

Regimental Histories

8th New York Cavalry

Also known as: The Rochester Regiment, The Crooks Cavalry Regiment

Colonels: Samuel J. Crooks, Alfred Gibbs, Benjamin F. "Grimes" Davis, William L. Markell, William H. Benjamin, Edmund M. Pope

Recruitments: from the counties of Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, Orleans, Niagara, Chenango, and Oneida

Dates of Service: Organized at the Rochester Fairgrounds, Rochester NY

Mustered in November 23 and 28, 1861, to October 4, 1862 to serve for three years

Mustered out of service on June 27, 1865

Major Engagements: Winchester, Antietam, Upperville, Barbee's Cross Roads, Beverly Ford, Gettysburg, Locust Grove, Hawe's Shop, Wilson's Raid, White Oak Swamp, Opequan, Cedar Creek, Appomattox Campaign

Upon muster, the regiment's officers were:

Colonel Samuel J. Crooks

Lt. Colonel Charles R. Babbitt

Major William L. Markell

Major William H. Benjamin

Adjutant Albert L. Ford

Surgeon James Chapman

Asst. Surgeon Winfield S. Fuller

Chaplain John H. Van Ingen

Co. A - Captain Edward M. Pope, 1st Lt. Alfred Leggett, 2nd Lt. Alfred E. Miller

Co. B - Captain Caleb Moore, 1st Lt. Henry Cutler, 2nd Lt. John A. Broadhead

Co. C - Captain John W. Dickinson, 1st Lt. John W. Brown, 2nd Lt. Frederick W. Clemons

Co. D - Captain William Frisbie, 1st Lt. Ezra J. Peck, 2nd Lt. Albert L. Ford

Co. E - Captain Benjamin F. Sisson, 1st Lt. Frank O. Chamberlain, 2nd Lt. Samuel E. Sturdevant

Co. F - Captain Fenimore T. Gallett, 1st Lt. Thomas Bell, 2nd Lt. William D. Bristol

Co. G - Captain William H. Healy, 1st Lt. William H. Webster, 2nd Lt. Frederick Scoville

Co. H - Captain John Weiland, 1st Lt. John Schoen, 2nd Lt. Charles Moore

Co. I - Captain Benjamin F. Foote, 1st Lt. Alpah Whiton

Co. K - Captain George H. Barry, 1st Lt. Alfred S. Kinney, 2nd Lt. Daniel E. Sackett

The 8th New York Cavalry, also known as the "Rochester Regiment," and informally as the "Crooks Cavalry Regiment" was organized at the Rochester Fairgrounds through November of 1861. On July 22, 1861 (the day after the Federal defeat at Bull Run), two members of Company F, 54th New York State Militia, met in Rochester and discussed the idea of raising a regiment of cavalry for the war effort. After more discussion, the two met with New York Governor Edwin D. Morgan in Albany, and received authority to raise the regiment. It would serve for three years or the duration of the war. Returning to Rochester, the pair opened a recruiting office and secured the county fairgrounds and buildings for a barracks and training camp.

Samuel J. Crooks, a native of Buffalo, had labored hard to raise the regiment from counties in western New York. Ten companies were formed and began drill. On the morning of November

21, Colonel Crooks received the marching orders for the unit, camped at the time at Camp Hillhouse. The orders were to proceed to Washington DC by way of Elmira and Harrisburg on the 26th. Horses had not yet been provided to the new recruits but were promised by the following week. It was noted in the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser* of November 22 that *"the ladies of the Brick Church congregation have been engaged for a few days past making 'housewives' (sewing kits) for the soldiers,... and they have completed over six hundred, which have been presented through their pastor (Rev. Dr. J. B. Shaw) to Col. Crooks' Cavalry... it is believed that these little gifts will be very useful to the soldiers, when away from home and in camp."* It was also noted in the article that "a lady of upward of eighty years... presented to Col. Crooks a 'housewife,' designed especially for him, which he most thankfully accepted. This venerable lady has two nephews in the Federal army, and takes a lively interest in the cause of the Union."

The regiment was officially mustered in on November 23. On the 28th, the regiment departed for Washington via the Genesee Valley Road. The "Union Blues," consisting of a band and a drum corps of young boys, dressed in Zouave uniforms, acted as escort for the troopers. The streets were thronged with well-wishers to witness the departure parade.

About 4 pm the regiment made its appearance on foot, marching down St. Paul Street surrounded by a thick crowd, the band leading the way. The crowd was so enthralled that at least two people were run over and injured, one a small boy. Colonel Crooks was mounted, as well as the field officers. The over 800 men of the ten dismounted companies marched in platoons and reached the Genesee Valley Depot an hour later, where the soldiers boarded the train on that Thanksgiving Day amidst shouts of support.

The regiment arrived at Washington on November 30 around 10 pm and were lodged in the Soldier's Retreat. The regiment had reached Baltimore earlier that morning and one soldier described the city as "a dreary looking place and very quiet." The troopers there saw the "bullet holes made by the noble Massachusetts men when they defended themselves against the secession mob" and hoped that "vengeance will yet be visited upon Baltimore for the outrage." At the station there, a young African-American boy climbed onto the train, asking to join their Company C. The men of the 8th called him "Friday." A member described him as "a bright little fellow, and says he wants to fight. He is a pet with the regiment already. He wears a haversack and canteen like other soldiers."

Exhausted from their trip, the new recruits slept on the floor of the Retreat and were informed by the Commissary that over the past 12-hour period, over 9,000 troops had passed through and been fed by him. A great many recruits were in the city, being readied for war, and men of the 8th found friends and neighbors they hadn't seen since their training began. They would be encamped at Camp Selden, on Meridian Hill, two miles outside Washington for drill and instruction. The following week, the men of the regiment were informed that Rev. Dr. John H. Van Ingen, former rector of St. Paul's Church in Rochester, accepted the position of Chaplain and was leaving for Washington.

The regiment experienced its first "casualties" soon upon arriving at Washington. Private Delafield Dwelley of Company E was ill with the measles when the unit departed Camp Hillhouse. Leaving the Washington hospital in a weak condition, 1st Lt. Frank Chamberlain accompanied the young recruit back to his Rushville, Yates County home, where Dwelley died a few hours after arrival. Dwelley was described as "an ambitious young man, possessed of a warm heart and the kindest regard for all around him." Chamberlain, who found on arrival that his home had accidentally been destroyed by fire the previous morning, returned to Rochester for two weeks to continue recruiting for the regiment. His company E, consisting of 94 members, still needed 10 more. On December 13, Private Elijah Demelet, a member of Company C, died in the Kalorama Hospital in Georgetown of acute bronchitis. Demelet was from Williamson in Wayne County.

Dr. James Chapman, regimental surgeon, would soon come under controversy. One soldier

referred to his facilities as the "humbug hospital," and Chapman was forced to resign under threat of being removed due to improper treatment of the ailing. Chaplain Van Ingen took temporary charge of the hospital. Van Ingen went to Washington, obtained several ambulances, and removed all the sick to the nearby Columbia Hospital for proper treatment. In all, 22 soldiers, most suffering from typhoid fever, were taken to new quarters, and Van Ingen was highly praised for his tireless efforts. Dr. Backus of Rochester, in February 1862, was requested to go to Washington to assume the post of surgeon. Upon arriving, however, and considering the situation, Backus declined the post.

The less-than-competent Colonel Crooks tendered his resignation from command of the regiment, to take effect on February 17. Crooks subsequently enlisted as a private in the 33rd New York Infantry. Lt. Colonel Charles R. Babbitt was placed in temporary command. New York Governor Morgan, the following month, appointed Captain Alfred Gibbs of the 34th United States Cavalry, a native of Rochester, to take command. On the appointment Gibbs was elevated to the rank of Colonel. The regiment remained in Washington as part of the force in defense of the Capital until March 9, 1862.

Not yet being mounted or "properly armed," the men of the 8th had felt neglected, even hearing rumors that they were to be disbanded, or given the choice of joining infantry units. Apparently the military authorities were of the opinion that they were getting more cavalry than what was needed. The regiment wouldn't even receive its carbines until early 1863. Until then, they toted the obsolete "Hall" model. On March 9, the regiment broke camp at Washington and was placed on guard along the upper Potomac from Edward Ferry to Point of Rocks. On April 6th, the men were ordered to Harper's Ferry and guarded the railroad from there to Winchester until May 24. The men had to fall back to Harper's Ferry during Union General Nathaniel P. Banks' retreat from Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's Corps.

Five companies (A, B, C, D, and H) of the regiment had previously been sent up the Potomac to guard bridges on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The companies had been ordered to Winchester VA as part of the reinforcements for General Banks' 5th Corps. Lt. Colonel Babbitt was in command of the detachment when it was engaged in its first fight with elements of Jackson's infantry. The companies, mistakenly reported as being mounted, and having no communication with General Banks, were left on the left wing to cover the army's retreat. They were heavily hit by shelling and musket fire, taking numerous casualties as they were the last to leave the town. Babbitt, who was even shot at by citizens in windows along the streets of Winchester, had narrowly escaped capture. Rev. Van Ingen wrote home to the Rochester newspaper that the men, though "*miserably neglected by the State, unmounted, and armed or rather unarmed with Hall's carbines, and of course no bayonets, they yet acquitted themselves bravely, and are all the better soldiers for the experience.*" The badly outnumbered Union soldiers eventually had to retreat, and were pursued and driven through Martinsburg, across the river. The Confederates captured many prisoners as well as arms and munitions. Nearly one half of the 8th's companies were still missing by the following evening. The remnant of the 8th, as well as two infantry regiments, were then stationed on Bolivar Heights to keep the enemy in check if they should appear until reinforcements could arrive. Issued muskets and 40 rounds of ammunition, the dismounted troopers took position on the extreme right of the Federal line to guard against an anticipated attack by Jackson. The regiment was the last recalled when the line was withdrawn that same night.

Members of the 8th felt they had been depleted so badly during their fight that they would soon be divided among other units. As Henry C. Carr of Company H wrote home to his mother about his experience at Winchester: "*We held the post of honor. We covered the retreat of the whole division, and the enemy were all firing on us... We kept our ranks closed until the rest of them were about a quarter of a mile ahead, when we ran... I expect that we are cut up so bad that we shall be disbanded.*"

However, the men that were left were still in good spirits. As one soldier of the 8th wrote home,

"We are soldiering now in good earnest. The halcyon days of our military life as spent in Baltimore, are among the things that are past. Henceforth, hard bread, salt pork, camping out on mother earth in the open air, hard work, hard fare, and doubtless some hard knocks. Well, when we enlisted for the war, this is what we expected and what we are at present experiencing, (and) is no disagreeable disappointment."

To improve their prospects of being properly mounted and equipped, the officers requested that Cavalry Corps commander Major General [George Stoneman](#) appoint a permanent Regular Cavalry officer to lead the regiment. Complying with the request, Stoneman placed Captain [Benjamin F. "Grimes" Davis](#) of the 1st United States Cavalry in command, promoting him to Colonel. Davis met the regiment at Relay House, near Baltimore MD, to which the regiment had been ordered in late June for the purpose of being mounted and fully equipped. The now-complete horsemen remained at Relay House until the end of August to drill with their horses and new equipment.

The troopers were ordered back to Harpers Ferry to protect Major General John Pope's lines of communication and performed daily reconnoitering until September 14, when they made the legendary escape at the town's surrender. The town had been virtually surrounded by Confederates. Colonel Davis devised a plan to save the cavalry by withdrawing them at night and breaking through the enemy's lines. Shortly after nightfall on the 14th, the 8th New York, [12th Illinois Cavalry](#), and a portion of the [1st Maryland Cavalry](#) of Davis' command crossed a pontoon bridge to the Maryland side of the Potomac River and made their escape. Shortly before daylight the next morning, the troopers captured Confederate General James Longstreet's ammunition train (about 80 wagons) on the Hagerstown Pike near Williamsport, which they hitched and took to Greencastle PA "at break-neck speed." After reaching Greencastle, they marched the captured wagons on to Chambersburg PA. Returning to Greencastle, the troopers rested that night and joined the army at Antietam the next day, where the "bloodiest day in the Civil War" would rage. Colonel Davis was brevetted major (Regular Army) at Army of the Potomac commander Major General George B. McClellan's recommendation for "conspicuous conduct" in the management of the withdrawal of the cavalry from Harper's Ferry.

Upon his first look at the battlefield at Antietam, strewn with bloated corpses and the debris of both armies, Private Daniel Pulis of the 8th wrote home to his brother in Rochester, of seeing *"men with one leg, one arm, bodies without heads or only part of a head. I saw one man... with the back part of his head cut entirely off. He was still alive."* Speculation was rampant throughout the army as to why McClellan seemed to keep his force so idle, and how Confederate Cavalry General JEB Stuart could "get away" with his recent raid into Pennsylvania. Writing from the 8th's camp at Sharpsburg on October 16, one New York newspaper reporter rhetorically asked, *"What is he waiting for, when sun, sky, earth, and air are so favorable for military movements and operations? Why are his troops permitted to lie so long idle... Why not hurry, and try to bring the war to a close before the advent of another new year?... We are as much in the dark about the why and wherefores of the army's inactivity... We have made up our minds to follow the sage advice of President Lincoln, and be 'patient,' waiting and hoping for the best."* Orders had just been issued, the writer noted, for the army to move at a moment's notice, and perhaps a pursuit of Lee's army was to come.

In early October, the 8th took the advance along with other cavalry units in pursuing Lee, who was falling back to the Rappahannock River by way of the Shenandoah Valley. After crossing the Potomac at Berlin, the next engagement of the 8th took place at Snickersville (October 27). There, a concealed enemy battery opened fire on them with canister and forced the troopers to fall back. Next came a rapid succession of engagements at Philomont, Unionville, Upperville, Barbee's Cross Roads, Sulphur Springs, Amissville, Corbin's Cross Roads, and Jefferson. Casualties at these clashes were heavy at times, and the engagement at Barbee's Cross Roads was a savage melee and "first gave the regiment that confidence in itself which it afterwards maintained to the close of the war." It was the first "fair charge of cavalry against cavalry" in which it participated, and the Confederates were routed. It was during this action that Major

William L. Markell, who related the incident at his address during the 8th New York's Gettysburg monument dedication, would see his first corpse of a cavalryman killed with the saber. While some of the regiment skirmished dismounted, the mounted portion was led over a small knoll by Colonel Davis, out of sight of the Confederates. Forming his men, Davis yelled the command to charge and, flying at the enemy, they broke the larger Confederate cavalry line which had just begun to charge their own position. The 8th, as the Confederates "broke and fled in the wildest disorder," took many rebel horsemen prisoner and inflicted high casualties.

At Jefferson the regiment participated in its final engagement of the year. In spite of the coming winter and cold nights, the men had not yet been furnished with tents. They were forced to lie out in the open all night, and "nearly all the time were denied the privilege of fire."

The troopers of the 8th, during these engagements of the second year of the war, would take note of the destruction and desolation of the Virginia countryside, writing home about the weariness of the war on both sides. The 8th would go into its winter camp on Capitol Hill in Washington, where the rations and health of the men improved. They continued drilling and received equipments to prepare them for the campaigns sure to come as the weather improved. Three new companies, recruited from Elmira and Rochester NY, joined the depleted regiment in November. In August, Major William H. Benjamin had been detached to conduct the recruitment. Major Markell took command of the regiment, and would be promoted to Lt. Colonel on April 3, 1863.

The spring campaign would take the troopers through several skirmishes, notably at Independence Hill and Freeman's Ford, where casualties were heavy. During the battle at Chancellorsville, the 8th was engaged in several days' worth of operations near the right flank of the army, falling back with the main body in retreat.

The summer campaign would see the troopers of the 8th in the massive cavalry battle at Brandy Station. Their Second Brigade commander, Colonel [William Gamble](#), had taken medical leave due to the effects of a previous wound that nearly killed him and Colonel Davis, a West Pointer born in Alabama and raised in Mississippi, was in command of the brigade since March. Davis was a notably aggressive fighter, somewhat in contrast to Gamble's more methodical style, and was killed in the action. The cavalry division had departed camp for Beverly Ford, with the troopers of the 8th leading the advance. Upon reaching the river, it was enshrouded by dense fog, which helped to screen their quiet movements. The brigade dashed rapidly across the water, with the foremost squadrons of the 8th receiving a sharp fire from the Confederate pickets. The Federal horsemen took their enemy pickets by surprise, but Stuart's main force, camped a short distance behind, received warning of the attack. Marching down a road in columns of four, the regiment received a heavy fire from skirmishers in the thick woods bordering the sides. Enemy cavalry was forming in the road, as well as a battery of cannon, so the 8th dashed into the woods to their rear to reform. Reaching an open field, the troopers of the 8th Illinois were formed into line to support them and check the Confederates' advance, allowing time for the New Yorkers to reform and rally. While attempting to rally the men during the first attack, Davis fell victim to a revolver shot by Lieutenant Owen Allen of the 6th Virginia's Company D as Davis exhorted, "*Stand firm, 8th New York!*" A soldier of the 8th New York stated that "*the deed was promptly avenged, however, by Adjutant Parsons (formerly a Lieutenant in Company K), who was close by, (and) wheeled his horse and by a right cut, cleft the fellow's head nearly in halves.*" Actually, the deed was avenged upon Sergeant John Stone of the 6th Virginia, who had ridden up to Allen's assistance.

Acting as skirmishers and in support of a battery, the troopers of the 8th would participate in the momentous cavalry battle that lasted nearly all day. Along with brigade commander Davis, nine of the 8th's men would die: Captain B. F. Foote of Company E, Lieutenant H. C. Cutler of Company A, Lieutenant Reeves of Company C, and privates John Lawson and Robert Faulkner of Company A, William H. Adams of Company H, John S. Smith of Company G (who was decapitated by a shell), Charles H. Brewster of Company I, John A. Lund of Company C, and Charles Ford of Company D. Lawson was singled out for special mention in one of Van Ingen's letters home to the Rochester newspaper; Major Pope, commanding the regiment (Lt. Colonel

Markell had been detached to other duties), recounted the story to the Chaplain: "...it was impossible to restrain Lawson in his daring and impetuous courage - that asking his leave he rushed again and again into the thickest of the fight, and using his saber only, slew five of the enemy with his own hand, bringing in on the last occasion the sixth by the collar, who had surrendered to him at discretion. Lawson had four horses killed under him, himself falling with the last. It is hard to lose such soldiers - and to be deprived of the privilege of rewarding such prowess by promotion." At the battle, the 8th took more casualties than any other regiment.

Upon Davis' lamented death, Markell took command of the regiment and would be promoted to Colonel in August, effective June 9. From Brandy Station to the July 1 opening of the Battle of Gettysburg, the regiment would march and skirmish almost daily.

Leaving Catlett's Station on June 15th, the regiment marched through Centreville, passing over the old Bull Run battlefield, where they encamped for the night. The men reached Aldie VA just after the conclusion of the fight between the 1st Division and the Confederate Cavalry of Fitzhugh Lee. The brigade pushed onward and picketed the ground that night, proceeding the next morning to Mountville, where they encountered a small enemy force that fled after firing a few shots. Returning to picket duty at Aldie, the next day they left for Ashby's Gap, then Middleburg, where the brigade rejoined the 1st Division with the 5th Army Corps following them. Confederates were soon encountered and the 8th's 2nd Brigade formed on the extreme right of the line of battle. Brigade commander Colonel William Gamble had resumed command on the 13th following the death of Davis. The regiment acted in support of a battery, with the rest of the division on their left. They drove the enemy back several miles in an "exciting day's work," then were grateful for that night's supper and rest as the men hadn't had sleep for nearly 48 hours or food for the last day. On the 23rd they returned to Aldie, where they would stay until the 26th when the regiment, in the 2nd Brigade of Brigadier General John Buford's 1st Cavalry Division, would leave Virginia and trek northward in pursuit of Lee's "invasion of Pennsylvania."

On the night of the 26th, the division halted at Leesburg (the county seat of Loudon), described by one trooper of the 8th as "*a beautiful town - more resembling our northern villages than any I have yet seen in Virginia.*" In the morning they crossed the Potomac at Edward's Ferry, and marched northwesterly, crossing the Monocacy River, camping for the night near Jefferson. The next morning they arrived at Middleton, just a short distance from the South Mountain range. The troopers noticed the bullet holes in the town buildings, evidence of the battle that raged there the previous September. They remained at Middleton until morning, continuing the northwesterly march, passing over South Mountain, and through Boonsboro, described by one trooper as "*an old fashioned looking place, of one street, containing many of the square log buildings built by the early settlers, and from the absence of manifestations otherwise, seeming to be mostly occupied by secessionists.*"

Heading north, the two brigades of Buford's Division (Buford had detached his 3rd Brigade of Regulars to Mechanicsville [Thurmont] MD to escort the division's wagons) crossed over the Pennsylvania border. They encamped near Fairfield after having marched all night. The men were then stirred at 2 am and readied for the continued march. The brigades unexpectedly encountered Confederate infantry a short time later, had a brief skirmish, but then disengaged and headed for Emmitsburg MD to enter their intended destination, Gettysburg PA, by an alternate route.

Along the way to the small Pennsylvania town, the troopers of the 8th were constantly told by citizens that a large force of Confederates were in possession of the town. When within 10 miles of Gettysburg, the troopers were told that the Confederates had just left it and intended to give them battle there. They continued onward in the lead of the brigades, reaching the town about noon after scouts had been sent in. The local citizens gave them a rousing welcome, singing songs and giving them flowers and refreshments.

The troopers proceeded westward through the town to a ridge upon which the Lutheran

Theological Seminary stood. They halted their horses in the fields there, and after an hour's rest Companies H and M of the 8th were ordered to march eight miles out to the east for picket and patrol duty. This was to provide early warning for an expected attempt by the Confederates to cross their lines between York and Westminster. A trooper of the 8th recalled that in the area they were detached they *"fared luxuriously among the substantial farmers, procuring loaves of bread of fabulous size, milk, butter and eggs in abundance, so that we felt compensated for our extra march."*

The balance of the 8th would remain west of Gettysburg with the two brigades. The 8th camped near the Seminary in an open field just south of the Chambersburg Pike. That evening, with the horsemen feeling the prospect of battle looming over them, dispositions were made on the ridges west and northwest of town. Gamble's 1st Brigade formed to the west, with the 2nd Brigade under Colonel [Thomas C. Devin](#) on their right - northwest, north, and east of the town.

The next morning, July 1, as the first shots of battle rang out about 7:30 am, the two companies that had been sent east moved in closer to town, posting pickets on the various roads connecting with the Baltimore Pike about two miles from town. They would listen to the battle from their position. Three squadrons of the 8th were sent forward as skirmishers in support of the vedette line. On one of the battle lines west of town on Herr's Ridge, Lt. Colonel Markell observed the regiment as it fought to delay the Confederate advance. He noted later that *"The fighting soon became general and sharp along the whole line, our skirmishers stubbornly resisting every inch of the enemy's advance although the Confederates were there in overpowering numbers. In a short time the line was compelled to fall back to the next ridge, less than a quarter mile in the rear."* Withdrawing in orderly skirmish lines with the rest of their brigade, the 8th drew back to the main battle line on McPherson's Ridge.

Fighting began to grow more desperate as the Federal line was pressed. Captain Albert Mills of the 8th feared that he and his troopers would *"hear the rebel yells and see the swift charge of their superior numbers which would sweep us from our position. We held our line down there along Willoughby Run as best we could, hoping that reinforcements would come, fearing that they would not..."* The troopers were doing their job splendidly, however, of delaying the Confederates until Union infantry support could arrive. As Markell observed, *"...the skirmishers fighting stubbornly... behind fences and trees, and our artillery doing good execution, the advance of the enemy was retarded..."* It was now almost 10 am and the brigade had been battling with the Confederates for nearly 3 hours. Shortly, Union infantry under Major General John F. Reynolds would arrive in the nick of time to take their place in the line that the troopers fought to exhaustion to hold.

Just as the brigade's line reached the breaking point, Union Brigadier General James Wadsworth's Division of the 1st Corps came up at the double-quick to relieve the tired troopers. Coming into line, the foot soldiers parted ranks to allow the cavalymen to fall back. Men of the 8th exhorted the infantry to *"Go in and give them hell!"* Retiring to the south side of the Fairfield Road to guard the left flank of Brigadier General Thomas A. Rowley's division, the men of the 8th and the rest of the brigade made constant charges at the enemy to retard their advance.

Retiring in the afternoon to the southwest of the town, the brigade covered the left flank of the army. They would have to make the first of two bold maneuvers to check the advance of the enemy and protect the line. About 4 pm, General Buford led the 1st Brigade to a low stone wall just south of the Seminary building to hold a Confederate advance and buy time for the Federals to rally on the ridge behind them. Dismounting and crouching behind the wall, the 8th and the brigade fired their carbines until they were forced to withdraw. As Markell recalled, *"The enemy being close upon us we opened an effective, rapid fire with our breech-loading carbines, which killed and wounded so many of their first line, that after a short heroic struggle to continue the advance, they could stand it no longer and fell back on the second line."* In a letter to his parents on July 6, Private Daniel Pulis of the 8th wrote, *"We went to popping at them... They fell like rain. The ground soon got covered with them. The front column broke and started to run but their rear*

column pressed on."

After being driven from the wall, the brigade fell into line along the Emmitsburg Road, where Devin's Second Brigade later joined them. Just a short time later, Gamble's troopers would have to execute their second maneuver to protect the final line on Cemetery Hill and Ridge. Around 5 pm, marching to a request to delay advancing Confederates in front of the hill, Buford directed the troopers to form lines between the opposing infantries. In the formation, the cavalymen sat atop their mounts and stared down the Confederates. Their enemy halted at the show of force and began forming hollow squares, a textbook infantry maneuver designed to receive a cavalry assault. Precious time was bought for the Union infantry to rally and strengthen, and the mounted command then turned and resumed its place on the left of the army. As darkness drew in, the fighting slowed and the troopers were able to encamp. The men of the 8th had fought for nearly 12 continuous hours that day. Companies H and M, detached to the east, rejoined their regiment the next morning. General Buford had high compliments for the regiment on their performance on the field.

On the morning of July 2, as the troopers were placed in line on the left flank to support skirmishers, one man of the 8th would fall to a bullet. Private Jonathan MacComber (of Livingston County NY) was struck in the forehead and died instantly, "without a word or a groan." The brigades were ordered off the field around noon to march toward Westminster to guard the trains. The long campaign had taken its toll on both men and horses. As the 8th's regimental historian noted, "*Our horses (are) about starved.*" The men hadn't had a decent meal for days and forage was scarce.

In camp on the 4th, the men of the 8th anxiously awaited any news from the front, as they could hear the battle raging to the north. They took note of their casualties: 1st Sergeant E. A. Slocum of Company A, and MacComber of Company M had been killed. Many had been wounded. Captain C. D. Follett, of Company D, was left on the first day's field, severely wounded, as the advance of the enemy prevented carrying him away. The men assumed he had been taken prisoner.

The 8th would do further battle with its division against Confederates during the retreat of Lee's Army southward, marching and fighting almost daily. From Gettysburg to the end of November, when the year's campaign ended and camp was established near Culpeper VA, the regiment would suffer over 150 casualties.

They left Westminster on July 4th in the midst of a thunder shower, which continued all night, so that the troopers were soaked by morning. The following week, at Boonsboro, five troopers would die in the all-day engagement there. There would be nearly constant battling over the next several days. Major Edmund M. Pope would be taken prisoner near Funkstown as he lay ill in a home near there which fell behind enemy lines.

On August 1, the division was in the saddle in the early morning hours to cross the Rappahannock River, but had to wait until nearly noon to cross as the pontoon bridge was being completed. Upon crossing, the Confederates were driven to within a couple miles of Culpeper VA, but the advance slowed at the fall of darkness. In the engagement, the regiment lost two killed, eleven were wounded, and one was missing. The troopers fell back a short distance east of Brandy Station. On the afternoon of the 4th, the pickets were driven in and the regiment had to saddle up in haste. Again they drove the Confederates, but, fearing a trap and with rain and darkness settling in, they returned to their quarters at Rappahannock Station VA. The regiment would see the withdrawal of Lee's troops across the river, ending the Gettysburg Campaign.

On September 13, the division crossed at Rappahannock Station and took the familiar route to Culpeper, with only two squadrons of the 8th present (the balance of the regiment were sent to Alexandria to escort a wagon train). As the squadrons supported Williston's Battery of the 2nd New York Artillery, fighting began near Beverly Station. The ground was familiar to the troopers, as they had fought over that same ground three times previously and done picket duty for weeks

there. Supporting a battery meant that the troopers, as one member of the 8th described it, have "a very trying position, as they are compelled to sit quietly on their horses, a target as it were, for their adversaries; and to remain in this position for a length of time, hearing the shrieking messengers of death coming nearer and nearer as the expert gunners are gradually getting the range, and knowing that one well aimed shell may perhaps destroy half a company, it is enough to try the stoutest nerves." Reaching Culpeper, where the Confederates had their batteries set up on the outskirts of the town, with sharpshooters in the buildings, the Federal batteries were compelled to shell the town to try to drive them out. Union Cavalry General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick's division galloped to the scene from Kelly's Ford and charged, capturing three guns and a number of prisoners.

On February 27, 1864, Colonel Markell resigned and Lt. Colonel William H. Benjamin took command of the regiment. He was commissioned colonel on April 14, to rank from Markell's resignation. In March, the regiment was transferred to the Third Cavalry Division's Second Brigade.

The spring campaign of 1864 would find the 8th in constant skirmishing with Confederate infantry and with Stuart's and Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry. In early May's approaches to the Confederate capital at Richmond, the 8th would see stiff resistance from the enemy earthworks. The sight of the James River would make some of the members wonder if perhaps the war's end were near. One of the regiment's surgeons, Dr. Ferguson, was captured while attending to the unit's wounded and was held in Libby Prison for 10 days before being released.

In June, the regiment left the river at Haxall's Landing and rode westward until they joined the rest of Grant's army at Chesterfield Station, near the North Anna River. The men's spirits were lifted by the recent successes of the army, but tempered by the death of General James S. Wadsworth, himself a western New Yorker. Since joining the main army and Major General Philip H. Sheridan's ensuing raids, the troopers were principally engaged in guarding the right flank and saw little action until the 3rd, at Salem Church, in which a severe skirmish with Hampton's Legion (supported by infantry and artillery), ensued. Fighting lasted for eight hours with the Federals succeeding in driving the Confederates. Colonel Benjamin, leading the regiment at Hawe's Shop, received a severe wound in the thigh "while gallantly leading his men in his usual manner."

On Colonel Benjamin's wounding, command fell upon Lt. Colonel Edmund M. Pope, a protégé of the late Colonel Benjamin "Grimes" Davis. Pope had been taken prisoner while wounded in Maryland the previous year and had just been released in the spring. The rest of June would find the regiment in constant skirmishing during raids around the James River.

Also present in the mind of one trooper of Company D was the coming Presidential election. Writing his sentiments home to the *Seneca County Courier* (the letter was published on June 30), the unidentified soldier wrote: *"In the contest of 1864, it is the co-relative duty of the friends of Freedom, under the flag of Abraham Lincoln, to rebuild and restore the Union... Should faction, or ambition, distract or divide them, an enemy of the war for the preservation of our free institutions will succeed to the Presidential Chair, and in that event the catastrophe of separation will be inevitable... We look to the men of Seneca to do their whole duty. We will take care of the enemy in the field. Will you defeat them at home?"*

As the troopers of the 8th endeavored to "take care of the enemy in the field" casualties were heavy in the skirmishes of June and July. In early August the still-recovering Colonel Benjamin would be able to again assume command of the regiment.

Benjamin himself would write a letter home to the *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, published on October 28, regarding his regiment's participation in the fall campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. One of their sharpest fights would come at Winchester, at Mount Olive on Tom's Brook. Benjamin wrote, *"There and then was made the charge by the Old 8th, which did it lasting honor, and was both grand and successful. We captured five guns, one caisson, ninety-four prisoners, and was mainly instrumental in the capture of the whole rebel wagon train, among*

which were the headquarter wagons of Generals Rosser and Wickham... it was a straight out and out cavalry fight, and we whipped them handsomely - which we can do any day even handed, and more too!" After the battle the regiment would assume picket duty and guarding trains to Winchester. Benjamin related that, *"The guerillas and bushwackers infest the country on all sides of us, and are a constant source of annoyance."* He attached a list of the casualties suffered in the actions since the regiment had entered the valley, containing seven that were killed and dozens wounded. Since August, the regiment had fought handsomely in the actions at Kearneysville, Snicker's Gap, Winchester, Front Royal, Waynesboro, Kill Creek, and Mt. Olive.

In October, many of the unit's enlistments were due to expire, but numerous men and officers chose to re-enlist. They were combined with the others into a re-formed regiment of eight companies.

Riding under General Sheridan in newly-promoted Brevet Brigadier General Devin's 1st Division, the veterans and re-enlistees of the 8th would participate in the destructive raids throughout Virginia, destroying railroads, warehouses, bridges, and all kinds of Confederate materiel. On February 27, 1865, the regiment marched southward from Winchester and encountered the enemy in force at Waynesboro VA on March 2. A sharp battle ensued with the Confederates (commanded by Major General Jubal A. Early) in which the Federal victory took 1500 prisoners, 5 pieces of artillery, and 10 rebel battle flags. Commanding the regiment in this engagement was Major Hartwell B. Compson, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for capturing a flag belonging to Early's headquarters. Compson, from Seneca Falls NY, was issued his citation on March 26.

The regiment's march to Petersburg continued, and they would participate in the final campaign of the war through Appomattox, fighting gallantly at the massive battle at Five Forks. At Appomattox Court House, the 8th New York received the flag of truce sent in by General Lee.

The veterans of the "Old 8th" were mustered out of the service on June 27, 1865.

During the regiment's term of service, it suffered a total of 794 men killed, wounded, and missing.