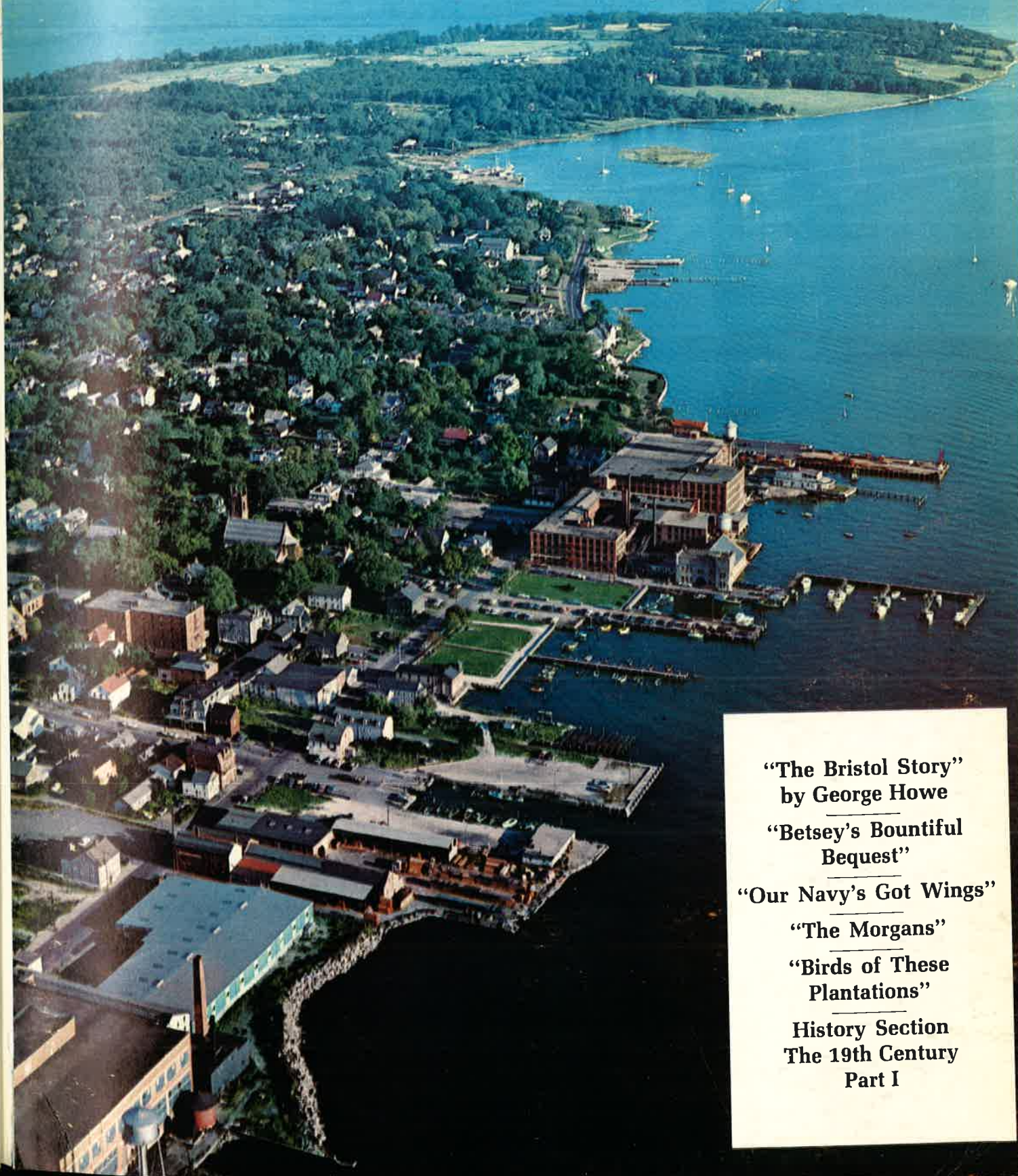


YEARBOOK

RODE ISLAND, BIRTHPLACE OF TEXTILES AND HAVEN OF HOPE



"The Bristol Story"
by George Howe

**"Betsey's Bountiful
Bequest"**

"Our Navy's Got Wings"

"The Morgans"

**"Birds of These
Plantations"**

**History Section
The 19th Century
Part I**

RHODE ISLAND IN THE CIVIL WAR

BY MAURY KLEIN

FOR weeks the newspapers had been predicting a clash of arms in South Carolina. So accustomed had Rhode Island readers grown to the tense situation that few were startled by the news that an attack on Fort Sumter was expected within hours. The *Providence Journal* devoted its lead editorial on 12 April 1861, to censuring its fellow Republican newspapers for their uninformed opposition to the new tariff, and especially for their ignorance on the vital subject of wood screws. One enterprising merchant even used the national crisis to frame a catchy advertisement:

Fort Sumter
Not taken!
Neither is

Cunningham's Emporium

But on April 13 came news that the fort had been attacked. No longer could the threat of war be stayed, and the *Journal* hastened to echo a sentiment shared by many Rhode Islanders:

From this day let there be no parties amongst us. Let us with one heart sustain our government against the rebellion which defies and insults us. *Let it be remembered that the southern government has put itself wholly in the wrong, and is the aggressor.*

Patriotic meetings convened all over the state as bellicose crowds cheered at the fiery oratory of state and local officials. Earlier that winter Rhode Island's energetic young governor, William Sprague, had offered a regiment of infantry and a battery of artillery to the federal government; now, in response to President Lincoln's call for volunteers, he repeated the offer and opened a canvass for recruits in the state.

In the first swell of enthusiasm young men flocked eagerly to the recruiting stations to sign up. Quickly the state oversubscribed its quota and units assembled at armories to commence drilling. They were a colorful if motley lot: the Bristol Artillery, Warren Artillery, Newport Artillery, Providence National Cadets, Providence Mechanics Rifles, Woonsocket Guards, Westerly Rifles, Pawtucket Light Guards, Westconnaug Guards, Kentish Guards and others. Out of these diverse elements came the First Rhode Island Regiment, which was ready to depart for Washington by April 20. Commanded by Ambrose E. Burnside, with Governor Sprague accompanying them, 544 men boarded ship amidst ceremonies described with florid sentiment by their chaplain, Augustus Woodbury:

The wharves, the heights upon the shores of the harbor and the coasts of Narragansett Bay were covered with spectators. Cannon belched forth its thunder. Cheers of men rent the air. . . . As the steamer left the bay, the boom of the heavy columbians upon the parapet of Fort Adams announced to those upon the sea and those upon the land that the shores of Rhode Island had been left perhaps forever by the flower of her youth and the prime of her manhood.

In Washington the natty Rhode Islanders marched proudly through the streets before wildly cheering crowds. Having reassured the anxious citizens of the capital by their presence, the troops bivouacked to await developments. Meanwhile, in response to another call by Lincoln for volunteers to serve three years or the duration of the war, a second regiment organized in Providence and left for Washington on June 19. Thus, when General Irving McDowell moved his Federal Army into Virginia in mid-July, he took with him a battery of Rhode Island artillery and two



William Sprague



The First Rhode Island Regiment drawn up in front of the Union Station before its departure for Washington.

Rhode Island infantry regiments as part of a brigade commanded by Burnside.

At Bull Run the 2nd Rhode Island and its artillery battery commanded by Captain William Reynolds fought superbly, although both were swallowed up in the rout of the Union army. The artillery, hard pressed all day, managed to salvage only one of its six guns from the turbulent retreat. In contrast the vaunted 1st Rhode Island had failed miserably. Held in reserve at first, it had moved to support its sister regiment only after a fatal 40 minute delay. In the thick of battle the 1st ultimately broke and led the headlong Union flight toward Washington. Originally mustered in for only three months, the men had insisted earlier that their enlistment had expired and demanded to go home. Only Sprague's threat to disgrace them publicly had compelled the regiment to march with McDowell. Now, safe within the confines of Washington, the 1st ignored desperate pleas by the War Department to re-enlist and sped homeward with unseemly haste. On August 2 the regiment disbanded for good, with the outraged Sprague blaming them for the defeat of the entire Union army.

Bull Run served notice that the war would not be quickly or easily won, and calls for more troops were soon forthcoming. Three more regiments joined the Union army in 1861, and within another year five more regiments were organized. In addition the state furnished three regiments and one battalion of cavalry, three regiments of heavy artillery, ten batteries of light artillery and one company of hospital guards. Only three infantry regiments, two cavalry regiments and most of the artillery remained in existence until the end of the war, though several units did not leave the service but were simply consolidated with other regiments. In all Rhode Island provided 23,236 troops for the Union, including 1,878 sailors and marines and 1,837 colored troops. That figure was about 5,000 above the quotas called for by the War Department.

The contribution of Rhode Islanders to the fighting naturally varied in both quantity and quality. Three infantry regiments, the 2nd, 4th and 7th, saw extensive action and were the only units from the state to lose more than 50 men killed in action during the war. After its handsome service at Bull Run the 2nd saw heavy action during the Peninsular campaign, at Fredericksburg and in the Wilderness campaigns. Most of the three year veterans were mustered out 11 June 1864, but the recruitment of five new companies and the consolidation of older companies kept the regiment in service until the war's end. The 4th participated in Burnside's expedition to North Carolina, Antietam, Fredericksburg and the siege of Petersburg. Three-year men were mustered out 15 October 1864 but over half of them re-enlisted, whereupon the unit was consolidated with the 7th Rhode Island. The latter had fought at Fredericksburg, journeyed west to fight with the Army of Tennessee at Vicksburg and then returned to participate in Grant's Wilderness Campaign.

Perhaps no Rhode Island troops achieved greater distinction on the battlefield than the light artillery. All eight batteries of the 1st Regiment Light Artillery remained in service until the war's end, though two had to be consolidated with sister batteries. Units of the regiment saw rugged fighting in virtually every campaign from Bull Run to Appomattox and soon won a reputation as one of the most dependable artillery regiments in the Army of the Potomac. At Fredericksburg Battery B under Captain John Hazard had been ordered to a position less than 200 yards from the formidable Confederate line. As Hazard led his column out a cannoneer in Battery A remarked, "There goes Battery B to hell!" He was not far wrong. Before Hazard could even unlimber his guns a hail of fire brought down three men and a team of horses. But he stood his ground and returned the murderous fire, and before the war's end he was commanding all the artillery of the Federal II Corps.

Other batteries could boast of similar exploits and push forward their own heroes. At Antietam Captain John Tompkins of Battery A had filled a gap in the crumbling Federal right wing despite a galling enemy fire. Suddenly, less than 60 yards in front of the gun on the right, a wall of Confederate infantry loomed up. Part of the untried Pennsylvania regiment supporting Tompkins broke and ran; the rest held their ground. But the surging Rebels swarmed past the guns and a detachment moved to capture them.

Quickly Tompkins obliqued his guns and fired volley after volley. Despite the gaps torn in their lines the Confederates kept coming until they were close enough for the gunners to distinguish individual faces. One Battery A sergeant urged his sponger to swab his gun as fast as possible. The gunner replied, "I'll sponge this gun if the Rebels come and take the sponge staff out of my hands." Only ten paces distant the Confederates finally melted away, but a handful of Rebel infantry leaped into the battery for hand-to-hand combat. Only the arrival of fresh Union infantry saved Tompkins' position, but in a few moments Battery A found itself the target of enemy batteries. Warily the exhausted gunners stepped through the mangled litter of bodies and equipment to return the fire.

With the fight commencing on two fronts Battery A split its fire and silenced the Confederates with a direct hit on an enemy caisson. Then another Rebel charge forced Tompkins to turn his guns to the left even though a burning barn threatened to consume his own caissons. Two more charges left Tompkins nearly out of ammunition, and his sweating gunners finally gave way to Battery G under Captain Charles Owens. In four hours and twenty minutes of hard fighting Tompkins had fired 1,050 rounds of ammunition and lost four men killed, fifteen wounded, and ten horses killed. Three complete sets of harness had gone up in the burning timbers and six rifled cannon had been rendered useless with worn and enlarged vents. For all the glory it would later garner, Battery A saw its finest hours on the blood soaked



Advancing in battle. Union soldiers in the suicidal formation that caused the death of thousands of fighting men.

corn fields at Antietam.

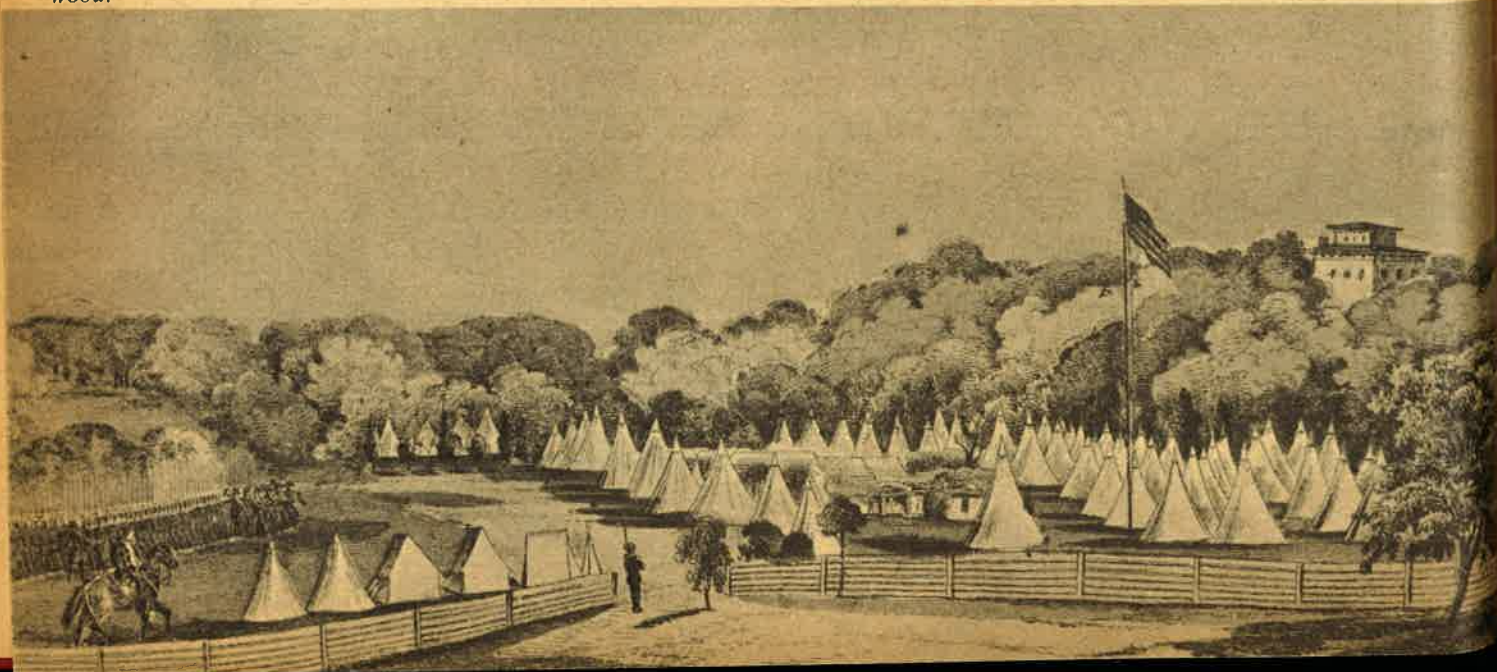
The Rhode Island cavalry units achieved no particular distinction in the fighting. The 1st Regiment did good service at Kelly's Ford and accompanied General George Stoneman on his raid toward Richmond during the Chancellorsville campaign. It remained in constant service for the rest of the war and took part in Sheridan's Winchester raid during the winter of 1865. The 3rd Regiment, not organized until September of 1863, spent its career in occupied Louisiana. The 2nd Regiment, organized in November of 1862, also saw duty in Louisiana under a cloud of controversy. By August of 1863 the regiment had been greatly reduced by battle casualties, sickness and an increasing desertion rate. When the declining number of volunteers from Rhode Island failed to replenish the ranks, General Nathaniel P. Banks consolidated the regiment into one battalion.

Still the reduction in ranks grew worse, and on August 24 Banks ordered the unit disbanded—the officers to be mustered out of the service and the enlisted men to be transferred to the 1st Louisiana Cavalry. But when Colonel Harai Robinson of the 1st Louisiana tried to carry out the order the men protested and refused to join their new companies. "Colonel," they cried, "we have made up our minds that as we enlisted in the Second Rhode Island Cavalry, we will, by God, serve in no other. We will not go. Do as you like, but by God, we won't serve."

Confronting a difficult situation, Robinson promptly declared the Rhode Islanders in mutiny, called up his troops and placed them around the sullen rebels. He then ordered the men to join their new companies or be fired upon, and quickly wrote out an order to execute the two ring leaders of the revolt. Already the Rhode Islanders had relented and were joining their new companies but Robinson insisted upon proceeding with the executions to demonstrate what he termed "the terrible consequences of rebellion and insubordination." Appalled by the shootings, the troopers gave Robinson no more trouble. Feeling against Robinson ran high in Rhode Island but came to nothing, and a court of inquiry called by Banks absolved the colonel of all blame. When the 3rd Regiment reached New Orleans in January of 1864 the remaining Rhode Islanders were transferred to that unit, thus ending their complaint against "foreign service" in the Louisiana regiment.

For all her efforts, Rhode Island never succeeded in producing a military hero of truly national stature. Her most famous general, Ambrose Burnside, was actually not a native Rhode Islander but had been born in Indiana. After graduating from West Point in 1847 Burnside saw limited action in Mexico and on the southwestern frontier against the Indians. In 1853 he resigned his commission and moved to Bristol to manufacture a breechloading rifle he had invented while in the service.

The 2nd Rhode Island, Col. Frank Wheaton commanding, encamped at Camp Brightwood.



Although the business venture failed, Burnside's affable personality led to an appointment as major general in the Rhode Island militia, a Democratic nomination to Congress and a position as treasurer of the Illinois Central Railroad under his good friend George B. McClellan.

On the day Lincoln issued his first call for troops Burnside was sitting in the New York office of the Illinois Central. A telegram reached him from Governor Sprague: "A regiment of Rhode Island troops will go to Washington this week. How soon can you come on and take command?" To this plea Burnside wired back tersely, "At once." On April 16 he received his commission as colonel of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment; in Washington, leading his smartly dressed troops in dress parade he cut a handsome and impressive figure. Commanding a brigade at Bull Run, he did a creditable job and won promotion to brigadier general on August 6. Lincoln was known to favor him, and it seemed as if Ambrose Burnside might easily become the man of the hour.

But throughout his career Burnside's star would continually rise only to be speedily eclipsed. A genial, honest and kindly soul, he possessed neither the superior intellect nor the intuitive genius to hold a high position of command. Capable of winning the affection of his troops, he could not use them effectively beyond a certain level. He was a man of decidedly limited talents sensitive to criticism and lacking in foresight. In early 1862 Burnside was given command of an expedition against the North Carolina coast. By skillful handling he achieved a thorough success in a season filled with setbacks for the Union. His exploits earned him a promotion to major general and a reputation for independent command. During the summer of 1862 it was rumored that he twice declined command of the Army of the Potomac.

Burnside's next opportunity came at the fateful battle of Antietam. In command of McClellan's left wing, he missed his opportunities and failed to crush the stripped Confederate position opposite the stone bridge. Some military historians have said that only Burnside's hesitation allowed Lee's army to escape destruction. Nevertheless, he was again offered command of the army in November. Painfully aware of his own limitations, he accepted unwillingly and only at the urging of other generals who did not want "Fighting Joe" Hooker to have the job. In Rhode Island the *Journal* applauded the appointment:

The office has sought him and, as it were, been forced upon him. That he has qualifications for it he has already shown. He is thoroughly in earnest. His whole heart is in his work. His industry and activity are proverbial. He has shown great versatility and fertility of resources. He believes in going ahead. He has that power so valuable in a commander of inspiring his soldiers not only with enthusiasm but also with love. They will follow him to the death. He cares for them with the tenderness of a father. Scarcely any other officer has, during the war, so won the affection of his countrymen.

But the first fruit of his leadership proved to be the worst military disaster of the war. In a series of frontal assaults against a virtually impregnable Confederate position at Fredericksburg, Burnside lost 13,000 men and the respect of his subordinate officers. His ill-fated "Mud March" to cross the Rappahannock in January further undermined his position. Relieved of command, Burnside willingly shouldered the blame for the Fredericksburg tragedy and agreed to remain in the army in a subordinate position. In March of 1863 he was assigned command of the Department of the Ohio. There he encountered the anti-administration activities of Copperhead Democrat and former Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham. In moving rather clumsily to squash civil opposition to the war, Burnside seized upon a speech made by Vallandigham to have him arrested and tried for sedition. After a highly questionable conviction by a military tribunal, northern Democrats unleashed a storm of protest against Burnside, and only the delicate intervention of Lincoln averted a



General Ambrose E. Burnside



Most Bugle Calls, "Taps" among them, were originated during the Civil War.

serious crisis.

In November Burnside ably defended Knoxville, Tennessee, from Confederate assault, although he was helped immeasurably by a thorough Rebel bungling of the attack. In the spring of 1864 Burnside's old IX Corps was reconstituted and he returned east to lead it in support of Grant's Wilderness campaign. But at the famous Battle of the Crater in July he failed miserably to penetrate a gaping 50 yard hole in the Federal line, and the following spring he resigned from the service. His uneven military career lost him no friends; after the war he held numerous lucrative railroad and industrial directorships, won the governorship of Rhode Island three times (1866-68) and served as United States Senator from Rhode Island from 1874 until his death in 1881. But he never achieved the military fame that seemed so often within his grasp.

Nor did any of the six native Rhode Islanders who rose to the rank of general during the Civil War. Richard Arnold of Providence, descendant of Benedict Arnold, captained the Fifth U. S. Artillery at Bull Run and lost all his guns covering the retreat. Later he participated in Nathaniel Banks' ill-fated Red River campaign and soon afterward confined his service to membership on a retirement board for disabled officers. Another West Pointer, Silas Casey of East Greenwich, had seen service in Mexico and against the Indians. He also compiled a book on infantry tactics which the government adopted in 1862. But in the Civil War he got his only good opportunity at the Battle of Seven Pines, where his division bore the brunt of the first Rebel attack and was overrun. Promoted soon afterward, Casey spent the rest of the war commanding a provisional brigade in the Washington defenses.

George Greene, born in Apponaug, had the distinction of being one of the oldest Federal field commanders. Already 60 years old when Bull Run was fought, Greene carved out a distinguished fighting record at Cedar Mountain, Sharpsburg, Chancellorsville and especially Gettysburg, where his isolated brigade held crucial Culp's Hill against heavy Confederate attacks. But Greene accompanied the XII Corps west that autumn, and received so severe a face wound at Wauhatchie in October, 1863, that he did not return to duty until the war's end.

Isaac Rodman, a native of South Kingstown, seemed the most likely Rhode Islander to win fame in the war. He had fought well at Bull Run as a captain in the 2nd Rhode Island. Later he became a colonel in the 4th Rhode Island, and after a superb performance during Burnside's expedition he gained a promotion to brigadier general. But at Antietam, Rodman's own valor undid him. At the bloody stone bridge he managed to get his men across an upper ford only to be confronted by A. P. Hill's troops arriving from Harper's Ferry. Magnificently Rodman's men

Shiloh, where raw troops clashed in a pitched battle.



shifted front and stood their ground, but a raw Connecticut brigade broke and exposed the left flank. In trying to bring up the 4th Rhode Island to plug the gap, Rodman was shot dead.

Thomas Sherman of Newport, a West Point graduate, performed well at Port Royal, Corinth and New Orleans, but in leading an attack upon Port Hudson 27 May 1863 he incurred a wound that cost him his right leg. He spent the rest of the war holding various district commands. Frank Wheaton, a Providence native, had the distinction of being the son-in-law of ranking Confederate General Samuel Cooper. During the war Wheaton took part in most of the major battles in the eastern theatre and rose steadily to the rank of major general. He was an efficient but unspectacular soldier, and outside the army and his native state he remained largely unknown.

One other prominent Rhode Islander aspired longingly to military glory and was in fact better positioned than his colleagues to achieve it. Governor William Sprague, handsome, energetic and barely turned 30, had promised the Lincoln government military aid long before Sumter fell. When war began he personally organized recruiting for the 1st Rhode Island and provided a \$100,000 loan to uniform and equip the regiment in sartorial splendor. Composed of men of wealth as well as mechanics and tradesmen, it became known as "the million dollar regiment." The 1st was Sprague's pride and joy; with it he envisioned riding to fame and glory. When the troops departed for Washington Sprague went with them—ostensibly as Burnside's aide.

As the first Democratic governor to support the Lincoln administration, Sprague had already endeared himself to the capital. Now his stylish 1st, the epitome of discipline and self-reliance in those first chaotic days of war, provoked applause and tears of gratitude as it marched through Washington. Late in the spring Sprague returned to Providence to help organize the 2nd Rhode Island, but his love of pageantry, color and grandeur made him restless at his desk. He wrote the War Department suggesting that he be commissioned to serve with his troops, but the major general's position he coveted went instead to the devious Massachusetts Democrat Benjamin F. Butler.

Undaunted, Sprague rejected a consolation offer of commission as brigadier general and rejoined the 1st as Burnside's aide. At Bull Run Sprague jumped willingly into the thick of battle. With bullets whizzing about him he helped feed ammunition to the artillery. When the 1st arrived belatedly to relieve the hard pressed 2nd Sprague felt that the men needed him more than Burnside. "I shall never forget . . . the blast of enthusiasm with which those twelve hundred men received me," he recalled. "We were ripe then for a charge. I led. . . my horse was then shot. I took off his saddle in front of the line; and the men, without order . . . fell back."

Soon afterward the Federal position began to crumble beneath a Rebel attack. Amidst the dissolving line Sprague tried vainly to get troops brought up to hold the line. The army swept like a tidal wave toward Centreville, and Sprague was washed along with them. Too exhausted to go the entire distance, he sent Burnside ahead and fell into a deep sleep on his cot. Waking at 2 a. m., he found the camp deserted; the panicked troops had continued their retreat toward Washington and overlooked the governor. Dejectedly he returned to the capital, his dreams of glory crushed. Despite a thunderous ovation in Rhode Island and an honorary degree from Brown, Sprague had no illusions. The disgraceful conduct of his beloved 1st had humiliated him, and in their fleeing footsteps had gone his pride and his hope. Henceforth he would devote himself to politics. In March of 1863 he resigned his governorship to replace Samuel Arnold in the Senate. Later that year he would win an even more coveted honor: the hand of Kate Chase, daughter of Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase and the darling of Washington society.



Kate Chase

Like the other states of the Union Rhode Island paid its price in blood and treasure for the war. Some 1,321 Rhode Islanders died in the service; of these 460 died in combat and 861 from disease. Such a mortality ratio was quite common during the war. The aggregate cost to the state and townships for the war has been estimated at \$6,500,772, but that represents only direct official expenses and does not include a multitude of indirect expenses. Yet the state made gains as well, especially in her economy. As early as 1840 Rhode Island had become predominantly a manufacturing state. Under the pressure of a wartime economy and its attendant inflation (prices doubled between 1860 and 1865), the state's economy moved in new directions.

The most important economic trend during the war was a movement away from diversification in industry. Overall industrial development did not accelerate greatly during the war, but some industries did better than others. The cotton industry failed to expand while the woolen industry grew dramatically—so much so that by the 1890's it would supplant cotton as the state's leading industry. Despite a wartime spurt by iron and steel and the introduction of rubber to the state's industry, the wartime trend tied the state's economy more inextricably to textiles than ever before.

There were other changes wrought by the war, many of them too intangible to be measured. Some state officials, for example, feared that army life would have a demoralizing effect upon moral character. A worried state adjutant general sent a circular letter to various city and town officials asking for their opinions on the general character of the returned soldiers as compared to their character before enlistment. Of the 29 townships that replied, three said the men were worse in general, twelve said they had actually improved and fourteen admitted that the evidence was too mixed to make any general conclusion.

One point upon which they could all agree, as could most Americans, was that the war had left an indelible imprint upon their lives, one that not even time could erase.



Fredericksburg, where General Burnside sacrificed thousands of brave men. Here, Union engineers build a bridge under heavy enemy fire.