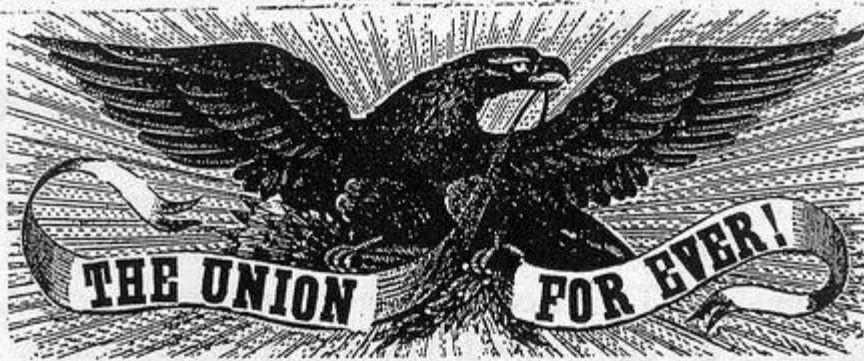


Then & Now: One More Hurrah for the Men of the Union Blue

John Wertis, Correspondent 5:02 p.m. EDT April 17, 2015

Military men rise up to halt military quotas

AN ENTIRE COMPANY FROM ULYSSES!



\$90 BOUNTY Still Paid!

ENLIST AND AVOID DRAFTING!

FIFTY MEN NOW IN "CAMP SUSQUEHANNA".

The undersigned is still enlisting men for a Company in Tracy's Brigade. All men enlisting with me will go in the same Company.

HEADQUARTERS AT TRUMANSBURG!

WILLIAM AUSTIN, Recruiting Officer.

August 14th, 1862.

HICKS AND PASKO, GENERAL JOB PRINTERS, TRUMANSBURG, N. Y.

(Photo: ULYSSES HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTO)

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As we approach the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, we might consider the way money influenced an individual's involvement in military service.

In the Town of Ulysses in 1862, regiments based on quotas set for state electoral districts were being formed. Ulysses citizens pledged money to provide for a local “bounty” of \$100 to be paid for each patriotic volunteer enlistee. These voluntary “subscriptions” ranged from \$1 to \$220.

The town bounty was in addition to bounties being offered by the state and federal governments. It has been calculated that at the height of the war total bounty payments to any individual were in the \$750 to \$1,000 range.

Money was involved in other ways. The eventual draft laws of 1863 allowed a named draftee to “commutate” his military responsibility. He could obtain a suitable volunteer or hired substitute, or make a direct payment to the federal government in lieu of service.

For-profit “agencies” sprang up that would provide a substitute for a fee. Some men fearful of being drafted formed “insurance pools” that would pay for the cost of a substitute, should a pool member’s name come up.

Some individuals termed “bounty jumpers” gamed the system by enlisting in one district and deserting as soon as possible. In many cases, this meant jumping from a slow-moving train carrying raw troops towards the battle lines, then repeating the fraud in another jurisdiction.

In 1887, almost a quarter century after the close of the war, bounty money became an issue again. The New York State Legislature passed a law characterized as the “Recovery and Relief Act” for men drafted but not personally ending up in uniform.

As the Trumansburg *Free Press* of February 4, 1891 reported: “By a law passed in 1887 it becomes obligatory at [the] coming town election to vote upon the question whether or not the board of supervisors shall be compelled to raise by tax a sum sufficient to pay \$300.00 to each man drafted in one of the several drafts under the conscription of 1863, who furnished a substitute, or paid the commutation for the procurement of a substitute.”

It was further noted that “every person who enlisted or served in the army or navy of the United States, and who has been honorably discharged therefrom, shall be exempt from taxation under provisions of this act.”

In any case, the minutes of the Ulysses Annual Town Meeting of February 24, 1891 state: “The Appropriation for the Relief and Refunding for the Drafted Men was Lost.”

However, the issue simmered on. In 1892, a revised law was passed by the state Legislature.

Two specific changes were made:

- (1) There was not to be a vote. Rather, documented taxpayers who wished to see the payments made were required to individually petition a municipality, and if a majority of the taxpayers on the rolls so petitioned, the money for payments would be raised by taxation and paid as specified in the 1887 law.

(2) The war veterans were given no exemption from this taxation.

“Relief and Refunding” became an issue in the 1893 town elections. Mr. C. R. Lobdell from Peruville argued in the April 19, 1893 *Ithaca Daily Journal*: “Two-fifths of the state have paid their drafted men.”

He could point to the 1887 and 1892 legislative wording that listed the “counties of Kings, Queens, New York, Richmond, Putnam, Westchester, Rockland and Sullivan, and the cities of New York, Brooklyn, Albany, Cohoes, Troy, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo, and several towns, including Waterloo in Seneca County, as already having made provision.”

The *Trumansburg Sentinel* reported on January 25, 1893: “Quite a number are working hard to prevent the nomination of Supervisor Camp because he is opposed to paying the claims of the drafted men.”

Veterans found the law to be outrageous. William Austin had helped raise Company G of the 109th New York Volunteers in 1862.

He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in that regiment, served well in battle and reached the rank of First Lieutenant when he was wounded at the Second Battle of the Weldon Railroad, from August 18-21, 1864.

Discharged from the service for disability, he returned to Trumansburg. By the 1890s he was a respected lawyer practicing in Ulysses and Tompkins County.

With his dander up, he wrote in the *Free Press* of December 10, 1892: “When I went into the army in 1862 I was not liable to the draft — was credited to the Town of Ulysses; received no bounty, had no property and had never paid any tax. By accident or otherwise I am now contributing considerable to bear public burdens and am asked to contribute to repay drafted men, heroes in peace but the reverse in war, what they were so anxious to pay rather than face the leaden ball of musketry — the iron storm of belching batteries — and the wild whirlwind of charging squadrons. If Ulysses is rich, if her taxpayers have a surplus of funds, let them remember first those who turned from the scenes of youth, the loved ones at home, and trod battle fields, the risk of which can never be compensated in money, and never tax a soldier to pay a civilian for staying home.”

Apparently, the “petition” law never gained ground in Tompkins County. The anti-payment parties retained office. The proposed measure simply melted away from lack of support. Hurrah! Hurrah! For the men who were true to the Union Blue!

John Wertis is the Ulysses Town Historian.