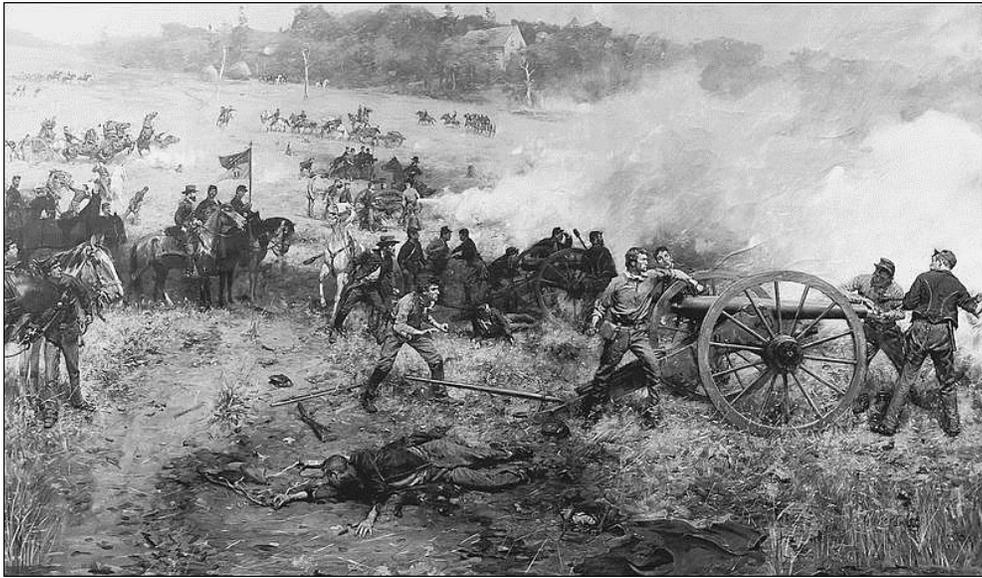


“A pretty tough pull on me.”

Private John Edmonds, Battery H, 1st Ohio Light Artillery

Daniel Welch, Gettysburg Foundation



Battery H, 1st Ohio Artillery at Cold Harbor by Gilbert Gaul, 1893. (courtesy Toledo Museum, Toledo, OH)

Twilight was setting on 1861. The Union armies across several theaters of war had experienced humiliating defeats as war efforts increased in both North and South alike. In the east, the loss of Fort Sumter and flight from the fields of Manassas left one of the largest Federal armies recovering around Washington, D.C. As late summer turned to fall and autumn chills rent the morning air, a twenty-three year old school teacher from Carey Township, Lucas County, Ohio signed his enlistment papers to join the Union war effort. John Edmonds, the gray-eyed, brown-haired, five foot eight inch “superintendent of the sabbath school in the town at which he enlisted”¹ had become a Private in Company H, 1st Regiment Light Artillery, Ohio Volunteers on October 26, 1861 in Toledo, Ohio.

Organized at Camp Dennison near Cincinnati, Ohio, Battery H left the Buckeye State for the front and Parkersburg, West Virginia in January 1862. John Edmonds and his fellow artillerists fought at the battles of Winchester, Port Republic, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville as the months of 1862 and 1863 marched onward. On July 2, 1863, upon arrival to Gettysburg, the battery, along with the rest of the Union army’s artillery reserve went into park on the northern fields of resident George Spangler’s farm. Later, the battery was called into action and took position on Cemetery Hill where it engaged Confederate artillery. “Shells were flying about in a lively manner when we reached the hill; fired from batteries on both sides of Gettysburg,” wrote Third Volunteer Brigade commander Capt. James F. Huntington.² “Return in kind was made by

all of ours that could be brought to bear,” and, “For some time, there were no serious casualties on our part.”³ Another man in Battery H recalled the fight this way, “Shortly before 5 P.M. on the 2d, our battery was opened upon by the batteries of the enemy on our right... For three mortal hours the iron storm was howling around and over us, while upon the extreme left the incessant roar of musketry added its rolling muttering voice to increase the general din and horrid, terrific grandeur of the battle. This could not last long without casualties....”⁴ Casualties did begin to mount, however. At the end of the spirited exchange, two men were killed, one mortally wounded, and four others wounded. Among the casualties was John Edmonds.

Numerous men in the unit witnessed the shot that struck Edmonds. Capt. Huntington recalled years after the battle, “But as I was standing a few paces in the rear of Battery ‘H’, watching through my glass the effect of their fire, a shot struck Priv. John Edmonds, taking his leg clean off just below the knee.”⁵ Lieut. W.A. Ewing of the battery wrote to his mother on July 4 from Gettysburg of the events that took place during the battle. Appearing in their hometown newspaper, *Toledo Blade*, on Saturday, July 11, 1863, Lieutenant Ewing wrote, “John N. Edmonds, from Maumee, of Lieut. Norton’s section, had his foot shot off....”⁶ Calling himself “Wanderer”, a letter from the battery written in Boonsboro, Maryland on July 11 and appearing in the *Toledo Blade* on July 18, this artilleryman also saw the mortal wounding of John Edmonds. “[S]till later, Jno. Edwards, from near Maumee, had his foot almost entirely cut off by a shell, but with his usual patience and endurance, bore it all, simply saying while being carried to the rear, ‘Boys, that was a pretty tough pull on me, wasn’t it?’”⁷ Returning to the postwar account of Captain Huntington, the commanding officer recorded what happened next to the wounded Edmonds. “An improvised tourniquet was applied, and he was sent to the rear,” wrote Huntington.⁸

Before arriving at the Union army’s Eleventh Corps field hospital, also located at the George Spangler farm along with the artillery reserve and the closest corps level field hospital to Battery H, Edmonds, according to a pension filed for and by his family, was first treated at a barn along the route to the hospital. Once at the Spangler farm, the young teacher from Ohio was eventually examined by medical personnel. Amputation seemed to be the only life-saving measure the surgeons could perform, and over the course of the next weeks, performed two separate amputations to the leg that had received the Confederate shell on July 2, 1863. Recovery from his wound and amputations was the latest battle in which Edmonds was engaged. During his fight, the artilleryman had a letter dictated to his mother. In a speech given by Rev. J.K. Morehead in 1882, he recalled the dictated letter of July 8, 1863. “[T]o Mrs. [Vanfleet], I am dying; resigned, happy, trusting in Jesus; ready for roll call; ready to meet – meet – in heaven we will meet.”⁹ Just a week later, Edmonds lost his battle.

Getting to know the wounded John Edmonds during this time was wounded Priv. Justus Silliman of the 17th Connecticut Volunteers. Private Silliman had been wounded during the fighting north of the town of Gettysburg on July 1, and after receiving his wound, found refuge in the town itself with many other wounded at the German Reformed Church. There Silliman remained for the next several days before finally being transported to the Eleventh Corps field hospital at the George Spangler farm. Recovering from his wound enough to write letters home and assist other wounded soldiers, Silliman recorded the death of John Edmonds in a letter to his mother on July 15, 1863. “My dear Mother. Ten o'clock P.M. Have been very busy this

afternoon attending to the wounded. One poor fellow who occupied this tent has left this world of suffering and gone to Jesus in whom he trusted...his name is John Edmonds, Co H 1st Ohio light artillery. he leaves a mother and sisters....”¹⁰ Edmonds story of sacrifice did not end with this death, rather he became part of the larger unfinished work born out of the battle itself and his “last full measure of devotion” was not to be forgotten lying in an unmarked grave.

The Eleventh Corps field hospital treated approximately 1,900 wounded Union and Confederate soldiers during its five weeks of operations at the George Spangler farm. Of those treated, 205 had lost their fight of recovery from devastating wounds received in combat. But here, at the Spangler farm, extra care was taken to ensure that their individual sacrifices were remembered, including the school teacher from Ohio John Edmonds. George Spangler in the period of time leading up to the battle had purchased and prepared over 1000 board feet of wood and 1200 shingles for “...the purpose of building a hog pen.”¹¹ Never accomplishing this task before the battle, the wood and shingles served a higher and nobler purpose in the days and weeks following the desperate engagement. Numerous neighbors of the Spangler family recalled watching “the soldiers use up board for coffins,” and “saw the soldiers sawing the boards to make coffins....”¹² Not only did Edmonds’ body receive a coffin, unlike so many other battlefield and hospital burials, but the other 184 Union soldiers that perished on the farm did as well. Each soldier’s burial in the ground was marked by a headboard, presumably made from some of Spangler’s wood as well. A soldier in the 153rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, upon arriving at the Eleventh Corps hospital days after the battle in search of a wounded comrade, wrote on July 7 that he found the dead of the hospital buried in “grave[s] in a field at a stone wall marked by a board....”¹³



(Courtesy of author)

Further identifying those that had died and their temporary resting place was a fence built around the hospital cemetery. A quartermaster agent reviewing the Spangler’s damage claims in June 1876 noted in his report that some of the timber that was damaged on the property was “...being cut down and used to inclose [sic] a number of graves of Union soldiers, who, died and were buried on his place.”¹⁴ The care and effort to remember these men, both Union and Confederate, was far different than the burials and graves marked at other

locales across Adams County, Gettysburg, and hospital sites. It proved to be temporary, however, as a final and fitting resting place was constructed not more than a mile to the north, on Cemetery Hill. Over the course of the fall and spring of 1863 and 1864, reburials of the Union dead of the battle occurred, bringing their remains to the newly established Soldiers’ National Cemetery. Among the reburials were the Union dead so well identified and marked in the hospital cemetery in the yard just south of the Spangler’s home. Today, you can visit John Edmonds grave, marked John Edmonds, in the Ohio section of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery, Row A, Grave 24.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Justus M. Silliman, *A New Canaan Private in the Civil War: Letters of Justus M. Silliman, 17th Connecticut Volunteers*, ed. Edward Marcus (New Canaan: New Canaan Historical Society, 1984), p.45.
- ² James F. Huntington, “Notes of Service with a Light Artillery at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg,” *Marietta Sunday Observer*, August 4, 1918.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Wanderer, “Letter from Huntington’s Battery,” *Toledo Blade*, July 18, 1863.
- ⁵ *Marietta Sunday Observer*, August 4, 1918.
- ⁶ W.A. Ewing, “News From Battery H,” *Toledo Blade*, Saturday, July 11, 1863.
- ⁷ Wanderer, “Letter from Huntington’s Battery,” *Toledo Blade*, July 18, 1863.
- ⁸ *Marietta Sunday Observer*, August 4, 1918.
- ⁹ *Beaver Falls Tribune*, September 12, 1882, as quoted in Edward C. Browne, Jr., *Battery H 1st Ohio Light Artillery 1861-1865* (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2012), p. 228.
- ¹⁰ Silliman, *A New Canaan Private*, p. 45.
- ¹¹ Testimony of George Spangler, Record Group 92, Quartermaster Claims from the Civil War, George Spangler Farm Entry #812, Claim #N-1892, Box 275, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Example 4, April 24, 1876.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, Example 6, April 24, 1876; Testimony of Jacob Hummelbaugh, November 1868. The neighbors that testified on behalf of the damage sustained on the Spangler property that also saw coffins being made at Jacob Hummelbaugh’s and Franklin Swisher’s farms.
- ¹³ Letter from Comrade Joseph Hillpot, in W. R. Kiefer, *History of the One Hundred and Fifty-third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers Infantry* (Easton, PA: The Chemical Publishing Co., 1909), p.170.
- ¹⁴ Testimony of Quartermaster Agent Z.F. Nye, Record Group 92, Quartermaster Claims from the Civil War, George Spangler Farm Entry #812, Claim #N-1892, Box 275, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Example 7, June 17, 1876.