

Milton Bush: Reluctant and Unlucky Soldier

by Mark H. Dunkelman

On September 10, 1862 Milton H. Bush made a big mistake--he enlisted in the army. It's abundantly clear he didn't want to, so the question is raised, why did he? The draft at that stage of the war was not a threat. The bounties offered, \$100 from the United States and \$50 from the State of New York, while attractive by the standards of the day, were hardly overwhelming. There is, on the other hand, no evidence that Milton was either unpatriotic or a coward. Perhaps pressure from his peers, who were infected with war fever, played a role in the 21-year-old's decision.

Milton was enrolled that day in the Cattaraugus County town of Conewango by a fellow townsman, Stiles B. Ellsworth. Ellsworth, R. L. Blackmarr and Philander W. Hubbard had been busy since mid-August seeking enlistments in the towns of Perrysburg, Persia, Dayton and Leon, as well as Conewango. Blackmarr represented Perrysburg on a countywide recruiting committee. Hubbard and Ellsworth were soon to be rewarded for their efforts by being elected as second lieutenant and first sergeant, respectively, of the company they were helping to raise. Milton Bush was the next to last of the 78 recruits the three signed up.

Bush and the other enlistees travelled to Jamestown in Chautauqua County, where the new regiment being raised, soon to be designated the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, was assembling at

Camp Brown. Here Bush and the other men of their newly formed Company K elected Henry Hugoboom, age 44, as their captain. On September 23, only thirteen days after he had enlisted, and two days before Company K was to be mustered into the United States service, Private Bush approached Captain Hugoboom. He explained he had procured a substitute, who he wished to be mustered in to replace himself. Hugoboom apparently agreed to the scheme, and the substitute, Gustavus J. Ackley, was brought forward. He was examined and declared to be fit by the popular surgeon of the 154th New York, Henry Van Aernam. The colonel of the regiment was the next to be approached. He was Addison G. Rice, a lawyer and politician from Ellicottville who had agreed to raise the regiment with the understanding he would accompany it to the front and go no further. Rice consented to the exchange of Ackley for Bush and ordered the papers to be made up. Milton Bush immediately left Camp Brown for his Conewango home, thinking himself a free man. And Gus Ackley moved into Bush's vacant bunk in camp.

Two days later, September 25, Company K was mustered in. Gus Ackley must have been puzzled when his name was not called from the alphabetical list of privates. And so when "Bush, Milton H." was called out, Ackley presumably answered for him.

It would have been a totally farcical performance by the neophyte soldiers, if the consequences hadn't been so tragic.

Milton Bush was where he wanted to be, at home. Soon thereafter, other participants in the incident returned to their homes. Colonel Addison Rice was the first. After delivering the 154th

New York to Virginia, as had been arranged, Rice returned to his law office and politicking in Ellicottville. Gustavus Ackley was the next to leave the service. He was discharged for disability on December 10, 1862 at Fairfax Court House, Virginia, where the 154th New York had been encamped for two months. (Gus Ackley did enlist in April, 1865 in the 12th New York Infantry. But by then the war was over.) Captain Henry Hugoboom was discharged from the service on March 4, 1863.

So things might have stood had not Rice's successor, Patrick H. Jones, made an interesting discovery. In January of 1864, Colonel Jones learned that Bush's name was still listed on Company K's rolls, and there was no reason stated as to why it should not be. Jones directed Hugoboom's successor, Captain Arthur Hotchkiss, to notify Bush he should report to the company or "be charged with and arrested for desertion." Imagine Bush's surprise when he received that letter!

Bush obeyed the order and travelled with Henry Hugoboom from Conewango to Lookout Valley, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the 154th was encamped. He reported for duty to Captain Hotchkiss--over a year and a half after he had supposedly purchased his freedom by hiring Gus Ackley as his substitute! Milton Bush was for the first time present for duty in Company K. But he was certainly there under protest. He insisted to Captain Hotchkiss and Colonel Jones "that he was morally if not legally discharged from the service", owing to the occurrences in 1862. Undoubtedly he was supported in his stand by the former Captain Hugoboom.

Colonel Jones saw the fairness of Bush's claim. On April 2, 1864 Jones wrote a letter to the assistant adjutant general of the Department of the Cumberland. He outlined the facts of the case and closed by saying, "Believing the foregoing facts as stated to be true and that Bush acted in the matter in good faith, I respectfully submit the case to the decision of the Commanding General."

Three days after Jones wrote his letter, a member of Company K from Leon, Marcellus W. Darling, wrote a letter to his homefolks. In it he said, "Our old Captain, Hugaboom, has been here, he came with Milton Bush but has gone back and left Bush and I guess we shall have to make a Soldier of Bush for I think there is no way he can get out now after any one is mustered into the United States (service) it is harder to get out than out of States prison in the first place Hugaboom was to blame in telling Bush that any one could take his place for it is an impossible thing to have it done after he is mustered into the United States service."

Jones's letter brought no immediate response regarding Bush's case, but instead slowly climbed the ladder of military bureaucracy. Any efforts by Darling and his comrades to "make a Soldier of Bush" never occurred, because poor Milton was taken sick and sent to a hospital in Nashville. There, on July 7, 1864, Private Milton H. Bush, Company K, 154th New York Volunteers, died of inflammation of the bowels.

Not long thereafter, the following communication was received at regimental headquarters:

Special Order
No. 282 .

War Department
Adjutant Genl. Office
Washington, D.C.
August 26, 1864

(Extract)

63. Private Milton H. Bush, Company K, 154th New York Volunteers, now with that Regiment will be discharged the service of the United States, upon receipt of this order at the place where he may be serving.

By Order of the Secretary of War
E. D. Townsend
Assistant Adjt. Genl.