

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The 8th Vermont Monument

The 8th Vermont

Organized and mustered in on February 18, 1862, the 8th Vermont was sent to the Department of the Gulf in Louisiana, where it was assigned to the 19th Corps and saw service during the Red River Campaign (May), the siege of Port Hudson (May-July) and the Sabine Pass Expedition (September). When its enlistment expired

in early 1864, it was designated a “veteran volunteer” regiment when enough men re-enlisted. It was sent north in July, along with the rest of the 19th Corps, to Washington, D.C., and then on to the Shenandoah Valley, where it participated in the battles of 3rd Winchester (September 19) and Fisher’s Hill (September 22).

The Suicide Mission At Cedar Creek

On the morning of October 19, 1864, aided by the pre-dawn gloom and a dense fog, the Confederate Army of the Valley, commanded by Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, launched a devastating surprise attack against the left flank of the Union Army of the Shenandoah.

In an effort to delay the overwhelming Confederate assault, Maj. Gen. William Emory of the 19th Corps ordered Col. Stephen Thomas to take his 1,500 man brigade to bolster the hard pressed 8th Corps, knowing the order meant the sacrifice of Thomas’ men.

Col. Thomas quickly marched his brigade across the Valley Pike and into a line of battle. To the right of the 8th Vermont was the 160th New York, 12th Connecticut and 47th Pennsylvania. The 8th Vermont, consisting of 164 officers and men, faced

portions of Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon’s Division, which included regiments from Louisiana, Virginia and North Carolina.



Colonel Stephen Thomas, 8th Vermont
Image Credit: Library of Congress

“More Like Demons Than Human Beings”

The Fight for the Flags

“...the enemy, with deafening yells, were moving swiftly in from front and flank... Yet the Sudden rush of the enemy from every direction, in their yellowish suits, breaking through even the short intervals between the commands, forced each regiment to fight its own battle; and so the Eight Vermont was practically alone for a time, -- and who can count such moments? -- as the swarming enemy broke upon it with almost resistless fury.”

Thomas’ line stood completely alone, being unsupported on either flank. One of the most well known incidents of this fight

involved the struggle for the 8th Vermont’s regimental colors. Refusing Confederate demands to surrender the flags, and “amid tremendous excitement,” according to one Vermonter, “commenced one of the most desperate and ugly hand to hand conflicts over the flags that has ever been recorded.”

So savage was the struggle that one of the Vermonters recalled: “Men seemed more like demons than human beings as they struck fiercely at each other with clubbed muskets and bayonets.”

The Sacrifice

During the struggle for the flags, three color bearers were killed, but ultimately the flags were saved. Thomas’ brigade was decimated. Out of the 1,500 officers and men who went into the fight, approximately 1,060 were lost; or over 70 percent. The

8th Vermont lost 110 killed, wounded and captured out of 164 (68 percent), including 13 of its 16 officers. But the sacrifice had not been in vain. Their desperate holding action delayed the Confederate attack for nearly 30 minutes.

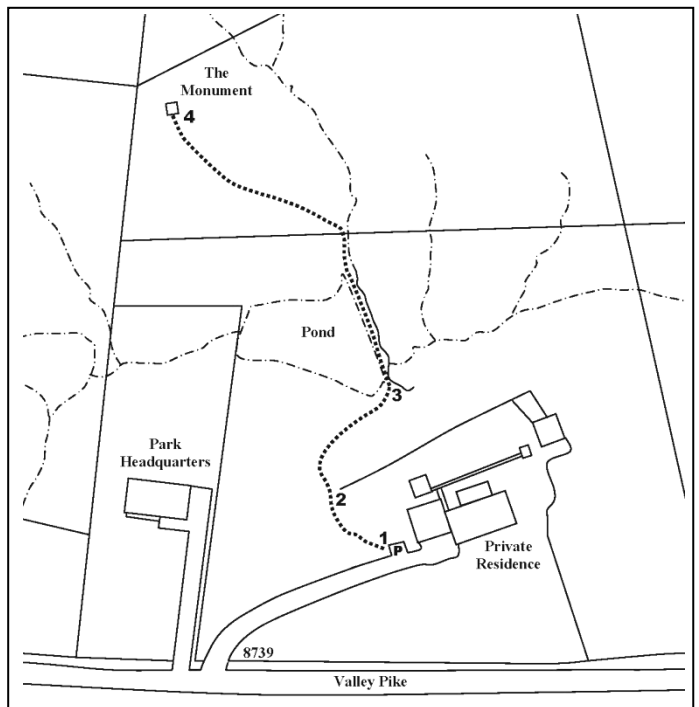
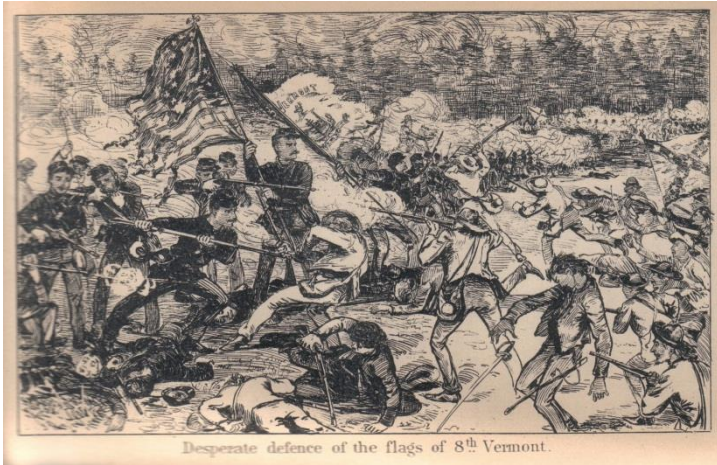
A Monument to the 8th Vermont

Dedicated in 1885, this monument marks where the three color bearers were killed defending their flags. Herbert Hill was 16 when he enlisted in the 8th Vermont in 1862 and thus was 18 when he fought at Cedar Creek. Hill decided to honor his lost comrades, and the service of his entire regiment. He explained it’s symbolism at the dedication.

“The solid block of Vermont marble, which we are assembled today to dedicate, was purposely carved and fashioned on three sides in rough to represent the savage and peculiar feature of that awful struggle. It represents the regiment as it was surrounded at one time on three sides by an excited foe, fresh from their great victory over Corps. It represents the three color bearers who were shot down in the terrible hand to hand conflict and who died.”



Walking the Trail to the Monument



Directions to the 8th Vermont Monument Trail

From the Visitor Contact Station, take a left onto Main Street and follow Route 11 south out of the town of Middletown. Go approximately 2.1 miles until you come to the National Park Service on the left. Turn left into the second

driveway at 8739 Valley Pike. Please park in the side gravel parking space or the paved parking pad close to the house and awning. The start of the path is at the left corner of the gravel parking pad.

Step 1

“At the Double Quick” An Introduction to the 8th Vermont (At the parking area)

“I was wakened in the gray dawn of that October morning by what I thought for an instant was a furious thunder-storm, so continuous was the dreadful roll of musketry. Springing out, I shouted, ‘Fall in, men!’ ... A moment later our brigade received orders to take position across the pike, and check the enemy’s advance, and the movement was made on the run.”
Capt. S.E. Howard, 8th Vermont

encountered soldiers fleeing from the attack upon the 8th Corps.

Capt. Howard continued, *“In a moment it was apparent that Crook’s Corps was helplessly broken. Officers were fleeing for their lives, half dressed and with their swords in their hands. Hundreds of men rushed past just as they had sprung from their blankets... 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?”*

Col. Thomas’ Brigade, including the 8th Vermont, crossed the Valley Pike, through this area and down into the ravine as they

Step 2

“A Desperate Situation Ahead” (The top of the ravine)

Cross the yard and follow the brown stakes that mark the trail.

Knowing that Thomas’ Brigade would be badly outnumbered, the Federal command was desperate to buy time to prepare a defensive line, the order would require their ultimate sacrifice.

“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.”
Carpenter, 8th Vermont

The brigade marched straight into the teeth of an overwhelming Confederate attack.

Years later, *“Gen. Emory took Col. Thomas by the hand, and said with much feeling,*

Continue in the footsteps of the 8th Vermont through the ravine by following the trail.

Step 3

The Landscape Today VS 1864 (At the bottom of the ravine)

Follow the trail stakes down the slope to the corner of the pond.

You are walking the same route that the 8th Vermont took through the ravine and woods. With the exception of the pond, the terrain is pretty much the same way the Vermonters would have seen it.

fugitives, and General Thomas’ command must have been under most admirable discipline to have been able to rally and form, under such circumstances, and for a time successfully oppose the onward rush of heave masses of Confederate troops flushed with the excitement of hitherto unopposed success. Such a display of heroic fortitude by the men and by the leader of your command is worthy of the highest praise and admiration.”

Carpenter, 8th Vermont

“Few, if any, troops, even the best of veterans, could resist being demoralized by the inundation of such a mass of excited

Step 4

“A Fight for the Flags” (At the Monument)

Continue following the trail stakes across the pond dam, through the gate in the fence, and up the hill toward the monument.

The rest of the brigade, the 160th New York, 12th Connecticut and the 47th Pennsylvania would have been formed up in line to your right, facing the slopes to the east. The monument marks where the regimental flags were located. Each regiment has a Color Guard who carry and protect their National and regimental flags.

“No pen can describe the scene... the deep gloom of early morning was lighted up by the incessant flashes of musketry from either side, the air was filled with missiles, and heavily laden with the roar of battle, the shock of artillery and the shouts of the combatants.

It was useless to stand against such fearful odds, neither could the frightful butchery be endured longer; and the regiment ... as a leaf... in a whirlwind... was swept from the field, but not without the flags.”
Carpenter, 8th Vermont