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**"The Old Stone Bank"**

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**The Return Home**

Presented by

**"The Old Stone Bank"**

Providence, R. I.

May 30, 1932



## The Return Home

**T**HERE was no decline in the proverbial martial spirit of Rhode Island during the War of the Rebellion. Before the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, Governor William Sprague of Rhode Island had offered to President Buchanan the use of the state's militia for defense of the national capital and for the maintenance of the Constitution and laws. After Lincoln had assumed the duties of the presidency and from the time of the actual outbreak of the struggle, the military activities of Rhode Island were unceasing until peace was finally restored between the North and the South in 1865. During these years nearly 24,000 men were mustered into active service—a force greater in proportion to the state's population than that sent into the field by any other state, with one exception, and no part of this force was raised by draft. Rhode Islanders were strong in their unalterable opposition to any form of conscription.

Rhode Island troops were with Grant before Vicksburg, and they took part in the bloody affrays of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and those of the wilderness campaign. Too little has been recorded of those campaigns in which Rhode Island troops distinguished themselves under fire and on the long, forced marches from one scene of

action to another. While some of our heroes of the Blue are still among the living, their experiences and recollections should be completely recorded for the enlightenment and inspiration of those who are to come hereafter and who may never have the privilege of meeting and talking with Rhode Island soldiers who fought and bled to preserve the Union and to unite the land.

There are a few citizens left who can remember the departure of the Rhode Island regiments for the battlefields in the South, and a few veterans can still recall very vividly the triumphant return of some of the weary, battle scarred fighters. The story of the Second Regiment's arrival furnishes the interesting details necessary to visualize the stirring scenes that took place when the surviving fathers, sons and brothers were welcomed home by their brave families and a proud state.

Of the eight hundred men who comprised the Second Rhode Island Regiment and who had gone to the war in June, 1861, a little more than one-fourth of these marched from the lines at Cold Harbor on June 5, 1864. One-tenth of the original roster remained in the field. Of the rest, some had been discharged, broken by disease and wounds; some had died in Southern prisons, in army hospitals, or at home; some had died gloriously on the battle field, and were buried where they fell; and others had been brought home and laid to rest by friends and families. In the comprehensive record

of this regiment's military operations, written by Augustus Woodbury, it is disclosed that: "the list of casualties numbers 66 killed in battle, 6 died in prison, 15 died of wounds, 46 of disease, 250 wounded, and 51 prisoners of war."

The departure of those who survived prompted many favorable and friendly comments on the part of several leading war correspondents, and the commanding officers were most generous in their praises of the Rhode Islanders' military efficiency, gallantry and bravery. After taking a transport to Alexandria the regiment departed from Washington on June 8, and arrived in Providence late in the evening two days later. Colonel Read, with the Burnside Zouaves, met the returning troops at New London and there took command. Upon the arrival of the men in Providence they were quartered in Railroad Hall, a large and popular auditorium on the second floor of the old railroad terminal building.

Rhode Island was ready for an elaborate reception. The entire division of the State militia was ordered out for escort duty and one or two companies from a distance had arrived the evening before the day of the expected ceremony and spent the night in Providence. Every preparation which genuine patriotism and sincere admiration could suggest, was made to give the returning heroes a hearty welcome home from the danger and strife of war. The city was thronged on June 11, 1865—the weather

was perfect and flags were flying from every available place, from private homes, public buildings, and from church steeples. At Mayor Doyle's request all shops and places of business were closed late in the morning for all day, and thousands came from far and near to witness what was expected to be the most spectacular military display in the history of the city.

The infantry escort, under the command of General Olney Arnold numbered nearly a thousand including officers, and this contingent was accompanied by a company of the U. S. Reserve Corps, two batteries of artillery and two troops of cavalry. All along the line of march the returning heroes were given a continuous ovation. Old acquaintances shouted from the sidewalks and from the house-tops, bells tolled, whistles screeched, and several bands entered into a friendly contest to drown out each other with "Marching Through Georgia." Officers and soldiers alike were garlanded with flowers, and every musket bore a bouquet in its muzzle. The crowds cheered, wept, smiled, applauded, and some were there who kept silent—for deep sorrow was mingled with the joy of reception. There were many vacant places in the ranks.

After the parade the Regiment marched into old Howard Hall where a great gathering joined in the impressive ceremonies. The regimental flags were brought in and placed upon the platform, while the assembled crowd cheered and displayed its irrepres-

sible enthusiasm. Governor James Y. Smith addressed the Regiment as did Colonel Rogers, then Attorney-General of Rhode Island, who spoke in terms of hearty greeting.

After the exercises, the Regiment and invited guests enjoyed a sumptuous repast and an hour or two was spent in friendly greetings and happy reunions. The troops were then dismissed for a few days while the necessary papers were prepared for the mustering out. The glowing tribute to the Second Regiment which appeared in the *PROVIDENCE JOURNAL* on June 10, 1865, most adequately expresses the feelings of every last Rhode Islander when the local "Boys in Blue" returned to home and loved ones:

"Today we welcome home the brave men of the Second Regiment. It seems hardly possible, that three years have elapsed since, on that pleasant June day, we saw this noble Regiment with full ranks march through our streets. We can scarcely realize, that then for the last time we looked on Slocum, Ballou and Tower, and so many other gallant men, who never again returned. But, we pause a moment and remember in how many a hard-fought field this Regiment has won imperishable honor for our state, when we think what a history it has made, and, above all, when we gaze upon its thinned ranks, and see how few of the brave fellows who went forth so proudly and patriotically now remain, we no longer doubt, that three years

have sped away—years which these soldiers have crowded with valorous deeds.

“Several men in the Regiment, it will be remembered, reenlisted and do not return today. They and the new recruits remain in the field, retaining a battalion organization, and bearing the honored name of the Second Regiment. Let us not forget them, as we pay honors to their comrades whom we have the pleasure of greeting now. Captain Young, we are informed, is the senior captain, and will have command of the battalion, if he leaves the staff service in which he is engaged. If he does not, Adjutant Rhodes will be the senior officer.

“We give today such expression as we can to the respect we feel for the returning heroes. We pay such tribute as we can to the memory of the dead, who have fallen by their side in the deadly conflict. But how inadequate is that expression, how poor are these tributes! What words, what praises, what banquets, what badges, what medals, what wreaths of laurel or of oak, can avail to repay these men for what they have done, or even to communicate to them our appreciation of their services! But it is not for our laudations and applause that they have endured hunger and toil, and storm and heat, and the weary march, and wounds and rebel prisons. It is not for fame that so many of them have faced the foe, until the hostile bullet laid them low. No! it is for the nation that they have made these sacrifices so cheerfully. It is that we might have

peace that they fought. It is that we might live and that the nation might live that so many have died. It is in our final success and in the approval of heaven, that they will find their only fitting reward. God grant, that the day may soon come when peace founded on righteousness shall be restored, and when the last of our brave soldiers shall return to enjoy his quiet home and pursue his wonted avocations, while the nation, in harmony and concord, goes on in a career of unexampled prosperity and happiness!”