

The number of deaths which occurred among the combatants in the American Civil War was phenomenal. There were over 500,00 in four years of fighting. Bullets and iron only accounted for about one third of those deaths. Two of every three fatalities were a result of disease. Ezra Ayers was one of those casualties taken by non-lead induced causes.

Ezra was born on June 22, 1832 in Goshen, Vermont to John and Betsey Ayers. <sup>[1]</sup> He had two siblings for sure: John, age twenty in 1850 and Calvin, age fourteen in the same Census. A twenty-three year old was listed, Anna, who may or may not have been a sister or other relative. Documents examined do not identify her conclusively. <sup>[2]</sup> In that Census year, only Betsey is listed in the head of household position on the form. John is not mentioned at all, except for the twenty year son. It is presumed by the researcher that the elder John was missing due to death or divorce although no record of his passing was found in the public records consulted. Ezra and his older brother were both listed as laborers. It is assumed that they were taking the place of the missing John. Betsey was identified as a farmer of a \$1000 Goshen homestead. <sup>[3]</sup>

By 1860, Ezra had moved out of his mother's house and went to live with the Stewart family; Y J and Irena, in Whiting, Vermont. He was now twenty-seven, single and working as a farm hand for the Stewarts. <sup>[4]</sup>

When the 1863 Draft Registration was done in June, Ezra was listed as a thirty year old, married farmer living in Whiting, Vermont. <sup>[5]</sup> In fact, he had married only the year before, on March 22, 1862 in Brandon, Vermont. He married a young lady named Sarah E. Clifford. <sup>[6]</sup>

The honeymoon was barely over when Ezra enlisted. From the documents in his military records, it appeared that the Selectman of Whiting, to which he was credited, had something to do with his joining the army. Whether the motivation was patriotism or the draft, Ezra became a soldier on September 1, 1864. <sup>[7]</sup> Two weeks later, on September 15 in Rutland, Ezra was officially mustered-in as a private. He was thirty-four years old, stood six feet and one half inches tall. He had dark complexion, eyes and hair. He was

born in Goshen but listed himself as a farmer from Whiting. He was assigned to Company E of the Fifth Vermont Volunteer Infantry. On enlisting, he was due \$100 in bounty money. He was given \$33-1/3 on signing and owed the rest. <sup>[8]</sup>

Some would argue that he was a member of Company B of the Fifth Vermont, not Company E. A close examination of his service records showed that he was in both companies. At first, when he initially enlisted in Whiting, when he was mustered-in at Rutland and when he was finally processed at New Haven, Connecticut, he was given to Company E of the Fifth. His Muster Roll for September/October of 1864 remarked: "...Joined Co. B, 5th Reg't Vt. Vet. Vols., as recruit Oct 16, 1864." <sup>[9]</sup> From that date on, Ezra is listed as belonging in Company B of the Fifth.

Army life was pretty much normal for Ezra until his Regiment was ordered to Petersburg, Virginia. He became seriously ill in March, 1865. In his application for an invalid pension, he stated that "...on or about the 15th day of March, 1865, while said Company was stationed near Petersburg, Va., he was attacked with Chronic Diarrhea and about the same time also with inflammation of the lungs...." <sup>[10]</sup> His condition was severe enough that Ezra never returned to active duty with his regiment. His Captain (Hiram Cook) verified he was unfit for duty and had contracted his illness while in the performance of his duty, as army regulations required, on May 5, 1865. C. H. Allen, Surgeon at Danville, also confirmed that Ezra suffered from "...Chronic Diarrhea and General Disability which renders him unable to labor or earn his subsistence at present...." <sup>[11]</sup> Ezra was given a disability discharge on May 14, 1865 at Danville, Virginia. <sup>[12]</sup>

Immediately after being discharged, the very ill and weak Ezra began the process of applying for a disability pension. He had to, of course, produce statements by third parties as to his condition to support his claim of total disability. The surgeon of the Fifth Regiment, his former Captain, Hiram Cook and two additional doctors all certified that his illness was contracted in the line of duty and that his disability was total. <sup>[13]</sup> In addition to those proofs, Ezra elicited the testimony of two Brandon residents who swore to the Rutland County Court clerk on July 31, 1865 that "...His health has continued poor

since his discharge, and he is still so feeble that he is unable to perform any labor - is confined to his bed a considerable portion of the time - has a bad cough - soreness through the lungs, and is very feeble...." [14]

Ezra was granted an invalid pension of \$8 per month on October 28, 1865 retroactive to the date of his discharge (May 14, 1865). There were strings attached to the receipt of the pension. Ezra had to have an annual examination by a doctor to verify his disability. As it turned out, that did not present any problem for Ezra. On January 1, 1866, he died of "black jaundice - consumption" in Goshen. [15]

#### NOTES

1. Ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908.
2. Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census under Ezra Ayers.
3. Op cit.
4. Op cit., U.S. 1850 and 1860 Federal Census under Ezra Ayers and Ezra Aysa.
5. Op cit., U.S., Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863-1865 for Ezra Ayers.
6. Op cit., Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 for Ezra Ayers.
7. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Vermont, p. 2, image 311389432. Herein after referred to as Compiled Service Records...
8. Ibid., Compiled Service Records..., p. 4, image 311389435.
9. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., pp. 2-4, images 311389432, ...433 and ...435; p. 5, image 311389436; p. 14, image 311389445.
10. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., p. 37, image 304445118 (application for invalid pension).
11. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., p. 12, image 311389443.
12. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., p. 10, image 311389441.
13. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., p. 39, image 304445120.
14. Op cit., Compiled Service Records..., p. 37, image 304445118 (application for pension).
15. Ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 under Ezra Ayer.