

George Bosley:

Soldier, Medical Cadet, Assistant Surgeon

by Mark H. Dunkelman

Rarely seen in images, medical cadets performed important services in the Union Army's medical department.

More than 200 young men served the Union cause during the Civil War in a little-known organization, the U.S. Army Medical Cadet Corps. In addition to their helpful work as members of the corps, many veteran cadets continued to serve in the army's medical department. About 40 percent of them went on to become surgeons, assistant surgeons, or contact surgeons with the Federal forces. George H. Bosley was one such medical cadet.

The Medical Cadet Corps was formed by an act of Congress in August 1861. As many as 50 cadets at a time were authorized to serve a one-year term in the army as wound dressers and ambulance attendants under the supervision of medical officers. The rules stated that an applicant had to be between 18 and 22 years of age and must have studied medicine for two years and completed at least one course of lectures at a medical college. Applicants also were required to provide testimonials of their physical fitness and character. In April 1862 the corps was enlarged to 70 cadets.

The actual duties of medical cadets ranged far wider than regulations prescribed. Most cadets served in army general hospitals, where in addition to dressing wounds they assisted in operations and postmortem examina-



A note inside the case of this sixth plate Ambrotype of George H. Bosley states, "Age 16 years, Taken Apr/58." (Author's collection)

tions, administered wards, and examined anatomical specimens. Officially a non-commissioned officer, a medical cadet was paid thirty dollars per month and covered for his quarters, fuel, and transportation. A daily ration was later added to his allowance. His uniform consisted of a junior officer's frockcoat with green shoulder straps adorned with a half-inch strip of gold lace, trousers with a narrow buff welt, a plain forage cap, and a non-commissioned officer's belt plate and sword.

George Henry Bosley, a son of Daniel and Lucia R. Bosley, was born on October 31, 1841, in Lakeville, Livingston County, New York. He enlisted at age 20 on November 23, 1861, as a private in Co. K of the 13th New York Volunteer Infantry. That regiment was raised primarily in Rochester, but Bosley enrolled in Washington, D.C. Although he enlisted to serve the term of the

regiment, he was never mustered in. On January 31, 1862, he was discharged for disability.

On April 3, 1862, Bosley began a two-year study of medicine, apparently in Michigan. About a month before he finished the course, on March 7, 1864, he wrote to Surgeon General William A. Hammond from Ann Arbor, seeking an appointment as a medical cadet. He stated that he was a resident of Rochester, New York, and 22 years of age. As required, he enclosed a certificate from the dean of the college attesting that he had attended a full course of lectures, and a doctor's certificate as to his character and physical condition. On April 18 an army medical board in New York City examined Bosley and pronounced him qualified to serve as a medical cadet. On May 2 he was appointed as such.

Bosley served from May 17, 1864, to the end of that month at DeCamp General Hospital on David's Island in New York Harbor. He was then transferred to Cumberland General Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee, beginning his duties there on June 11. On October 1, 1864, he requested a transfer to the east so he could attend another course of medical lectures and graduate, "thereby becoming better qualified to care for my patients," he explained, "and also that I may be enabled to take *higher rank* in the Medical Dept. of the Army, which is now *debarred* me by reason of *not being a graduate*." In response the authorities transferred him to a

general hospital in Albany, New York, where he arrived on November 1, 1864, and completed his career as a medical cadet.

Bosley was discharged on January 3, 1865, to accept a position as assistant surgeon of the 154th New York Volunteer infantry, then occupying Savannah, Georgia, as part of Major General William T. Sherman's army. His commission as such was dated December 27, 1864. Bosley reported for duty with the regiment on the rainy day of January 19. Although other outsiders who were commissioned as officers in the 154th received a hostile reception from the regiment's veterans, Bosley appears to have been accepted. When 27 officers of the regiment contributed cartes de visite for the making of a souvenir montage at the end of the war, Bosley was included with the veterans. Eight days after he



Bosley posing in military headgear and civilian clothing, perhaps about the time he became a medical cadet. (Ninth plate tintype in the author's collection)



Bosley as assistant surgeon of the 154th New York, from a composite photograph of 27 officers of the regiment. (Courtesy of William C. Welch)

arrived in Savannah the regiment left the city for the Carolinas campaign. Assistant Surgeon Bosley served with the regimental hospital until March 31, 1865, when orders issued near Goldsboro, North Carolina, detailed him for duty in the Second Division, XX Corps hospital. At the close of the war he was mustered out with the 154th on June 11, 1865, near Bladensburg, Maryland.

In the postwar years Bosley graduated from the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons and practiced in New York City. He organized and directed the Relapsing Fever Hospital on Hart's Island and was connected with the "outdoor department" of Bellevue Hospital for a dozen years.

"Dr. Bosley displayed

unusual ability in diagnosis," the *New York Times* stated in his obituary, "and was the author of several articles in the *New-York Medical Journal* which attracted much attention from members of his profession." Bosley was a member of the New York Medical Society. One of his colleagues was Dr. Millard Fleming, former surgeon of Bosley's old regiment, the 13th New York. Both men were active Masons (Bosley's ornate Masonic Knights Templar sword and scabbard was auctioned on eBay in April 2003).

Bosley died suddenly of heart failure on the morning of December 3, 1892, at his home at 152 West 74th Street in New York. He was 51 years old. He left a wife. The whereabouts of his Civil War effects is unknown. ●