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PERSONAL NARRATIVES

OF THE

BATTLES OF THE REBELLION,

BEING

PAPERS READ BEFORE THE

R.I.
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

No. 1.

U.S.
Ms 1-10
1872-74

*"Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,
Et quorum pars magna fui."*

PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1878.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THREE have now been issued three numbers of the series of "PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF THE BATTLES OF THE REBELLION," under the auspices of the "Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society," as follows:—

- NO. 1. THE FIRST CAMPAIGN OF THE SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY. BY ELISHA H. BRODES.
- NO. 2. THE RHODE ISLAND ARTILLERY AT THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN. BY J. ALBERT M. SROG.
- NO. 3. REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE IN THE FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY. BY GEORGE N. BLISS.

These papers embrace reminiscences of the three arms of the service—Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry—and are intended as specimens of the series, succeeding numbers of which will be issued if these succeed. The editions have been limited to 250 copies, and the price fixed at 35 cents per copy.

PROVIDENCE, July 24, 1876.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF THE
BATTLES OF THE REBELLION

No. 3.

REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE
IN THE
FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY.

BY
CAPT. GEORGE N. BLISS.

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Rhode Island soldiers and sailors historical society.

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No more published.



(Continued on next card)

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LIST OF PAPERS
IN THE FIRST SERIES OF
PERSONAL NARRATIVES.

- No. 1. THE FIRST CAMPAIGN OF THE SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY. By Gen. ELISHA H. RHODES.
- No. 2. THE RHODE ISLAND ARTILLERY AT THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN. By Col. J. ALBERT MONROE.
- No. 3. REMINISCENCES OF SERVICE IN THE FIRST RHODE ISLAND CAVALRY. By Major GEORGE N. BLISS.
- No. 4. MY FIRST CRUISE AT SEA AND THE LOSS OF THE IRON-CLAD MONITOR. By FRANK B. BUTTS, late Paymaster's Clerk, U. S. N.
- No. 5. KIT CARSON'S FIGHT WITH THE COMANCHE AND KIOWA INDIANS. By Capt. GEORGE H. PETTIS.
- No. 6. A TRIP TO RICHMOND AS A PRISONER OF WAR. By EDWARD P. TOBIE (late Second Lieutenant First Maine Cavalry.)
- No. 7. INCIDENTS OF CAVALRY SERVICE IN LOUISIANA. By Col. CHARLES H. PARKHURST.
- No. 8. THE BAY FIGHT. A SKETCH OF THE BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY. By Wm. F. HUTCHINSON, M. D., late Surgeon U. S. Navy.
- No. 9. PERSONAL INCIDENTS IN THE EARLY CAMPAIGNS OF THE THIRD REGIMENT RHODE ISLAND VOLUNTEERS. By Col. EDWIN METCALF.
- No. 10. THE BATTLE OF THE MINE. By Capt. ERVIN T. CASE.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN
OF THE
SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

BY

ELISHA H. RHODES,

(Late Lieutenant-Colonel Commanding Second Rhode Island Infantry
Brevet Colonel United States Volunteers.)



PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1878.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

A few years since, it occurred to some of the comrades residing in this city, who served in the United States Army and Navy during the war of the rebellion, to form themselves into an association under the name of the "Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society," for the purpose of collecting, as far as they were able, documents concerning the civil war, and of putting on record some of the unwritten history of that contest, in the hope that their labors might, perhaps, be of value to the future historian. As a part of the means to this end, these comrades have, from time to time, written and read before the Society papers treating of their own experiences and recollections of notable events as they saw them. In the belief that these papers will be pleasant reading for all who were interested in the great conflict, and contain many facts of historical value, as well as tend to keep alive memories of patriotism, bravery and self-sacrifice. It is proposed to publish them in a series of pamphlets uniform in size and style for preservation. The initial number, The Campaign of the Second Rhode Island Infantry by Colonel Rhodes, is here presented. It was read before the Society, November 3rd, 1875, and was the first one of the series. Others are in preparation and will speedily follow.

PROVIDENCE, July, 1878.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN
OF THE
SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

UPON the call of the President of the United States, in the Spring of 1861, for troops to serve for the period of three years, measures were taken to organize a regiment to be known as the Second Rhode Island Volunteers. It was my fortune to be one of the first to volunteer for service as a soldier in this command, and I propose to relate in plain and simple language, my experience during the first few weeks of the war, including a description of the First Battle of Bull Run, as seen from the standpoint of an enlisted man. I am aware that I have selected a difficult subject, as perhaps no campaign of the War of the Rebellion has given rise to more contradictory statements and reports than the one I shall

attempt to describe this evening. In the excited state of the people at this time, and in the absence of a proper appreciation of military affairs, skirmishes were magnified into battles, and the highest importance was attached to events that in after years were considered of very little if of any consequence. If in the course of my paper I am obliged to frequently refer to myself, I know you will excuse me when you remember that this paper is a personal narrative, a record of what I saw and felt, and not a history of general events.

I enlisted at the armory of the First Light Infantry Company, in Providence, R. I., and assisted in organizing a company composed of about one hundred and forty men, which command, after being properly officered, was tendered to Colonel John S. Slocum as part of the regiment to be raised. The number of recruits offered from all parts of the State was largely in excess of the number required, and rendered it necessary that some organizations should be declined, and as the Infantry had already sent two companies into the First Rhode Island Detached Militia, our company was ordered to disband, much to our

disappointment. Twenty-five men, however, were selected from our ranks and assigned to a company commanded by Captain William H. P. Steere. My name was included in the number selected, and I suddenly found myself changed from an "Infantry" man to a "National Cadet." This company was mustered into the United States service as Company "D," June 5th, 1861, in a building on Eddy street, Providence, and ranked fourth in the regimental formation. Uniforms were issued, consisting of the so-called "Rhode Island blouse," grey pants, and hats looped up at the side.

On the seventh of June the first parade was made and the regiment proceeded to Exchange Place and there listened to an official announcement of the death of the Honorable Stephen A. Douglas. On the eighth the regiment went into camp on Dexter Training Ground, which was named in honor of the Colonel of the First Rhode Island Detached Militia, "Camp Burnside." Sibley tents were issued and our camp life began. Our company being unable to procure tents passed the first night in a carpenter shop on the corner of Cranston and Gilmore Streets. One member

of the regiment was drummed out of camp to the tune of the rogue's march, creating quite a sensation not only in the camp but among the citizens of the city. I remember that we made several parades, and on one occasion attended Divine service at Grace Church and were addressed by Rt. Rev. Bishop Clark. The colors which the regiment carried into the field were presented by the ladies of Providence, June twelfth, by the hands of Hon. Jabez C. Knight, Mayor, and the scene was one long remembered by the men.

A battery of light artillery, armed with James twelve pounder guns, had been organized, and under command of Captain William H. Reynolds was attached to the regiment. This battery was known afterwards as "Battery A, First Rhode Island Light Artillery," and at the close of the Bull Run campaign was detached from the regiment.

Rumors of our intended departure for the seat of war had become numerous, but for reasons best known to the authorities our breaking camp was delayed until June nineteenth, when tents were struck, baggage and knapsacks packed, and the regiment

moved out of camp, and marching by way of High, Westminster and South Main Streets, took the steamer State of Maine near Fox Point. The Battery embarked upon the steamer Kill-von-kull. The streets were crowded with people, and we left the wharf amid the tearful farewells and cheers of our friends. Rations of bread and salt beef were served on board the transport, and we had our first taste of army fare, having lived sumptuously while encamped in Providence. The novelty of the trip banished sleep from our eyes, and we passed the night indulging in such mild demonstrations as military discipline would permit. By early morning we were in New York, and after touching at the wharf for orders, we steamed away to Elizabeth, New Jersey, where we landed and took the cars for Baltimore *via* York and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. All day we slowly rolled along the track and on the afternoon of the twenty-first found ourselves in the vicinity of Baltimore.

Rumors had been heard along the route that an attack was to be made upon us while marching through Baltimore, and the excitement in the regi-

ment ran high. Three ball cartridges were issued to each man in the cars, and as we had the old style of flint-lock gun, altered to percussion, we found each cartridge to contain three buck shot in addition to the ball. Most of the men carried revolvers, although strict orders had been issued against the practice. In the search which was made by the officers for concealed weapons, I managed (as most of the boys did) to save mine from capture. It was dark when we disembarked at Baltimore and we found the streets crowded with people. Strict orders had been given us to answer no questions and hold no conversation with any one. Silently we slung our knapsacks, and taking our places in line began the march. Cheers for Jeff. Davis were given by the crowd on the sidewalks, and some abuse was heaped upon us, but we kept on our march, ready to repel an attack. My knapsack contained a load sufficient for a dozen men, and with aching back I tramped on, not daring to stop for fear of the crowd. As I look back upon this short march, I remember it as one of the most fatiguing ones I ever experienced. But I learned a useful lesson: never to put more in a knapsack than I could comfortably carry.

After taking the cars for Washington we heard many rumors of intentions to run us off the track, which kept the men on the alert, and fears of an attack caused sleep to be out of the question. It seems strange now to think of our alarm, but at the time it was dangers unseen, more than seen, that troubled us.

On the morning of June twenty-second the regiment arrived in Washington, and we had our first view of the Capitol. Forming column, we marched out New York Avenue, a distance of about three miles, to Gale's Woods, where we found a camp adjoining the barracks occupied by the First Rhode Island Detached Militia. Our camp was called "Camp Clark," in honor of Bishop Clark, who accompanied us to Washington. The boys of the First Rhode Island greeted us with hearty cheers, and we were soon made at home in their comfortable quarters.

The next few weeks were passed in perfecting our discipline and knowledge of a soldier's duty. Our camp was a centre of attraction for the Washington people, and the evening parades of both regiments were witnessed by thousands. The parades were

held in the camp of the First Regiment, the Colonels alternating in command. Rumors of intended movements were continually reaching camp, and every skirmish in Virginia was magnified into a battle. While stationed at "Camp Clark" we experienced little, if any, of the unpleasant and disagreeable part of a soldier's life. Rations were issued in bulk to both regiments, and cooked under the supervision of the commissary of the First Rhode Island. The daily fare consisted of roast beef and plum pudding for dinner, while the morning and evening meals were more like what one would expect to find at home, rather than in the army. I remember well our disgust at receiving, just before we started on the Bull Run march, an issue of army rations composed of hard tack and salt pork.

On the eighteenth day of July we broke camp and moved out into New York avenue, where we found the brigade to which we were assigned, which up to this time we had known only in name. The brigade consisted of the First and Second Rhode Island Volunteers, the Second New Hampshire Volunteers and the Seventy-first New York Militia, the whole un-

der command of the senior Colonel, Ambrose E. Burnside. Excitement ran high in the streets, and as we moved through the city we were loudly cheered by the people. Crossing the Potomac, by Long Bridge, we took the road to Fairfax Court House. It being late when we crossed the river, only a short march was made, and we halted for the night at Annandale. This was our first experience in sleeping without tents and by camp fires. Rails were soon collected and immense fires started, we imagining this to be the correct thing for soldiers to do, although on a hot July night.

Early the next morning, the nineteenth, we resumed the march. Co. "D," Captain Steere, was detailed as flankers, and we started off with little, if any, idea of our duty or danger. I remember we found an old railroad embankment covered with blackberry bushes, and the entire company stopped and ate their fill. This march partook more of the character of a pleasant ramble than that of an armed force looking for an enemy. About noon, in company with two other men, I found myself on the summit of a hill, and looking back to our left and rear I saw the

spires of a town that we had passed unnoticed. I reported the fact to Captain Steere, and with his glass we decided that it must be Fairfax. Captain Steere formed his company into a square, and in this manner we entered the town by a side street and below the Court House. The rebels, in their haste, had left many articles lying in the streets, and if we had not been restrained by the good sense of our Captain, we should have loaded ourselves with the useless trumpery.

Halting in the main street we were soon joined by the head of our regiment, that came in by the main road. The rebel flag was taken down and the Stars and Stripes raised by one of our men. It fell to our lot to be placed in camp in the grounds of a mansion which had been occupied by the rebel commanding general. In looking about the house I found among some loose papers a subsistence return, showing the number of men to whom rations had been issued the day before. I gave the paper to Captain Nelson Viall and he sent it to army headquarters. The passion for pillage broke out, but was quickly suppressed, though many ludicrous

scenes occurred. I remember one man entering camp with a Bible under one arm and an immense engraving of the Father of his Country under the other. An officer obliged him to restore the articles to the house. A piano, from which the strings had been taken, served as a cupboard for some of the boys. The inhabitants had fled and we had the town all to ourselves.

On the twentieth we left Fairfax Court House and encamped a few miles beyond, near Centreville. Here we built shelters with pine and cedar boughs, and this camp is known to this day as "Bush Camp" by the men of the Second Rhode Island Volunteers. Here we heard our first hostile shot, and although at a distance, yet it served to impress us with what was likely to follow.

About two o'clock, on the morning of July twenty-first, we left "Bush Camp," and marching down the hill, through Centreville, found the roads obstructed by wagons and troops that had failed to start on time. Soon the Second left the main road and struck off to the right, through a wood path that had been much obstructed. As we led the brigade the task of