



## THE 8<sup>TH</sup> OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY AT GETTYSBURG

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### From A Brief History of the 8th Regiment OVI

By T.M.F. Downes

When Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 militia on April 15, 1861, Northeastern Ohio and Cleveland were not slow to respond. Soldiers joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry from Tiffin, Cleveland, Bucyrus, Norwalk, Sandusky, Fremont and Medina, which includes Sandusky, Seneca, Crawford, Huron, Erie, Lorain, and Medina counties. They were mustered in at Camp Dennison June 24, 1861. The Brigade Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio was Colonel Samuel S. Carrol.

About mid-morning on July 1st the II Corps began marching towards Gettysburg where heavy fighting had been reported. The regiment slept by the roadside on the night of the 1st, about 3 miles from Gettysburg. Before daylight of the 2nd the corps was on the move again, reaching the rest of the army south of Gettysburg by 9 in the morning. The 8th was placed in a position facing generally westward, south of Cemetery Hill, along a ridge running nearly parallel with the Emmitsburg Road. The brigade was posted in the grove of trees known as Ziegler's Grove, the right of the brigade touching the Taneytown Road and the 8th on the left of the line.

(It would be just as well at this point to say something about the terrain around Gettysburg in 1863. The area was farm country for the most part. Any land that seemed useable had been cleared either for pasture or crops and the area was much more open than it is now. Landmarks like Cemetery Hill or Little Round Top, which today are overgrown with trees and bushes, commanded a much wider field of view than they do now. Conversely, objects such as men or cannon, which may have been on these hills, made much more prominent targets, visible at greater distances, than they would today.)

About 2:30 p.m. the "Gibraltar Brigade" (still the 4th and 8th Ohio, 7th West Virginia and 14th Indiana) was holding its position in and around Ziegler's Grove, the 8th Ohio supporting Woodruff's battery (I, 1st U.S.) in front of the Grove.

Rebel skirmishers had established themselves on a slight ridge on the other (west) side of the Emmitsburg Road and began picking away at the artillerymen as they worked their guns. The 8th was ordered to drive the Confederate riflemen out of this position and put out a skirmish line of their own, out of small-arms range of the main Union line so the cannoneers could go about their business unmolested. Forming up in the grove the 8th came down the ridge on the run, flags flying and the cheers of the artillery men spurring them on. Reaching the fences along the Emmitsburg Road, companies B and D deployed as skirmishers and moved out into fields on the other side of the road. The rest of the regiment followed, driving the enemy skirmish line before it.

The confederates fell back until they were rallied around the Bliss barn where they turned and stopped the 8th's advance. The 8th fell back then, having pushed the enemy skirmishers beyond sniper range of the guns in Ziegler's Grove, and established a skirmish line of their own about 50 yards west of the Emmitsburg Road into which the main body of the regiment was placed. Several attempts were made to dislodge the 8th from their position, but although some severe fighting took place, the Ohioans were able to hang on.

Late in the evening of July 2nd Gen. Jubal Early's division attacked Howard's XI Corps on Cemetery Hill, breaking through his lines and briefly capturing several cannon. The other three regiments of Carroll's "Gibraltar" brigade were sent from their position in Ziegler's Grove to help retake the guns. Col. Sawyer, noticing Rebel troops forming up on the edge of town and fearing an attack on his position, sent back to

his division commander, Gen. Hays, for re-enforcements. Hays replied that as Carroll had been sent to Cemetery Hill to help the XI Corps, there were no troops to be sent to help the 8th and Sawyer must hold his position at all costs, to the last man if need be; a message that many Confederates would regret on the morrow.

At first light of dawn on July 3rd, after a night of constant sniping, the skirmishers of the 8th were rushed by a force of 3 or 4 hundred Rebels trying to regain the advanced position and higher ground the regiment occupied. Fortunately Col. Sawyer anticipated this type of attack and had Co. B standing by as reserve. Supported by the other companies in the road, Co. B dashed forward with bayonets fixed and drove off the attacking force. After stabilizing the situation Co. B stayed out on the skirmish line sending the wounded to the rear.

After this attack the regiment was left alone except for some desultory pot-shooting from a couple of snipers in a tree by the Bliss barn. The men lay in the hot July sun, trying to keep as comfortable as possible, until 1 or 1:30 in the afternoon when the Confederate artillery opened the bombardment which preceded the attack of Gen. Pickett's division. The cannon fire ranged a little high, however, so the majority of the shells passed over the 8th. The entire regiment had only 2 men killed during the barrage which lasted nearly 2 hours. The sound reached such a thunderous roar that many of the men were lulled to sleep by the crashing monotony of the cannon fire. As the artillery fire slowly diminished, the regiment prepared itself for the infantry assault it knew was coming.

Being out in the open as they were, the men of the 8th were able to assess their situation from almost the first moment the Confederate battle lines emerged from the woodline on Seminary Ridge.

Away to the south (left) and west was the division of Pickett, already taking fire from the Union guns on the Round Tops, but still far enough away as to be of little concern yet. Closer in was the division of Gen. Pettigrew which, as it came into view, seemed to be headed straight for the 8th, but due to adjustments in their alignment on Pickett's division, would pass several yards to the left of the regiment. Directly in front were the brigades of Gen. Pender now under the command of Gen. Trimble. These would be the 8th's first order of business.

As the Ohioans waited for these ranks of gray to close within easy rifle range, they kept a wary eye on Pickett's men who were still advancing across the open fields. As they watched through the dust and battle-smoke, the entire division executed as left oblique, a forty-five degree turn to the left, which closed the gap between the divisions of Pickett and Pettigrew. Out ahead of Pickett's division was a mounted officer (Garnett?) leading the troops up the slope into a flaming inferno of shot at steel. The color bearers of the 8th suddenly waved their flags in a spontaneous salute to his courage. (One has a secret hope that some Confederate regiment returned the salute in tribute to the small group of blue-coats standing all alone in an open field 200 yards in advance of their own main line, facing nearly a hundred times their number.)

As Trimble's troops came into range the 8th opened up a withering fire backed by the cannon in Ziegler's Grove. These Confederate brigades had been badly shot up in the fighting on the first day of the battle and their stamina was not as great as it would have been under normal circumstances. There were a large number of wounded and rear-echelon troops in the ranks this day. The combined artillery and close range rifle fire was more than they could stand. They advanced as far as their own skirmish line and then broke and faded back toward Seminary Ridge.

Pressured from the front, attacked from the rear, and shelled from nearly every side, the Rebel troops passed the limits of human endurance and broke for the rear. As Leut. Thomas Galwey of Co. B saw it, "They threw away everything --cartridge boxes, waist-belts and haversacks --in their stampede.. As far as the eye could reach, the ground was covered with flying Confederates. They all seemed to extend their arms in their flight, as if to assist their speed."(2)

The survivors of the 8th moved in among the dazed and confused Confederate soldiers, capturing 3 stands of colors and nearly 300 prisoners, almost 3 times their own remaining numbers.

When ordered into battle on July 2nd the 8th counted 209 rifles. After two days of fighting almost a quarter of a mile in advance of the main Union lines, only 107 men were left to gather about their tattered colors. Their losses were 18 killed, 83 wounded, 1 missing.

As the shattered remnant of the regiment re-entered their own lines with the 3 captured flags flying and escorting their prisoners, the artillery and infantry posted in Ziegler's Grove gave them a cheer of welcome and the Col. of the 14th Ind. complimented them by having his regiment present arms as the Ohioans passed by.

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**The following is from Sergeant Thomas F. Galwey, a member of Co. "B" of the 8th O.V.I. to his father in Cleveland. (Company B was an Irish company, which was known as the Hibernian Guards.)**

Battlefield of Gettysburg, PA.,  
July 5th, 1863

My Dear Father:

We have met the enemy and have given him the most decisive defeat that he has gotten in this war. It was the most hotly contested battle of the rebellion. Both armies were composed of veteran soldiers, who had been in many engagements, and, accordingly, it was only after the utmost amount of valor and resistance had been used on both sides that we succeeded in compelling them to relinquish the field, of which we are in undisputed possession, the enemy having entirely withdrawn, leaving us all of his dead and most of his wounded, besides thousands of prisoners.

Our regiment took three stand of rebel colors, being those of the 14th Virginia, 34th North Carolina and 16th North Carolina regiments. Corporal Joseph Evans took two lieutenants and several privates prisoner. The 8th numbered about 216 men. Small as that number was, we alone charged into three brigades, of Pender's division of General Hill's corps, and took 1,854 prisoners. This is no "blow," but the plain truth. But what did it cost us? Out of 216 men that took the field, we had 103 killed and wounded. I do not count those who were only slightly wounded. I myself twice hit by pieces of iron shell from the enemy's artillery, and once the day before by cannister. I was not hurt, although struck three times.

The great fighting of which I speak was on the 3d, although we were engaged on the 2d and 3d. There was a small battle fought on the 1st, but our corps did not get up to the front till the morning of the 2d, and we were sent up to the front at once. Our position was in the centre. You must look to the papers for an account of the three days' battle.

Bang! Bang! There is booming of our field artillery, which, with the cavalry, is pursuing the enemy. I will close by giving you a list of killed and wounded in our company:

Killed - Private George R. Wilson and Wm. Brown.  
Wounded - 1st Sergeant John G. Fairchild, and Sergeant Kelly.

I think Fairchild will have to lose his leg, and I am afraid Kelly is mortally wounded. We had six others wounded, whose names I have not furnished.

**Thomas F. Galwey**

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The next several days were spent in burying the dead, caring for the wounded and making ready for the next move. On July 7th, with the rest of the 11 Corps, the 8th Ohio marched away from Gettysburg taking with it the memory of its brightest contribution of the war.

After Gettysburg the 8th spent several weeks slowly pursuing the retreating Rebels through Maryland and back into Virginia. The regiment suffered greatly during this period due to the hot weather and the fact they were out of touch with any source of supplies. The unit had been on campaign since the 14th of June when it left Falmouth, and was becoming increasingly ragged. By July 23 more than half of the regiment was without shoes, and other supplies were equally lacking.

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**Major General Samuel S. Carrol**



Photographed by Brady, General Carrol is pictured here as a Colonel in the 10th US

**Captain James K. O'Reilly Company B/E**

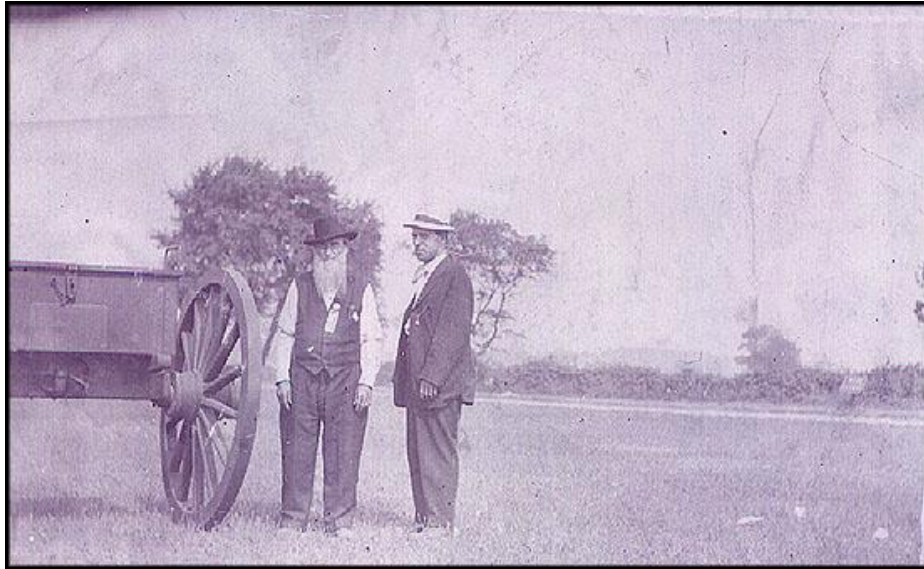


**Corporal Jason Jack - Company G**



**Jason Jack**  
Born in Fremont, Ohio Feb. 9 1837.  
Died in Erie County Soldier's Home May 29, 1914.  
Never Married

## **Corp. Nicholas Backus - Company A**



### **Nicholas Backus**

Pictured here at the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg with his son Henry Backus.  
Born in Belgium May 19, 1840. Came to the US in either 1853 or 1858.  
Died in Cleveland, Ohio October 8, 1914.  
Photo courtesy of Cathy McDade

## **Lieutenant Colonel Franklin S. Sawyer**

