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Personal Reminiscences of Bull Run.

Read at the Thirty-eighth Annual Reunion of the First R. I. Regiment and First Battery Association at Lakewood, R. I., Thursday July 21, 1910, by Albert E. Sholes, of Flushing, N. Y.

“AND what so tedious as a twice-told tale,” says Pope, and yet your secretary, my comrades, wrote me a few weeks since, asking that I present on this forty-ninth anniversary of the day we celebrate, a paper of reminiscences.

To so give color and change to the story of that which is in the main familiar to you all, as to interest, is not an easy task. As one strives to look back through the mist of the years, he finds that details of incidents, faces and even names of those once closely allied with, and dear to him have been obliterated, wiped out as the child erases the picture from his slate, so that only the dimmest trace of it remains.

Yet the real story of the past can only be gathered and collated from individual remembrance, and I can respond to Comrade Slocomb's request, tell of the time,

When we beheld a Nation betrayed,

When Lincoln called and we obeyed,

in no better way than by giving you personal memories.

It had been an exciting winter. From December 20, 1860, when South Carolina seceded, to February first, 1861, seven States of the Union which our forefathers had declared should be a "Perpetual Union" had passed acts of secession.

On February 4, 1861, delegates from thirteen slave-holding States, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, which had seceded, Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas and Tennessee, which later seceded, and Missouri and Kentucky, forty-four in all, met in Montgomery, Alabama, adopted on February 9 a provisional constitution, and the same day elected Jefferson Davis, president, and Alexander H. Stephens, vice president of the Southern Confederacy.

From the South came, day by day, the story of the gathering of military forces. Thousands of guns and trainloads of munitions of war had, by the traitorous Secretary of War John B. Floyd, been transferred from northern armories to southern arsenals, yet the large mass of the people of the North were prone to say "There will be no war."

On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln took the reins of government from the feeble and flaccid grasp of James Buchanan and in his inaugural address, he with both hands extended the olive branch of peace to those who would disrupt the Union.

Who could read the eloquent and earnest appeal embodied in the closing words of that address without feeling that it must reach the hearts and consciences of those to whom it was addressed?

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one "to preserve, protect and defend it."

"I am loathe to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriotic grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chords of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

The reading of these tender words again stirred hope in the hearts of the North, although but three days later, the State of Louisiana, on March 7, seized more than half a million dollars of bullion in the United States mint at New Orleans, and each day thereafter had its story of treachery and treason. Then came the wire which told

Of that shot which at Sumter's walls had been hurled,
Which divided a Nation and startled a World.

Fired on Friday morning at daybreak, it was not until Saturday that here the certain news was known and accepted as truth.

Can you recall that Saturday and Sunday, the 13th and 14th of April, 1861?

Wherever men congregated, the question was prominent as to what would be the outcome. On the Sabbath, in every church, patriotic sermons were preached, and could these sermons be gathered and collated today, with their texts of "He that soweth to the wind shall reap the whirlwind," it would be found that among our preachers we had prophets in those days.

That Sabbath was a day of anxious waiting for all our people, old and young, and on Monday morning everybody was out early for the morning papers.

The mail train arrived at my home station, Valley Falls, at 7.40 and at that early hour an hundred citizens were at the station to obtain a copy of the Providence Journal.

As many eyes as could focus on the page gazed over the shoulder of him who opened the first copy. In large letters on the first page was the announcement of the surrender of Sumter, and on another page in the corner was the call of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, for 75,000 men, and below it the modest announcement that "In pursuance of the foregoing, I William Sprague, Governor of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, do hereby call for the formation of a regiment of infantry and a battery of artillery."

The war had begun.

Whether my personal experiences of the preceding winter had tended to especially prepare me for the war, I cannot say, but they had been peculiar then, and I certainly was patriotic now. No less than five times between November 1860 and March 1861, my left eye had been from various causes badly blackened and completely closed. Once it had been a stick of wood which I had attempted to split, but the operation was reversed, the stick splitting my head. Again in coasting a boy comrade had run his head against mine, and still again, Oh, awful remembrance, as bearer at a funeral on a bitterly cold, icy day, I had pitched headlong down a stairway into a tomb, crashing my eye on the screw on the coffin lid, as the coffin struck the floor.

Only once have I any pleasant recollection in connection with my ante-war wounds, and that was when a big schoolmate, whom I did not like any more than he liked me, struck my but recently healed eye, and in the mix-up which ensued, I managed to get the better of the argument, with the result that he bore away from the scene two black eyes, either one in worse condition than mine.

So well known had become the tendency of that eye of mine to catch everything that came along, that the last words said to me when I was leaving home in April to start for Washington, were from the village grocer, who called after me, "You're going to war, eh? Well you'd better get a shield for that left eye."

But this has carried me beyond my story. On that Monday morning, April 15, a schoolmate had read the Journal with me, and I think the proposition was mutual that we should drive into the city. Upon broaching the proposition to my mother, she said, "Albert, my boy, I'd much rather you

would go to school." "Yes, mother," I said, "but the governor has called for a regiment and a battery, and all the excitement will be in the city."

As usual, the boy won, and with the consent obtained we drove off, and at 9.20 arrived on Canal street and hitched our horse opposite the old Providence Artillery Armory.

A large crowd was inside and overflowed the doors. Everybody was excited, and within we could hear someone apparently delivering an address which was every moment punctuated by cheers and shouted response.

Pushing in, we discovered the speaker to be Nicholas Van Slyck, then City Attorney and Captain of the Artillery.

In impassioned words, he told of the struggles of our forefathers to form and maintain the Union, how for more than four score years, our flag, the glorious Stars and Stripes had waved in honor,

But now rebellious hands, with treason dyed,
Were uplifted to smite our glory and pride.

Was it any wonder that when he had concluded and called for those who would go to the defense of the Flag, more than 200 names were signed in an hour where but fifty were needed, and the books were closed with as many more disappointed at being refused the privilege to sign? Well up among the first of those signers, was the boy whose mother preferred he should go to school that day.

It is needless to tell of the long argument with that mother that night and the next day. On Wednesday morning the 200 gathered again at the Armory, where inspecting officers John S. Slocum and Sullivan Ballou were to select the fifty to fill the company. Captain Slocum mounted a table at the west end of the room, and with the men clustered around him, he selected one after another to go to the room at the other end, where Dr. Rivers would examine them.

I had known Captain Slocum well all my life, but now it seemed impossible for me to make him see me, though I tiptoed until I felt myself at least seven feet high. Finally I caught his eye, when he called Major Ballou to the table, and stepped down, pushed through the crowd to me, and then pushed me out to the north side of the room, saying as we cleared the crowd, "What are you doing here, Albert?" "I want to go to Washington," I replied, "and I want you to help me."

"You had better stay at home and go to school," he responded. "This isn't going to be a picnic." "I know that very well," I said, "but I wish to go."

"What does your mother say," he asked. I did not tell him of the long contest and the many tears, but only the finale, as I answered, "She said 'Other mother's boys will have to go, and if I was determined, she would not stop me.'" "God bless her, and you too, my boy," he cried, as he put his arm around my neck, and so walking, ushered me into the little room where Dr. Rivers was, saying as we entered, "Here Doctor, here's a boy who wants to go to Washington, and I guess you had better let him. The doctor, looking at me, turned me about, patted me on the back and chest, and said, "All right, you'll do."

And thus I became possessed of the proud right to stand with you today, and be counted as a member of that grand body of men who followed our great commander, Ambrose E. Burnside, in the First Rhode Island.

History has fully told of the departure of the two detachments of the Regiment, the first under Colonel Burnside on Saturday, April 20 and the second under Lieutenant Colonel Pitman on Wednesday, April 24, both detachments marching through streets lined with a cheering multitude and yet with the cheers were mingled many tears and sobs as loving friends bade dear ones farewell.

No similar scenes had ever before been witnessed in Providence, nor

do I think they ever were again, for as the war advanced the people learned to hide their grief and pain.

Those who went with the first detachment landed at Annapolis, and sharp in their memory still lives the recollection of that "Only nine miles to the junction."

The second detachment sailed up the Potomac under convoy of the war vessel Powhatan. It was reported that Alexandria was occupied by the rebels who might fire on us. As we approached the city, the men were ordered below deck. By some means I now fail to recall, I managed to remain on the upper deck, where were Col. Pitman and a few of the other officers, and from the vantage point of the rear of a smokestack I saw two pieces of shining artillery with half a dozen or more grey clad men on the wharf, and heard the remark of one of the officers to another, "We would have caught it if it hadn't been for the gunboat."

On Sunday morning, April 28 we landed at the Navy Yard at Washington. Was it the next day, or two days later that we marched through the streets of Washington,

Up to and through the Patent Office door,
In and over the marble floor,
To bunks beside great cases;
Surely one of the strangest places,

that ever quartered a regiment of men.

As we passed through the streets, evidences were visible on every hand of a beautiful, but unfinished city, from the unfinished dome of the unfinished Capitol on our right, to the less than quarter-finished monument to the great Washington on our left.

The inspiring music of Joe Green's band stirred the pulse and gave cadence to the step, calling forth the shouts of the multitude on either side, and as the strains of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," rent the air, the smiling faces and bright glances of the pretty maids who lined the way, said as plainly as words could speak,

"Don't mind, dear boys, don't mind,
The girls you've left behind;
There's lots of girls before
Whom maybe you'll like more;
Look at us—Look at us."

We looked, and some of us old fellows have not yet forgotten the sweet friendships formed in that long ago.

For the next few weeks, while our barracks at Camp Sprague were in process of construction, we lived as few soldiers have lived before or since. The Patent Office was our lodging house, while our meals were provided at two of the then leading hotels of Washington, the Clarendon and Clay's United States, seven companies being served at the former and three at the latter.

My company, B, was one of the three to go to the United States, where the high living made some of our number very fastidious, as was early proven. Eggs were served at breakfast, a la carte, "How'll ye had you aigs dis mornin', boss?" being the regular inquiry.

A big Irishman of our company, whose name I would not tell, even if I could remember it, ordered them one morning, "harrod biled." On their receipt he cracked one, and saw with disgust the half fluid contents ooze out upon his plate. Glancing up, the darkey who had served him was on the other side of the table, and shooting the second egg at him, he cried as it splashed over his head and ran down his face and neck, "Do ye's call that harrod biled, ye black divvie?"

The change presently came to Camp Sprague, and of our life there the

story, as it lives in the memory of us all, has been many times told and needs no retelling today. Drills which were to perfect us as soldiers occupied our days, and the dress parade at evening, enlivened by the music of our famous band, attracted an audience of the great, the gallant and the beautiful, such as has graced few amphitheatres.

Only a few years since, I visited the site of the old camp, undiscoverable had it not been for the guidance of one of "the girls," of the old days—then a grandmother—and found nothing to identify it save the mansion which we used as a hospital. Paved streets and handsome homes covered the site, yet as I stood in front of that mansion, I could close my eyes and call back the old scene. I could see the Regiment down before me, the music of the band as it made its journey to and fro was in my ears. The clear voice of Adjutant Merriman, reported "All present, or accounted for," and I witnessed the applause of the President and his little lady, and Master Rob, or Secretary Chase and his beautiful daughter, and the thousands of others ranged around the semi-circle of the hillside, as the curt commands of Colonel Burnside were responded to by the Regiment as though the thousand men were but one.

The weeks we spent there flew rapidly, interrupted by the fruitless march on Harper's Ferry, and the return. Just following that return I was detailed to the Commissary department under genial old Captain Cole, my principal duty, as I remember, being to apportion the food for the various messes at meal time; I know the position gave me generous opportunities to visit friends in the city, and as I had a standing pass through the guard lines, I made liberal use of it. On July 16, orders came for the regiment to move across the Potomac, but Commissary Cole was instructed to keep all the attaches of his department in camp. This did not meet my approval, and I arranged with one of the boys in my mess to bring my haversack with the rest for rations and leave it in my bunk. I served all the rations, saw the Regiment formed and march off, and watching my opportunity, slipped off to quarters, put on my equipments, caught my gun and ran as if for life.

Half a mile down New York avenue, I dropped into line, Captain Van Slyck failing to note my presence till we had crossed the Long Bridge, when he commented with a smile, that I "would probably wish later that I had obeyed orders and staid in camp."

Memory skips today many of the details of that march, though I recall that it was a hot and dusty experience. The night of the 17th, if I remember rightly, we camped in the yard of Fairfax Court House, and I have a letter somewhere which I found in the scattered mail at the Post office, which written to a member of a South Carolina Regiment, from his home, informed him that a three gallon jug of fine old corn whiskey had been shipped, and requested in return that the soldier bring him "one of old Abe's front teeth."

I recall also a visit to the home of Major Ball, who, married into the Washington family, was in command of a Confederate battery, and how some of the troops—I think not of our regiment—had sought to get even with him by practicing on his piano with their boot heels.

Then came our advance on the 18th, when we heard the first shot of the enemy across Blackburn's Ford, and our movement to Centerville, the morning of the 19th. That day and the next in camp there, and then, on the evening of the twentieth, came orders to prepare to move in the early morning.

Little of sleep was, I think, obtained by any of us that night. The excitement of realization that tomorrow would witness a battle between two great armies, both composed of American citizens, and that we were to participate, did not tend to slumber. Then, for myself, I was one of the details to go half a mile or more to a spring for water. On our return, rations which

would shortly arrive must be waited for, and after arrival, which was near midnight, the meat must be cooked.

Finally tired and sleepy, I laid down only to be awakened before I had gotten even the traditional "forty winks," with the cry of "Fall in."

Out into the road, down to and over the bridge which was to achieve fame ere the close of the day, up a slight elevation, and forward over an unknown road, moving in quietness, every man simply following his file leader, dawn found us in the midst of a forest, such as few if any of us had ever before seen. Giant trees were on every hand, while all about us other giants had grown to maturity, lived their day, decayed and fallen to earth. We could almost imagine the genii of the forest peering out upon us and saying, "Who be these who thus disturb us? Surely their like ne'er passed this way before."

Clambering over the fallen trunks of trees, pushing through heavy growths of underbrush, we presently emerged into the open ground, crossed a little brook, and climbed a small hill toward what we later learned to be Sudley Church.

As the left of the regiment cleared the top of the hill, the order was given "By batallion left into line," and we advanced in line of battle.

An hundred or more yards we moved when there came a shot which I am confident was the widest shot fired during the entire war. It struck the ground a short distance in our front, and ricochetting, passed directly over my head. I am prepared to swear to this even now, and I have no question that every man here today will testify that it passed directly over his head, never mind whether he was on the right or left of the line. The command came "Forward. Double quick!" and then, "Left oblique," and in less time than I can tell it, pushing over the left of the 71st N. Y. as it lay on the hillside, we were on the brow of the hill with the Seventy-first New York on the right, the Second Rhode Island on our left, and the gray clad enemy in front.

Who can tell of the incidents of a battle, particularly of one like Bull Run, where every man and officer was a novice in the art of war? The rattle of musketry, the roar of cannon, the cries of the wounded, the shouts of officers, the loading and firing at will, all come back as a blurred memory. I recall seeing the loved Prescott dead, the falling with wounds of Irving and Haskins of my Company, the riding of Governor Sprague to the front of our line, the killing of his horse, and his appearance as he rose with hat off, hair flying and sword waving and called on the First to follow him. Then as he was led rearward, some Regiment advanced to fill our places, and we were marched to right and rear to the shade of the woods, to have our supply of ammuntion replenished.

Here, to us came the news of the wounding of Colonel Slocum, Major Ballou and Captain Tower, and that they had been borne to the little house at the rear of our line of battle.

Securing permission from Captain Van Slyck, I at once went to the cabin especially to know if I could render service to the man whom I had always loved and honored, Colonel Slocum.

As I recall, no physician or attendant was with them when I entered. Colonel Slocum, Major Ballou, and I think a third man lay on the floor at the side of a room, while I passed Captain Tower lying in the yard near the door of the cabin with the pallor of death on his face. I gave utterance to some expression of sorrow when the Colonel said, "I am glad you came, Albert; can't you get us some water?" I removed their canteens, cutting the tapes and went to the old sweep well nearly up on the line of battle. As I drew up the bucket, a man waiting by the well at my side, fell dead, as he was struck by a fragment of a shell. The canteens

were filled, and returning, I gently raised the head, first of Captain Tower in the yard, then of Major Ballou, and finally of the Colonel, gave them to drink and moistened their faces with my handkerchief. When I had helped Colonel Slocum, I eased his position as best I could, and then sat or half lay beside him with his head upon one arm, while I wiped the blood away as it slowly oozed to his lips, till he suggested that I return to my company. He bade me goodbye, and as the tears ran down my face, he said, "Never mind, Albert, it's all right." Captain Tower's mind was wandering, and he was near death as I left, but the voices of both Colonel Slocum and Major Ballou were comparatively clear and their eyes not unsteady, so that I hoped to see them again. A few days later we learned that both had died in Sudley Church, to which place they had been removed by the rebels.

Returning to the Company I learned that the ammunition brought would not fit our rifles, and the wagons had been sent back. Then troops passed us, moving hurriedly to the rear, and the report came that the enemy was reinforced and our men retreating. As Colonel Burnside rode up, several ran to him and asked if it were true. The cry arose for him to lead us back to the fight, with the responding cry, "What can we do without ammunition?" Shortly, we fell into line and covered the retreat, two hundred regular cavalry who were supposed to protect our rear, crowding their way through our ranks, ere we had gone a mile.

Needless to tell of the march back through the woods, of the opening of artillery on us as we came into the open above the bridge, of the blockade of the bridge by which we lost our guns, of the curses of McDowell, which rose loud and deep on every hand. Shortly after nightfall we were back in camp at Centerville, tired, weary, heartsick, with every Company counting their lost from those who had marched away in the morning.

A few hours of rest, and then, at midnight the sound of volleys, with stray shots dropping in camp, followed by the cry of "Fall in," and we were off in irregular, disorganized mass for Washington.

What a night? Who, that was there can forget it? Men fell asleep leaning on a comrade, as they walked, and then, one after another dropped by the roadside indifferent to everything but sleep. I confess to being one of these, and at early dawn I was awakened to discover a six mule team stalled almost beside me, the animals twisted up as only army mules can twist themselves, and the driver using frantic exertions with whip and voice to straighten them out. Rising, I aided him to ultimate success, with the result that I was invited to crawl in on top of the barrels of beef, which I at once did. Placing my blanket roll on a barrel which lay on top of the upright ones, I dropped again into dreamless slumber. The jolting of the springless wagon tossed my head from the blanket to the barrel chimes and back again, until when I finally awoke as we entered Alexandria, I had that vulnerable left eye more badly swollen and discolored than ever before.

A boy of the Seventy-first had somewhere gotten into the wagon and when we dropped off we sought a place for breakfast, though it was well toward noon. As it chanced, we entered the Marshall House, where Ellsworth was shot a few weeks before. It was apparently uninhabited, and as we turned to go out a soldier came from the basement. "There is nobody about," he said, "but I have found a barrel of mighty good wine down cellar." Returning, he showed us the barrel and a sample of the contents testifying to his truthfulness, we filled our canteens and then proceeded to consider how to get to Washington. Stragglers from all regiments filled the streets, the Seventy-first being especially represented, and presently it was reported that a boat was to be sent from the Navy Yard for them.

My "Seventy-first" friend, Will Berrian, told me to stick by him and he

would see me through, and I obeyed.

The boat came, and Lieut. Colonel Kimball standing at the gangway declared that he'd run through any man not of the Seventy-first, who tried to embark; nevertheless, by the aid of a dozen of the Seventy-first I got on, but not by the gangway.

We landed at the Navy Yard about seven o'clock Monday evening, and I expended my last two dollars for a coach to Camp Sprague, where I arrived at about nine p. m., to receive a hearty welcome from the boys, who thought me captured.

One other incident, a pleasing memory, and my story ends. I slept until nearly noon next day, then in the early afternoon started down town to assure my few Washington friends of my safety. Having made one call, I was about to cross New York avenue, at Four and One Half street, when I heard a familiar voice crying, "Here, my boy!" and looking up, Colonel Burnside had stopped his carriage in front of me. I saluted as he signalled me to approach, and as he asked where I was going, I answered, "Down on Pennsylvania avenue to visit friends," when he said, "I wish you wouldn't. Return to camp today, and I will give you a pass for all day tomorrow." "Thank you, Colonel," I replied, as I turned campwards; "I have a standing pass." "Oh! yes," said he. "You are with Captain Cole, aren't you? Please then go back to oblige me. Some of the men on the avenue are not acting well today, and you know what Dog Tray got for being in bad company."

As I touched my cap in salute, and again turned, he threw open the door of his carriage and said, "Here, ride up with me," and in a moment I was beside Colonel Burnside.

Long before we reached camp he had all my pedigree, knew several of my kindred and had permanently established himself in a very warm place in my heart.

There could be no prouder boy or man in the camp than I, as we drove through it, and to his headquarters where I alighted, and he again thanked me, implying by his manner that in obeying his request I had conferred on him a special favor.

Two days later, on Thursday evening, July 25th, we bade farewell to Camp Sprague, and embarked near midnight for Providence where after much delay we arrived on Sunday morning, July 28th.

We were boys, you and I in that long gone July
When our country called us to dare or to die!
But as the call came, in an hour then
The boys had assumed the full stature of men.

We're proud to be counted as boys of '61,
To have fought with Burnside at Bull Run.
We're proud of the record the old First bore;
Each man did his duty; none could do more.

So here's to the brave, the gallant Burnside,
We cherish his name in love and in pride;
And here's to Sprague our War Governor, who,
In time of peril, was staunch and true!
Here's to our comrades! God bless each one,
May He say, as He welcomes them, "Boys, well done!"