

# ***8th Illinois Infantry***

## *Regiment History*

### **"Col. R.J. Oglesby's Regiment"**



#### ***Adjutant General's Report***

On the 25th day of April, 1861, the Regiment was organized at Springfield, and mustered in for three months' service. Richard J. Oglesby, of Decatur, was appointed Colonel. The regiment was immediately sent to Cairo. Companies A and D, in command of Capt. Isaac Pugh, were sent to Big Muddy river, to guard the railroad bridge, as there was danger of its destruction by rebel sympathizers, to prevent the transportation of troops and supplies. Relieved by other troops, these companies rejoined the regiment at Cairo. The regiment remained at Cairo during its term of service, when it was mustered out.

July 25th, 1861, the regiment reorganized and was mustered in for three years' service. It remained at Cairo until October, 1861, when it was ordered at Bird's Point, Mo. During this time it received a thorough drill, and attained a high state of discipline. With other troops it made expeditions to Cape Girardeau, Commerce, Bloomfield, and Norfolk, Mo., and Paducah and Blandville, Ky., and joined in the feint on Columbus, Ky., in January.

The move to Bloomfield is fixed in the memory of the soldiers of the Eighth by the raid on the rebel Colonel Hunter's well stocked farm, and the rapid return march from Bloomfield to Cape Girardeau. In November, the regiment constructed at Bird's Point extensive and comfortable quarters for the winter.

February 2d, 1862, it was taken up the Tennessee River to a point near Fort Henry. On the 5th it reconnoitered the enemy's position, approaching near enough to attack and drive in his outpost. It was among the first to enter the Fort, after its reduction by the gunboats.

February 11th the movement on Fort Donelson began. The next day, under command of Lieut. Col. Frank L. Rhoads (Colonel Oglesby commanding the Brigade), it was in the advance of the column, where it met a strong outpost of the enemy about noon, and after a few volleys dislodged and drove them toward their entrenchment. The regiment was moved towards the Cumberland River, on a ridge overlooking, in places, the enemy's defenses. On the 13th moved further to the right, gaining a position still nearer the enemy. During this night the weather became extremely cold, and the men suffered greatly--being so near the rebel picket line no fires could be had. A driving snow-storm set in, adding to the discomforts of the situation. Many were severely frost-bitten. On the 14th the regiment was in position near the Dover road, with pickets thrown well to the front, and in constant action with those of the enemy. Another night of intense cold, with sleet and snow was experienced, and at early dawn on the 15th the enemy came out in massed columns and attacked us. Our men were quickly in line, and although stiffened and suffering with the cold, they met the first onset and stood their ground for about three hours, when, ammunition exhausted and the brigade to the right giving away, it was forced to retire. The regiment lost in this battle 57 killed, 191 wounded, and 10 missing. Major John P. Post was captured. Among the killed were Capt. Joseph M. Hanna and Lieut. Daniel A. Sheetz, F. Co., and Lieut. Henry Y. Marsh, B. Co., and Lieut. Joseph G. Howell, K Co., acting adjutant.

On the 6th of March the regiment embarked for Savannah on the Tennessee River, and a few days after for Pittsburg Landing. Here it was in McClernand's Division, and brigaded with the 18th

Illinois, the 11th and 13th Iowa Regiments. The camping ground was excellent for drill, and the time was well occupied with that and other camp duties.

Sunday morning, April 6, when called into line for the impending battle of Shiloh, there were 25 officers and 453 enlisted men. The regiment was in command of Captain James M. Ashmore, C Co.; Lieutenant-Colonel Rhoads being absent sick, and Major Post a prisoner of war. The regiment was moved rapidly to a position of left of Sherman's Division, and not far from Shiloh Church. At once it received a fierce attack from the enemy, but held its ground. Captain Ashmore was wounded and left the field. Captain William M. Harvey, K Co., next in rank took command and nobly led the regiment until about 10 o'clock A.M., when he received a shot through his body and died instantly. The fight at this time was furious and the regiment was forced back, but recovering and reforming, it drove the enemy back over the ground it had lost. Captain Robert H. Sturges, H Co., next in rank, took command, and led the regiment with steady courage throughout the great battle. At night the regiment lay on the field exposed to the storm of rain that fell, and ready for the conflict of the succeeding day. It was in the front lines that early moved against the enemy on Monday morning, and performed its share in the battle of the day. Near the close of the second day's fight, the regiment, with the 18th Illinois, under the immediate orders of General McClelland, charged upon and captured a rebel battery, which was pouring a destructive fire upon our lines; some of the gunners were killed at their posts. The regiment lost at Shiloh 26 killed, 95 wounded and 11 missing. Among those wounded were Captain Loyd Wheaton, E Co, Lieutenant Geo. S. Durfee, A Co., and Adjutant Monroe.



## **CAPT. DIETRICH CONRAD SMITH**

By Jim Butler

Dietrich Conrad Smith was born in Hanover, Germany, April 4, 1840. He moved to Pekin, Illinois with his parents and brothers in 1849. His education was obtained in Germany and at the college in Quincy, Ill. Dietrich's older brother, Teis Smith, was a prominent business man in Pekin, Ill. Dietrich worked with his family at a very successful operation, T&H Smith & Co. Which produced agricultural implements and carriages in Pekin. The demand was great for these products as many Germans were immigrating to Illinois to farm. The family was very pro-Republican and avid Lincoln supporters.

At age 21, Dietrich volunteered with the 8th Illinois volunteer infantry, Co F., on April 18, 1861 as a Sergeant with a 90 day volunteer enlistment. After, the 90 days, he reenlisted as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 8th Illinois, Company I. In 1861, Mr. Smith writes home to his fiancée Caroline Pieper:

“You are undoubtedly acquainted with the condition of our country...the Traitors arm is raised to destroy our glorious institutions under which we have prospered & been happy: the enemy is within our borders, they would tear down the Stars & Stripes, the ensign of Liberty, and place in its stead the representation of the vilest reptiles, the rattlesnake rag, the stigma of slavery.”

In April, 1861, he was in Camp Defiance at Cairo, Illinois, across the river lay Missouri and Kentucky. Most of the men feared an attack was imminent on Cairo. Of course, no attack ever

came. Camp life for these green soldiers seem to be quite enjoyable in Cairo. Charles Wills of Co E writes in his book *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier...* that he traded rations for food and milk, went swimming in the Ohio River, bathed daily and was anxious to sign up for a three year enlistment. Obviously, these men had not yet experienced the horrors of war! Still full of bravado, Dietrich writes,

“...but then some day I may be privledged to show you my experiences in that line of business [war], at least I hope so, for I do not expect to feel much southern steel, I intend to make them feel mine, at least I will try pretty hard, those miserable traitors.”

Both Dietrich's letters and Charles Will's letters state that many refugees escaping the Rebs in Memphis were moving through Cairo. Both recall a man that the Rebs had shaven one side of his head bald and shaved off one side of his beard and mustache and robbed him of 16 dollars before his escape.

In November 1861, the 8th, with several other regiments crossed the river into Missouri and camped at Birds Point. General Grant led an expedition about 25 miles south to Belmont. The troops were transported via steamboats down the Mississippi to a point near the Rebs. Although the 8th was not present in the Battle of Belmont, ( a few of the 8<sup>th</sup> were in another Suceh town who took over the print shop and published the first copy of Stars & Stripes...contact John Pillars at [jp8thill@yahoo.com](mailto:jp8thill@yahoo.com) for his research on this topic), Dietrich describes this 2nd hand account in his letter to Caroline...

“The troops were then drawn up into a line of battle and at the double quick step attacked the enemy & the mortal combat begun the men moved through a deadly fire inesintly forward...Liet. Col. Wentz of the 7th Iowa regiment-while with uplifted sword he was cheering on his men was shot dead from his horse. I grieve at his death I was well acquainted with him also with his wife who as here at the time visiting him...the men fought like heroes and soon the Rebels had to leave their camp in flight, but while yet the men were resting on the ground, the enemy recieved strong reinforcements from Columbus and Gen. Grant had to order a hasty retreat to the boats.”

The retreat was nearly cut off by Rebel artillery until the Union gunboats silenced the battery. All sources indicate the Union forces were now routed and running in disarray back to the transports. The 7th Iowa and 22nd Illinois suffered 175 and 200 killed respectively. Lt. Smith stated that his men fought like ‘tigers’!

Carrie Pieper, Dietrich's beloved was attending college in Illinois till a fire destroyed the college and she returned to her home in Beardstown. Once home she found many of her family with scarlet fever. With her Beloved Dietrich at war, her family sick and the college damaged, she had little inclination to studies.

The 8th Ill was present at Fort Henry when it fell, but no infantry battle action was really required since the Union gunboats did most of the work. In Feb 1862, Grant ordered 30,000 men including Col Oglesby who led the 8th Ill and five other regiments, on to take Fort Donelson. The Federals quickly drove back the Rebel pickets, but the Rebs were now entrenched behind breastworks and ditches. The 8<sup>th</sup>

with its sister regiments with artillery support attacked the redoubts, but were bloodied and repulsed. That night it snowed and the men were without cover and suffered terribly in the weather. But, by Feb 15th the fort was surrounded and it was only a matter of time for the Rebs. After the bloody repulse, Dietrich writes,

“...sad are many at home at the loss of some father, brother, husband or friend. But not only are those at home sad, also we deeply mourn & grieve over the loss of our comrades who only a day or two ago were yet in our midst setting around our camp fires with us full of life, spirit and patriotism; but they are no more we must see them shot down by our side, victims of this unnatural rebellion. They died bravely & for a good cause, silent & blessed be their rest in the soldier’s grave.”

The rebs attempted to break out just before dawn and attacked the 8th Illinois with fury for 5 hours. When the ammunition ran low and fresh Rebs continued the push to escape, the Federals had to give way momentarily. But, Federal reserves also moved in and pushed back the Rebs who had not yet escaped. Though they had taken some of the Rebel breastworks, the Federals still did not occupy the fort. Dietrich’s letter continues with the next amazing entry...

“...next morning our Colonel [Ogelsby] comes to me & says, ‘Smith, I want you to take 15 men to take the fort.’ Of course, this seemed strange to me; but I was at his orders. I got the men & we went as skirmishers ahead we were soon up to the Rebels breastworks & there we saw the white flag waiving the enemy had surrendered...we took from 10 to 12 thousand prisoners...”

The 8th Ill lost 54 killed and had 196 wounded at Donelson.

By April 1862, the 8th Illinois regiment was under Gen. McClelland’s First Division, in Col. Hare’s First Brigade. Camped at Pittsburg Landing on April 5th, the 8th was to be part of the Federal rout at Shiloh on April 6th, 1862. The 8th was camped just north of Shiloh church when the Confederate forces under Johnston made a surprise attack on Gen. Grant’s massed Federal forces here. With little time to organize, the Federals were soon being routed and pursued back towards Pittsburg Landing.

Confederate Gen. Cheatham’s men were pushing through the disorganized Federal forces past Shiloh church and moving in a northeast direction towards the landing when they ran into the 14th Iowa regiment under Col. William Shaw. Meanwhile, the 8th Illinois had managed to rally their troops and formed a line on the north edge of Duncan Field. The 8th poured a galling enfilading fire into the side of Cheatham’s already bloodied ranks. Lt. Dietrich Smith was shot in the shoulder during this stand at Shiloh. He was transported up river back home and on April 10th he jotted a few lines to tell Carrie of the horrible battle he had witnessed...

“...It was an awful battle, dead and wounded by the thousands...”

Dietrich was soon back at home in Pekin, Illinois with family and friends. He had to opportunity to visit with Carrie and describe his exploits. But, he was soon back on his

way to rejoin his regiment. By June 24th, 1862 he was in St. Louis, MO still awaiting certification he was fit for duty again. His shoulder wound was still open and the dressing was still being changed daily. He comments that they were still removing bits of bone from the wound. From there, he rejoined the 8th in Jackson, Tenn where his wound was even worse than before. Dietrich was sent home again as his wound now made him unfit for duty. The 8th went on to fight in all the major battles of the Vicksburg Campaign with much success. They ended the war in New Orleans and provost duty in Texas till 1866.

By early 1864, Dietrich reenlisted with the 139th Illinois regiment as Captain of Co C. I am currently researching this unit for further information. I know this regiment was under Gen. Rosecrans at the end of the war and received praise directly from the General while in St. Louis. Capt. Dietrich Conrad Smith was mustered out on Nov 23rd, 1866.

In his civilian life, Dietrich married Caroline Pieper in 1863 when he was home from the 8th and had six children. He became a prominent banker in Pekin and was connected with manufacturing and the railroads. In 1874 he became one of the organizers of the German College of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. In 1876, he was elected Representative in the 30th General Assembly from the Tazwell District. In 1880, he was elected to Congress, representing the 13th district under a Republican ticket. Dietrich died April 18th, 1914 in Pekin, Ill. Dietrich's home in Pekin still stands today at 405 Willow St, Pekin, Ill.

Authors Note: Dietrich Smith was brother to my great, great, great, great grandfather Teis Smith who was a prominent founder and industrialist of Pekin, Ill. I am very proud of my ancestry and especially proud of my uncle who gave his all for a cause he believed in. Jim Butler.

## OGLESBY, Richard James, 1824- 1899

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**Years of Service:** 1873-1879

**Party:** Republican



**OGLESBY, Richard James**, (cousin of Woodson Ratcliffe Oglesby), a Senator from Illinois; born in Floydshurg, Oldham County, Ky., July 25, 1824; orphaned and raised by an uncle in Decatur, Ill.; received a limited schooling; worked as a farmer, rope-maker, and carpenter; studied law; was admitted to the bar in 1845 and commenced practice in Sullivan, Ill.; during the Mexican War served as first lieutenant of Company C, Fourth Illinois Regiment; spent two years mining in California; returned to Decatur, Ill., and resumed the practice of law; unsuccessful candidate for election in 1858 to the Thirty-sixth Congress; elected to the State senate in 1860 and served during one session, when he resigned to enter the Union Army during the Civil War; served as colonel, brigadier general, and major general of the Eighth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry;

Governor of Illinois 1865-1869; again elected Governor in 1872 and served from January 13, 1873, until his resignation on January 23, 1873, having been elected Senator; elected as a Republican to the United States Senate and served from March 4, 1873, to March 3, 1879; declined to be a candidate for reelection; chairman, Committee on Public Lands (Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth Congresses); Governor of Illinois 1885-1889; retired to his farm, 'Oglehurst,' Elkhart, Ill., where he died April 24, 1899; interment in Elkhart Cemetery.