A Different Time

Two days after the ferocious Battle of Antietam in Maryland, ostensibly the single bloodiest day in American military history, the citizens residing in and near Carlisle, Pennsylvania, awakened to their usual routines. Farmer. Cooper. Preacher. Wheelwright. Banker. Housekeeper. Teacher. And, due to it being a Friday, those who could read eagerly devoured the four jam-packed pages of the *Carlisle Weekly Herald*.

The paper's masthead featured a heraldic crest with two dashing steeds facing in opposite directions, an American eagle between them. The words virtue, liberty, and independence were entwined. And below this image in large type: A Paper for the Family Circle. The editor and obviously proud proprietor of the *Herald* was A.K. Rheem.

His paper was consumed by war news, and this week was no different. The difference was that his readers could never be on top of the latest developments. Even dailies in the big cities of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York often printed rumor and conjecture—only to retract or amend it later.

As the victorious Union Army began to regroup after the Battle of Antietam, counting its casualties, burying its dead, and deciding on whether or not to pursue Lee's Southerners back across the Potomac; as Abraham Lincoln decided it was time to announce his intention to emancipate the slaves (he had waited for a decisive Union victory to cushion the impact); the people of Carlisle were unaware that the battle had even taken place. They were to read in this Friday's edition about defending Pennsylvania against invading Southerners. Only in subsequent weeks would the horrific carnage of the battle and the loss of local men fill the pages.

Rheem passed to his loyal readers the information coming out of Harrisburg at the time. "By order of the War Department and of Gov. Curtin, Brig. Gen. John F. Reynolds assumes command of the forces assembled for the defense of Pennsylvania. … Harrisburg was virtually under martial law on Saturday. No able-bodied man was permitted to leave the bounds of the city. … A sufficient force is in Cumberland Valley to check any advance of the rebels in that direction. A strong reserve force is retained at Camp Curtin."

And he shared what was filtering in from reporters in the field, most of it inflated. At the time he put his latest issue together, Rheem was hearing about encounters and fighting that preceded Antietam.

A sampling of headlines, supposedly originating from the telegraphic dispatches from McClellan's Army: "Another Glorious Victory! The Rebels Routed—Gen. Reno Killed. (*3 Miles Beyond Middletown, Sept. 14.*); STILL LATER. The Enemy Making for the River—The Rebel Army perfectly Demoralized! … The Union Forces in close Pursuit! (*Head Quarters Army of the Potomac, Sept. 15.)*; THE VERY LATEST. Full Confirmation of the Above! Gens. Lee and Gland Wounded—Over 1000 Prisoners Taken---Rebel Loss 15,000—The Rebels Retreat. … We are following as rapidly as the men can move. (Bolivar, Sept. 15).

That news was filtered to the American people two days before the battle. Anyone reading *The Herald* could scarcely have anticipated the carnage that was to come.

Most people scan a newspaper when they first pick it up, glancing at headlines, bold graphics or advertisements, then return to a particular article for in-depth reading. I would assume that during these war times people devoured the front-page war news, then glanced at the rest of the paper. Remember, there was no other source of information available to them. So, what else occupied the citizenry of Carlisle in that September of 1862?

They read about the explosion of the U.S. Arsenal in Pittsburg (period spelling) where 75 or 80 boys and girls were killed in the building where they were employed. The scene was described as "appalling", with dead bodies lying in heaps. Where "whitened bones could be seen through the smoke and flame".

The ladies of Carlisle were implored to "make one more effort to provide bandages, lint, old linen, carpet slippers, preserves of all kinds, pickles, onions, fruit &c. for the sick and wounded at Hagerstown."

A "levee" had been held the week before by the commissioner on exemption from draft. According to the reporter (probably Rheem himself), not everyone in Carlisle was patriotic or willing to fight. "The attendance of the lame, the halt, and the blind was quite extensive. Bad whiskey was imbibed in large quantities, and some rich scenes took place which we are sorry to say cannot be put in print." A draft was scheduled to be held in Carlisle on September 25.

The area was in the midst of continual war activity, such as the transportation of troops over the Cumberland Valley Railroad. "Day and night, the cars, filled to overflowing with the hardy militia, passed through the streets, and were greeted with loud plaudits from the men and the waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies."

And the subsequent transfer of Rebel prisoners, which must have truly interested the populace. "A number of rebel prisoners passed through this place on their way to Fort Delaware, escorted by Capt. Cornman's company. They were a rough looking party, dirty and ragged, and some of them without shoes."

Editor Rheem injected levity amid the sadness of reporting war news, such as a tale of a drunken, but patriotic citizen who was literally carted off to jail in a wheelbarrow, pushed by one Constable Fagan. The citizen was reportedly "overcome with rum and patriotism". Or the report from an army correspondent on the James River who wrote that "the most attractive character who could visit that region would be—a lady. It is so long since some of the 'boys' have seen one of the opposite sex, that they verily begin to believe that they belong to the 'lost tribes'."

Ordinary life continued but it was tempered by war. A notice was published in that week's issue that the State Fair had been postponed until the next year "on account of the unhappy military condition of our country". Merchants took advantage of war fever. One enterprising A.W. Bentz offered a sale in his dry goods store due to "our Federal Armies having gladdened every American heart…." He offered "prices that will satisfy every

person … cheaper than can be bought from any other house with limited means….” Offerings included bleached muslins, calicoes, black silks, ginghams, and “dress goods of the latest styles and choicest patterns”.

The entrepreneurship did not stop with merchants in town. Walker & Stutzman of Somerset County were advertising a new farming implement on the last page of the newspaper: J.C. Stoddard’s Horse Rake. Many men were absent from the farm, but this rake could be operated by “any boy, girl, or old man, who can drive a horse. (They) can rake and cock with perfect ease. The power applied by the touch of the toe to operate it does not exceed two pounds.”

In the Carlisle of September 1862, the populace attempted to carry on in very difficult circumstances. Editor Rheem did his part by providing them with news despite the limitations at the time. “We still manage to keep matters moving,” he wrote, “and will not stop unless there is absolute necessity for it. Should our state be invaded, we will all, of course, drop the pen and stick, and take up the musket in her defense.” The “we” he referred to were his colleagues in the newspaper business. He and the editor of the *Cumberland Valley* had already joined the local militia.

The following summer Pennsylvania would be invaded, and it behooves this writer to see how the town and *The Herald* fared. General Ewell’s Second Corps briefly occupied Carlisle on their way to Gettysburg. General JEB Stuart’s cavalry brigades engaged the local militia a few days later, shelling the town in the process.

All facts, anecdotes, and advertisements taken from:
The Carlisle Weekly Herald (Carlisle, Pennsylvania); Friday, September 19, 1862.