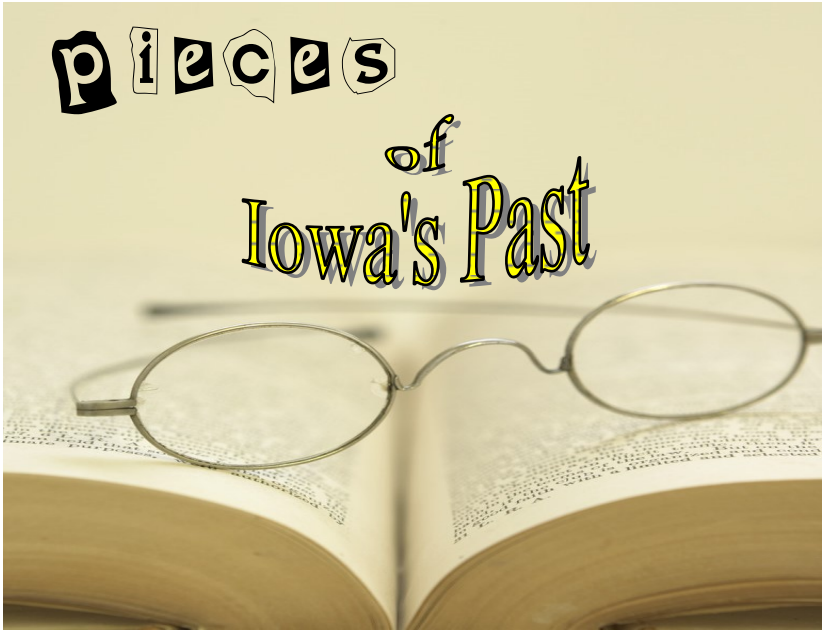


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

February 19, 2014

THIS WEEK: Homeward Bound

BACKGROUND:

From *The Story of the 168th Infantry, Volume II,* by John H. Taber, Published by the State Historical Society in 1925.

The 168th Infantry was part of the Rainbow Division formed in WWI and named by Colonel Douglas McArthur. Divisions were traditionally formed by men from the same state but the 42nd Division was made up of men from 26 states and the District of Columbia and Douglas McArthur stated "42nd Division stretched like a rainbow from one end of America to the other."

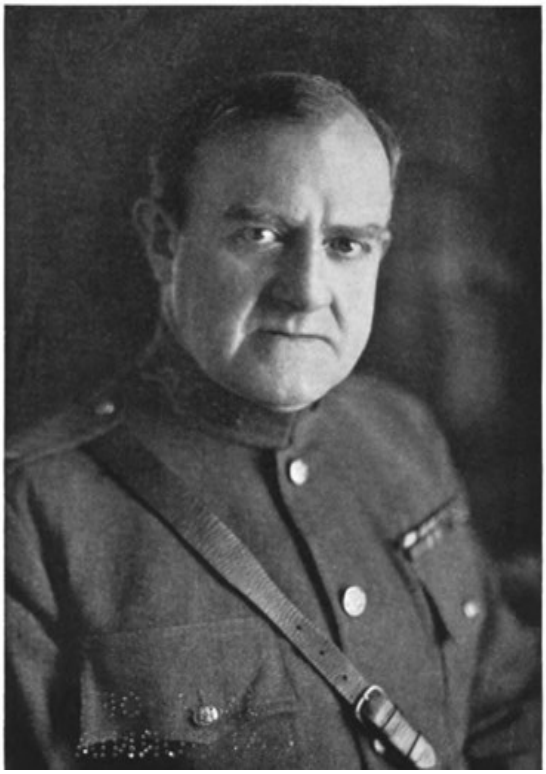
The following is from the last chapter of this two volume set explaining the last days and journey home for the 168th Infantry, Rainbow Division.

Homeward Bound

On the 3rd of May the regiment passed in final review before its commanding officer before being broken up into various State detachments which its veterans represented. For only those living in Iowa were to go to Camp Dodge for discharge; and in the months of service it had received replacements from every State in the Union with the exception of Nevada. Thirty-two hundred men

and ninety-eight officers returned to this country with the 168th, but of that number only sixteen officers and less than thirteen hundred enlisted men had set out with it from Iowa in the fall of 1917—even this represented a large portion that had been wounded in battle—and the others had either been killed or too severely wounded to rejoin it.

After the review Colonel Tinley called his men to him for the *nunc dimittis.* The passing of the regiment as an organization was a tragedy to them all, held close by the tightened bands of comradeship and the wealth of memories they shared. There will, in this generation at least, be a distinction, perhaps unconscious, between those who have seen the war and those who have not, and the feeling that creates that distinction strengthens the tie among those who have actually fought together.



Colonel Mathew A. Tinley
Commanding Officer of the 168th Infantry

"Down in our hearts there is a pang of regret that we are assembled for the last time", the Colonel commenced", and you who are not accompanying us back to Iowa, you will always have a kindly feeling toward the State you have represented so well. I only wish that we could take you all back with us to share the great welcome that awaits us there. The friendships that have sprung up among us will always bind us closely together. We have slept in the same shell hole, drunk from the same canteen, have suffered common dangers, discomforts, discouragements. Those of us who lie sleeping beneath the sod of France will be with us in the great homecoming to which we have looked forward for so many months. We must keep up the traditions for which they died. And now, on this our last gathering, I wish you Godspeed."

In groups the detachments for the different sections of the country left camp, beginning with that very afternoon. On the 11th the Iowans entrained for the West. There is little to relate of that three days' journey, except a steadily mounting excitement as they sped toward the home State. As the three sections crossed the Mississippi and entered Iowa at Dubuque, Davenport, and Keokuk, they were vociferously greeted by the townspeople, and by committees of prominent citizens from all over the State. There were parades and speeches and flowers and food, and then they reëntered the trains for a progress of triumph unequalled in the history of Iowa. Every town and hamlet along the three

parallel routes was crowded with cheering mobs. Even at the cross-roads small crowds of country people gathered to shout their welcome as the trains shot by. Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown, Waterloo, Ottumwa, and Oskaloosa met them with enormous throngs and rousing receptions. Converging on Des Moines, the trains reached the Capital City during the night and early morning of the 14th of May. Despite the untimeliness of the arrival there were thousands on hand to greet them; but the men, still under military discipline, remained in the cars for the night. There was a big day ahead of them. There was to be a lunch at the Coliseum; and then a parade followed by a banquet and a dance; and at eleven o'clock they were to go to Camp Dodge where they would receive their discharges.

The final parade at Des Moines

The crowds at the station increased with the brightening dawn. There was laughter and some tears as families were reunited after twenty-two months' separation, but everyone was happy, inconceivably happy, to be home again.

Des Moines had declared a holiday, and with it as many people from the rest of the State as could crowd into it. The streets through which the parade was to pass were gay with flags and bunting, and leading up the hill to the State House, where the reviewing stand was placed, a court of honor, culminating in an arch of triumph, had been erected. The sky was blue, the air was clear—it was a perfect day.

More than eighteen hundred members and former members of the regiment lined up for the parade behind Colonel Tinley and his mounted staff. First came the Band in full strength, then the veterans of the entire campaign, equipped with rifles, helmets, and gas masks; behind them marched more than three hundred discharged or convalescent comrades who had been previously invalided home; and at the end, in automobiles, crippled and disabled members of the regiment

from the hospitals at Camp Dodge and Fort Des Moines.

The concluding gesture of their military life was performed with the utmost seriousness on the part of the men. The gay youths who had gone away with smiles on their faces had not come back; in their stead were men who looked neither to the right nor the left. There was no display of emotion by those who had experienced emotions in concentrated portions. The spirit that kept up unnecessary discipline to the end was the spirit of the Rainbow Division.

Through the solid mass of humanity that thundered out its applause and strewed the rough paving with a carpet of flowers, the regiment marched; and many saw at the side of the men marching in the flesh the dead comrades who had trod the same path with them two years before. The cheers, the smiles, the flowers, the tears were for all.

When the reviewing stand was reached, Colonel Tinley left the column and took his place beside the high dignitaries of the State. The Band, playing an inspiriting march, passed by; then line after line of straight, lithe figures, and in their midst the regimental colors proudly borne with their newly-won bands. So, as the last platoon executed “Eyes right” as a final salute to its beloved commander, the 168th Infantry marched on into history.