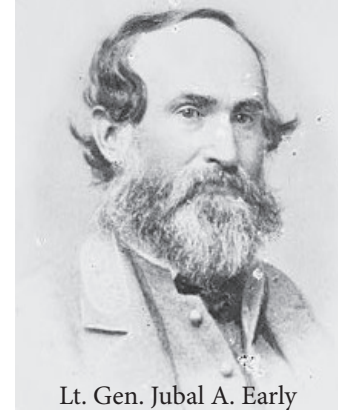




The Morning Attack Trails

The Battle of Cedar Creek began during the pre-dawn hours of October 19, 1864, when a surprise Confederate attack by Lt. Gen. Jubal Early's Army of the Valley swarmed into the Union camps along the banks of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River and Cedar Creek. Despite heroic efforts by the Union defenders, the Southern assault eventually drove the entire Army of the Shenandoah out of their camps and north of Middletown.



Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early

This brochure includes three walking trails, which explore one phase of this morning fight. They can be hiked individually or in various combinations. The trail map is on the back page. These trails are:

1. **The 8th Vermont Monument Trail** - a 300 yard trail (600 yards round-trip) to the 8th Vermont monument.
2. **Thomas Brigade Loop Trail** - a 0.6 mile long trail that focuses on the stand of Thomas's brigade.
3. **Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail** - a 0.7 mile long trail that explores the attack of Stephen D. Ramseur's Confederates on the Union forces of Rutherford B. Hayes and Howard Kitching.

You can walk all of the trails, or simply take the trail up to the 8th Vermont monument and return here.

The 8th Vermont Monument Trail

STOP 1: "At the Double Quick" (at the trail head bulletin board)

On the morning of Wednesday, October 19, 1864, Union Brig. Gen. William Emory, commanding the 19th Corps, located on the other side of the Valley Pike (Route 11), had planned to lead a reconnaissance-in-force across Cedar Creek. As a result, he had all of his corps up early. Suddenly heavy firing broke out to their left, on the eastern side of the Valley Pike, where Brig. Gen. George Crook's 8th Corps was camped. Emory later wrote: *"I was in the act of saddling when I heard firing to the left in the direction of General Crook's camp, followed by prolonged cheers, as if the enemy were making an assault..."*

What Emory described was a brilliantly planned and executed surprise attack on the unsuspecting, and vulnerable left flank of the Union Army of the Shenandoah. Aided by pre-dawn darkness and a dense fog, the first Confederate forces struck Col. Joseph Thoburn's division about 5:00 a.m. By 5:30, Thoburn's troops had been routed, and shortly after, other Confederate units assaulted Crook's other division, commanded by future U.S. president, Col. Rutherford B. Hayes.

In order to give the rest of the Union army time to respond, Emory ordered Col. Stephen Thomas's brigade towards the fighting. Thomas quickly formed up his men and marched them at the "double-quick" across the Valley Pike. Leading was Thomas's own command, the 8th Vermont, followed by the 160th New York, and the 12th Connecticut. Bringing up the rear was the all-German 47th Pennsylvania. They probably numbered no more than 1,000 strong and reached this area a little before 6:00 a.m.



Brig. Gen. William Emory

Walk in the footsteps of Thomas's men by following the brown stakes that mark the trail.

STOP 2: "A Desperate Situation Ahead" (At the bottom of the ravine)

You are walking the same route that Thomas's brigade took through the ravine. With the exception of the pond, the terrain appears much as it did in 1864. As his brigade moved across the Pike, Thomas ordered Lt. James Welch's Company G, 8th Vermont, ahead as skirmishers. They spread out in a skirmish line, then pushed down this ravine and up the ridge beyond. The rest of the brigade followed. Soldiers from the 8th Corps rushed by them, trying to escape their Confederate pursuers. One Vermonter recalled that these men *"...did not seem excited, only stolidly, doggedly determined to go to the rear...heeding no pleas to stand."*

Years later, *"Gen. Emory took Col. Thomas by the hand, and said with much feeling, 'Thomas, I never gave an order in my life that cost me so much pain as it did to order you across the pike that morning. I never expected to see you again.'"*

As the Vermonters rushed up the hillside in front of you, the other three regiments veered off to your right. No doubt many were thinking the same as Vermont Capt. S.E.Howard: *"...The only question was, could we check the furious tide, could we hold that line for half an hour, and thus give the Nineteenth and Sixth Corps time to form a new line?"*

STOP 3: "A Fight for the Flags." The 8th Vermont Monument

Once the 8th Vermont reached this position, they immediately formed into a battle line. The monument in front of you marks the spot where the color-bearers, those soldiers responsible for carrying the national and state flags, stood. The sounds of battle increased, and one Vermonter remembered: *"In an instant the timber was a blaze of light from musketry, and we were in the midst of one of the most fearful struggles of the war."*

Striking them suddenly was part of Gen. John B. Gordon's Confederate division. The heavy fog not only made visibility nearly impossible, but the Confederate uniforms of grays and browns blended with the color of the mist, while the dark blue uniforms of the Union soldiers stood out. Just as bad was the collapse of the Union forces to the left. Thomas had been sent to support those troops, but Col. Rutherford B.Hayes's division and Howard Kitching's "Provisional Division" were now in full retreat (walk the Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail to learn more about this action). Thus Thomas's men found themselves being attacked from three sides: left, front and right.



Defense of the Flags of the 8th Vermont

The fight became *"one of the most desperate and ugly hand-to-hand conflicts over the flags that has ever been recorded...Men seemed more like demons than human beings, as they struck fiercely at each other with clubbed musket and bayonet."* Two of the four Vermonters who carried the state colors were killed, and a third one was mortally wounded. Incredibly, Sergeant Moran, who held the national colors, was not touched.

Finally, with the 8th Vermont *"bleeding, stunned and literally cut to pieces,"* Thomas ordered what was left of the regiment to fall back. Of the some 165 Vermonters who fought here that morning, 110 were left killed or wounded, nearly three out of every four men.

But what of the other three regiments in the brigade?

About the monument:

Veteran Herbert Hill, just 18 years-old during the battle, decided to honor his regiment's service, and his fallen comrades, by erecting this monument. He later explained its symbolism at the 1885 dedication:

"The solid block of Vermont marble...was purposely carved...on three sides in rough to represent...the regiment as it was surrounded at one time on three sides...It represents the three color bearers who were shot down in the terrible hand-to-hand combat...(and the regiment's losses here)..."



General John B. Gordon

Here you have two choices: to take the Thomas's Brigade Loop Trail, continue to the right (stops 4-10). To take the Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail, continue straight (stops 11-15).

The Thomas Brigade Loop Trail

STOP 4: The 160th New York and the 12th Connecticut Infantry

The 160th New York, commanded by Capt. Henry P. Underhill, followed the 8th Vermont into the ravine behind you, then up this ridge, forming its battle line here. They no sooner arrived than they were met by the same heavy Confederate fire that had greeted their comrades to the left. With perhaps 250 men, the New Yorkers put up a stiff fight for a time, but their line soon collapsed, and the survivors fled to the rear. Their retreat left a gaping hole in Thomas's line, one that the Confederates soon exploited. The regiment suffered 66 casualties that day, most of them on this ridge.

Lt. Col. Lewis's 12th Connecticut numbered approximately 300 men as they formed into battle line to the right of the 160th New York. The men from the "Nutmeg State" were able to fire three quick volleys at the enemy, but were soon hit on the right, when the regiment on that side, the 47th Pennsylvania, gave way. One soldier wrote later, *"...in the mist and underbrush and in the flurry of close fighting, there was small chance to reload and there was some hand-to-hand work."*

At one point the regiment took fire from its left. One Connecticut soldier, thinking it was coming from his New York comrades, yelled out: *"What the devil are you firing this way for?"* The reply was: *"Surrender, you damn Yankee!"* followed by more bullets. The 160th New York had already fled the field. The regiment held, *"until both regiments on our flanks were driven back and we were flanked right and left. There was nothing to do but run the gauntlet."* The 12th Connecticut paid for their efforts, suffering 172 casualties that day.

Continue along the trail, to learn about the fate of the 47th Pennsylvania.

STOP 5: The 47th Pennsylvania Infantry

The 47th Pennsylvania had the misfortune of being the last regiment to reach this ridge and form into line of battle. Almost immediately, they were hit by Confederate forces on their right and front. The 47th's commander, Maj. Shindell Gobin, tried to "refuse his right," meaning he pulled back the right of his regiment, so it faced the new onslaught. In the shape of an inverted V, the regiment could not hold, and it disintegrated almost immediately.

One Confederate later described the scene as he and his fellow soldiers pursued to the edge of the ravine behind you, *"...we found the whole force we'd been fighting down at the bottom of it to escape our fire. Poor fellows! It looked like murder to kill them huddled up there where they could not defend themselves and while we had nothing to do but load and shoot. At the first volley, the most of those who were not killed or wounded began a scramble to ascend the steep side of the ravine, catching to bushes and any object that offered help. Their knapsacks on their backs presented a conspicuous target for our rifles"*

The 47th Pennsylvania was decimated. Of some 300 men, 174 became casualties, including 40 killed outright. The next day one member of the regiment *"went out to the woods where the 47th had stood, and the dead bodies strewn thickly over the ground showed that this had been a hot place."*

Over 500 members of Stephen Thomas's brigade were killed, wounded or captured that day, about 50% of his strength, and most of those casualties occurred along this ridgeline.

From here, the trail continues around in a loop, focusing on the fighting from the Confederate perspective.

STOP 6: Massanutten Mountain and Signal Knob

From this spot, you have a good view of Massanutten Mountain and of Signal Knob, the site of a signal station that was used by both sides during the Civil War. Signal Knob is marked by a modern radio tower today.

On October 17, 1864, Gen. Jubal Early ordered Gen. John Gordon and several other officers to climb to Signal Knob in order to survey the Union positions. Seeing that a frontal attack would be madness, they instead recommended a risky march along the base of Massanutten, including crossing Cedar Creek and the North Fork, in order to strike the left flank of the Union army. The plan, approved and implemented, was a brilliant success.

STOP 7: The Importance of Terrain

Turn around and look in the direction of Stop 5, which marks the right end of Thomas's brigade. Confederate forces advanced through this area and struck the Union line ahead. With the sun just starting to come up in the east (to your right), along with the heavy fog, Confederates would have had an additional advantage attacking from this area - they would have been out of view until reaching the higher ground in front of you. Slight folds in the terrain like this one often affected the outcome of a battle. This is simply another example of why we preserve these historic landscapes; reading about it cannot replace being able to walk where events actually occurred.

Can you think of any other Civil War battlefields where terrain affected the outcome of a battle?



Col. Rutherford B. Hayes

Before Thomas's brigade came under attack, Gen. Clement Evans's Georgians had swarmed through Union Col. Rutherford B. Hayes's camps, which were stretched out for nearly half a mile along the same line as modern Interstate 81, to your right. One Georgian remembered that they "...advanced through the woods in fine order. The enemy was not aware of our being anywhere near them till a few of their camp guards began to shoot at us. It was then light enough for us to see their camps. We advanced in a run and raised the 'Rebel yell.'" Hayes's camps were quickly overrun. Evans's men then pushed on, and with Colonel William R. Peck's Louisianans on their right, advanced against Thomas.

STOP 8: Hayes's Camps

Continue on to learn about the attack by the rest of Gordon's division.

STOP 9: The Confederate Soldier

Imagine you are a Confederate soldier, a member of Col. William R. Peck's Louisiana brigade. You have been up most of the night, marching from Fisher's Hill, about 6 miles from here, then around the base of Massanutten Mountain, reaching an area along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. You then were given a little rest, before being ordered to ford the river around 5:00 a.m. But now you are on the move, perhaps excited because you caught the Union army by surprise, and victory seems certain.

But you are also hungry, cold and wet, your uniform is in disrepair, and you may be barefoot. Yet the "Yankee" camps you just overran have tents filled with blankets, uniforms, shoes, and breakfast being prepared on the fire. You might have stopped to grab a piece of hardtack, and no doubt some of your comrades are still there. You were tempted to remain, to enjoy what edibles you could find; many Confederate soldiers did. You find yourself here, however, being fired on by a Union force in your front. Because of the heavy fog, however, you cannot make them out that well, although you can certainly see the bright flashes of their guns. You, however, are much harder to see. Why is that?

It is just before 6:00 a.m., the day is really just beginning, and you wonder if you will live to see another.

Continue on to learn about the last of Gordon's three brigades.

Did you know that two future Presidents fought at the Battle of Cedar Creek?
Col. Rutherford B. Hayes and Capt. William McKinley

STOP 10: The “Stonewall Brigade”

Brig. Gen. William Terry’s brigade, all Virginians, included what remained of the famous “Stonewall Brigade” (2nd, 4th, 5th, 27th, and 33rd regiments), which now numbered no more than a few hundred. But they, along with nine other Virginia regiments, still made up a formidable opponent. These Confederates were seasoned veterans, and had experienced much success during the war, including half a dozen victories during the 1862 Shenandoah Valley Campaign.

It was Terry’s Virginians who eventually overwhelmed the 8th Vermont, and fought in a “death struggle” over the Union flags. One witness later wrote that *“men actually clinched and rolled upon the ground in the desperate frenzy of the contest for the flags.”* Union soldiers later maintained that some Confederates were wearing light blue Union infantry overcoats, apparel they might have snatched up while moving through the enemy camps.

Here you can either go straight, to the 8th Vermont monument, and back to the parking area, or turn right onto the Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail (stops 11-15), which covers the attack of Confederate Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur’s Division on the Union forces of Rutherford B. Hayes and Howard Kitching.

The Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail

STOP 11: Hayes’s and Kitching’s Camps

This trail will cover a portion of the Union commands of Col. Rutherford B. Hayes’s Division and Col. J. Howard Kitching’s “Provisional Division.” Hayes’s command probably numbered no more than 1,500 during this fight. Kitching, who had only reached the Union encampment a few days before the battle, had perhaps 1,000 men.

The camps of Hayes’s and Kitching’s divisions were located along the same line as the modern highway (Interstate 81). While this highway was being constructed in the 1960’s, numerous artifacts from that encampment, items that would have helped us piece together more clearly the story of this early morning fight at Cedar Creek, were uncovered. Modern preservation laws, that currently protect historic sites such as this, did not exist at that time.

On October 19, 1864, after those Union camps were overrun around 5:45 a.m., Hayes and Kitching formed their battle lines closer to the Valley Pike, on the ridge to your left.

Coming towards these Union troops was Maj. Gen. Stephen Dodson Ramseur’s division, consisting of four brigades, close to 3,000 veteran soldiers. These men from Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina were confident in themselves and their commander. Gen. Ramseur, only 27 years old, had just heard a few days earlier of the birth of his first child. Unsure if he had a son or daughter, Ramseur nevertheless honored his child by wearing a boutonniere in the lapel of his coat. One officer wrote later that Ramseur’s *“presence and manner was electrical.”*

This loop trail will cover Ramseur’s attack and the collapse of the rest of the 8th Corps.

STOP 12: Ramseur’s Attack

Face the buildings on the ridge in front of you. Although they were not there during the battle, they mark the line of Rutherford B. Hayes’s division after his soldiers had retreated from the area of their camps (behind you, where modern Interstate 81 now runs). To the left of the buildings is where the 8th Vermont fought.

Now face Interstate 81. On the morning of October 19, 1864, at around 6:00 a.m., Brig. Gen. Bryan Grimes’s North Carolinians came across what were then open fields. They had already pushed aside the first Union line of battle, in front of Hayes’s camps. One North Carolinian wrote later that *“...a great many were fast asleep when we attacked them...they jumped up and ran for their lives.”* As Grimes’s men swept across these fields, some attacked the 8th Vermont, while the rest advanced against Lt. Col. Benjamin Coates’s brigade, Hayes’s division, positioned on the ridge behind you. It would prove no contest, as Coates had only one full regiment, the 14th West Virginia.

Continue along the trail to learn about the rest of Ramseur’s division, and the Union defense.

STOP 13: The Confederate Onslaught Continues

Brig. Gen. William R. Cox's North Carolina brigade crossed these fields to attack the Union line on the ridge to your left. Attempting to visualize historic events can be difficult when so many modern changes occur to the landscape. While the construction of Interstate 81 has forever altered these fields, other "core battlefield" land at Cedar Creek still exists in its 1864 condition. Yet much of that same land is still unprotected and in need of preservation.

The remaining two brigades of Ramseur's division, Brig. Gen. Philip Cook's Georgians and Brig. Gen. Cullen Battle's Alabamians, extended the Confederate line across this area, and attacked the left of Hayes's division as well as Col. Kitching's troops. Swinging around the far right of the Confederate line was a small brigade of Virginia cavalymen commanded by Col. William H. Payne.

Although their exact position is unknown, Capt. Frank Gibbs's Battery L, 1st Ohio Light Artillery, might have been located on the slight knoll visible between the modern houses to your front. Gibbs's original position was well south, overlooking Cedar Creek, but once the 8th Corps was routed, Gibbs was ordered here. Three of Gibbs's guns were placed on that knoll; his fourth piece was positioned in the middle of Kitching's line.

Ramseur's line of battle outflanked Hayes and Kitching, and their lines soon disintegrated. Their withdrawal across the Valley Pike, which Col. Devol wrote *"was done in some confusion,"* doomed the fate of Thomas's brigade further south.

Follow the trail to the Union positions.

STOP 14: Hayes's and Kitching's Lines

You are now standing on the ridge held briefly by members of Col. Hiram Devol's brigade of Hayes's division. Col. Howard Kitching's "Provisional Division" was located to your left front and extended towards Interstate 81. The three guns of Capt. Frank Gibbs's Battery L, 1st Ohio Light Artillery, anchored the Federal left.

After Devol was driven away from his initial line, in front of their camps (just beyond the other side of Interstate 81), he retreated here. He wrote later, *"This threw my brigade into line parallel with the Winchester pike and some seventy-five yards from it."* Devol then ordered two companies *"deployed as skirmishers..., " who "...became engaged with the enemy at once, were driven back..."*

Col. T. Howard Kitching of New York, only 25 years old, had already seen plenty of action during the 1864 "Overland Campaign." As the Confederates were approaching, Col. Rutherford B. Hayes rode over to Kitching, somewhere along this ridgeline, and asked the young New Yorker if his men could hold. *"This is a good position,"* Kitching said, *"and I can hold on here if you can hold on down there."* Apparently a bit offended by the younger man's response, Hayes replied: *"You need not feel afraid of my line...I will guarantee that my line will stand."*

Hayes had no sooner spoken than the Union lines began to dissolve. Gen. Cullen Battle's Alabamians outflanked Kitching to the north, and other Confederate units were doing the same to Hayes's right. Capt. Gibbs's guns fired case-shot, then switched to canister, but it did no good. As he wrote later, with *"my supports giving away...to the advance of the enemy, I immediately limbered up and got away just in time to save my guns."* Hayes also experienced a close call, as his horse was suddenly killed. Temporarily stunned by the fall, Hayes managed to "hobble" away to avoid being captured.



Maj. Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur



Col. Howard J. Kitching

Kitching rode among his men, and tried to rally them, but to no avail. Maj. Edward Jones, commander of the 6th New York Heavy Artillery, was hit, and Kitching cried out: *"Stop men, you will not let Jones be made a prisoner!"* Some New Yorkers turned back to help save Jones. Shortly afterwards, Kitching was hit on the foot. He refused to leave the field of battle, however, until the loss of blood caused him to almost lose consciousness. In January 1865, Kitching would die of this wound.

With the Union line collapsing, Devol's men found themselves in a desperate spot: *"... a heavy column of the enemy could be seen marching as if to gain the pike between us and Winchester,"* Devol wrote, *"and the troops on our right had given way, exposing the brigade to a flank fire from that direction."*

The buildings, which are owned by the National Park Service, are closed. Pass to their right by walking on the driveway to Stop 15.

STOP 15: Final Collapse of the 8th Corps

From here, you have a good view of much of the Cedar Creek battlefield. Looking towards Interstate 81, imagine Ramseur's division, nearly 3,000 strong, attacking across the fields in front of you, with Gordon's division doing the same further to the right. Further south (to your right, beyond Interstate 81), Gen. Joseph Kershaw's Confederates had already overrun Col. Joseph Thoburn's 8th Corps division. Signal Knob (in the distance to your right, marked by a modern radio tower), which the Confederates used as an observation post before the battle, is several miles off to your right-front.

Now face the Valley Pike (Route 11) behind you. In the distance, on the other side of the Pike, is Belle Grove. Completed in 1797 by Isaac Hite, Jr., whose grandfather had brought down the first white settlers to the Shenandoah Valley, Belle Grove was Union army commander Gen. Philip Sheridan's headquarters. To the left of Belle Grove the Union 19th Corps was camped. Beyond Belle Grove was the Union 6th Corps, Sheridan's most experienced army corps, and even further north, holding down the army's right flank, were two cavalry divisions under Wesley Merritt and George A. Custer.

Now turn back and face the direction of the Confederate attack. Why would this position have been a good one to defend? Why did the Union line here fall so quickly? One problem was that Hayes's 2nd brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Benjamin Coates, had only one of his four regiments, the 14th West Virginia, and a handful from the 34th Ohio; the rest were out on detached duty. Coates later wrote that, *"The enemy soon made their appearance in overwhelming numbers on our right and front, and our slender line was compelled to fall back in confusion..."*

With Hayes's division routed, George Crook's entire 8th Corps had been forced to retreat and played no more significant role during the day. Next in line was Gen. William Emory's 19th Corps. Would they be able to stop the Confederate onslaught?

To return to your vehicle, follow the trail, which continues behind you and to the right of the barn, to the 8th Vermont monument. From there, you can either hike the Thomas Brigade Loop Trail (stops 4-10), or go back to the parking area. Please stop by our Visitor Contact Station (7712 Main Street, Middletown), for more information.



