



# NEWS RELEASE

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS  
ILLINOIS ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD  
1301 North MacArthur Boulevard  
Springfield, Illinois 62702-2399



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**CONTACT:** Public Affairs Office

**TEL:** (217) 761-3569  
**FAX:** (217) 761-3527

## ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARDSMAN, URBANA NATIVE WAS HERO OF FORT BLAKELY

*Story by Spc. Zachary Zimmerman, Illinois National Guard History section*

**SPRINGFIELD** - It was June 1862. After only being in business a few years as a merchant in Urbana, 26-year-old Samuel T. Busey would soon answer another calling from his state.

Illinois Gov. Richard Yates asked Busey to establish a company of men for active service in the Civil War. Commissioned as a second lieutenant, Busey quickly gathered men for service and was soon elected captain.

Aug. 6, 1862 Busey and his men became Company B of the Illinois 76th Infantry and he received promotion to lieutenant colonel. On Jan. 7, 1863, upon the resignation of Col. A. W. Mack, Busey filled the vacancy to lead the 76th as the unit's commanding officer.

In the fall and early winter of 1862, after Gen. Grant's retreat from Memphis during the inland movement to Vicksburg, the 76th acquired orders to perform rear guard duty to Snyder Bluff. Angered by the command, officers of the division formed a petition for Grant to be relieved and sent to the frontlines. Busey refused to sign the petition.

Characteristic of Busey's loyalty and sincerity he said, "No officer of my regiment would so far forget his duty, which was to obey orders without question and take whatever orders assigned to him without question."

To the joy of the men, the regiment was transferred to join the extreme left of the campaign before Vicksburg. It was said that the 76th approached so close to rebel lines that a man could throw a hat over the nearest enemy.

Busey frequently declined promotion to the rank of brigadier general.

After being told someone else would take the vacancy he replied, "Well, Col. G. will have to take it then, for I shall stay with my men."

He later declined to take command of the post at Natchez.

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2/2/2/2 BUSEY

Busey continued to command his men in the 76th throughout the Civil War. On April 9, 1865, he led his regiment during the assault on Fort Blakely. Busey bravely charged ahead of the regiment alone and engaged the enemy, unsupported, in hand-to-hand combat against a rebel gun squad. Busey's right eye was rendered useless after a shell round exploded and he also suffered an injury from a shot to the hip. He still successfully managed to kill a confederate gunner and injure two others.

The lone attack lead to the personal surrender of the rebel officer and his staff, and saved the lives of 50 or more of his men. Afterwards, Grant and Maj. Gen. George Andrews recommended him for rank of brevet brigadier general and he was referred by his men as "The Hero of Fort Blakely."

Busey mustered out at Chicago Aug. 6, 1865 and he returned to his home in Urbana. In 1867, Dr. W. R. Earhart, Busey, and his brother started Busey Bank in Urbana. Busey served as mayor of Urbana for five terms until elected into the 52nd congress as a Democrat in a district that had been Republican for years.

Busey and his niece drowned while vacationing at Mantrap Lake, Minn., on Aug. 12, 1909.

According to Busey First National Bank Samuel is characterized in Champaign County history as "Soldier, banker, patriot, and public-spirited citizen".



**Photo courtesy of Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library, Urbana/** Samuel T. Busey of Urbana, in 1862 was called to duty by Illinois Gov. Richard Yates. Over the course of roughly 3 years Busey became the commander of the Illinois 76th Infantry and would be known as "The Hero of Fort Blakely."

For high resolution photos, please contact the Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office at [ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil](mailto:ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil)