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# A Common Soldier: William H. P. Ivey

## **Abstract**

When I set out to pick a soldier for my first *Killed at Gettysburg* project, I did not know what I would find. I chose to research a Confederate soldier named William H. P. Ivey simply because he was born and raised on a farm, like me. As I did my research, I realized that Ivey's life tells us a lot about the motivations and thoughts of a common southern soldier in the Civil War. Like most Confederate infantrymen, Ivey's family was of the lower class and they were not slaveholders. Ivey, along with his brother Hinton, enlisted in the 8th Alabama on May 8th, 1861. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

8th Alabama, Confederate Soldier, Killed at Gettysburg, William H.P. Ivey

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

## **Comments**

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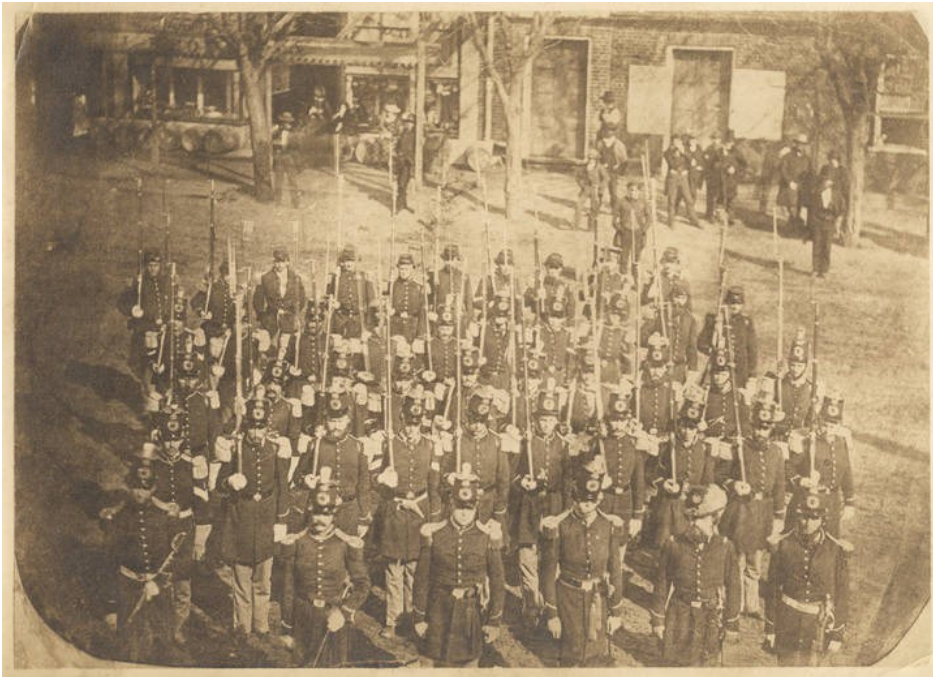
# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

### A Common Soldier: William H. P. Ivey

By Isaac Shoop '21

When I set out to pick a soldier for my first *Killed at Gettysburg* project, I did not know what I would find. I chose to research a Confederate soldier named William H. P. Ivey simply because he was born and raised on a farm, like me. As I did my research, I realized that Ivey's life tells us a lot about the motivations and thoughts of a common southern soldier in the Civil War. Like most Confederate infantrymen, Ivey's family was of the lower class and they were not slaveholders. Ivey, along with his brother Hinton, enlisted in the 8th Alabama on May 8th, 1861. Ivey was 20 years old at the time and his brother only 16, which was under the legal age to enlist, but that did not stop him. They likely enlisted to protect their homes and family, as well as to protect their stake in the institution of slavery. Even though the Iveys did not own slaves they still benefited from the institution: They would have been able to hire out slaves when they needed extra labor and slavery assured them a higher social standing than the bottom rung of the ladder. The Ivey brothers came from the small town of Radfordsville, Alabama which had a population of 1,100, with roughly half of the population being enslaved peoples. Notions of masculine honor and patriotism undoubtedly also played into their decision to enlist.



***Members of the Independent Blues of Selma, Alabama.  
Later became Company D of the 8th Alabama.***

The Ivey brothers and the 8th Alabama fought in numerous, bloody battles, including the Peninsula Campaign, Antietam, and Fredericksburg to name a few. In fact, the 8th Alabama was the first regiment mustered into Confederate service for the duration of the war. During the Battle of Williamsburg, May 5th-6th, 1862, Ivey was wounded in the groin and spent time as a prisoner of war in Union hospitals. Ivey was admitted to both the Mill Creek U.S.A. General Hospital and the Chesapeake U.S.A. General Hospital in the Fort Monroe, Virginia area. After four months, Ivey recovered and was exchanged, so he rejoined his regiment in time for to the Battle of Antietam. Ivey was probably happy to be out of the hospitals and back with his friends and especially his little brother whom he likely felt great responsibility to protect. At Antietam, Ivey was a relatively “green” soldier because of his wounding, but his comrades were veterans and Ivey likely fed off of their courage in the heat of battle. Following the Chancellorsville battle, the 8th Alabama marched north into Pennsylvania and arrived at Gettysburg on July 1st, but they were not engaged until July 2nd and 3rd.

On July 2nd, the men of the 8th Alabama were positioned north of the Peach Orchard and participated in General Longstreet’s attack on the Union left flank. The widespread death and carnage of July 2nd, mixed with Confederate defeat, likely weighed heavily on Ivey. However, like many other Confederate survivors of the July 2nd fighting, Ivey saw how close the Confederates had come to cracking the Federal line, and likely held out hope for the next day’s attacks. On July 3rd, they found themselves marching over much of the same ground which they had trod the day before in support of the Confederate artillery batteries that participated in the cannonade prior to the infamous “Pickett’s Charge.” Ivey was unfortunately wounded again on July 3rd and he was cared for on the Adam Butt farm, a field hospital located to the west of town, until his death on July 12th. His brother was also wounded on July 2nd, but he would ultimately survive the war and return to Alabama. Ivey’s body was buried on the Butts’ property until he was disinterred and moved to his final resting place in Richmond’s Hollywood Cemetery in 1872. Ivey’s death had a detrimental impact on his family because it forced upon them a larger workload and likely forced the women in the family to assume new roles, such as increased manual labor around the farm.

Today the 8th Alabama is memorialized through the monument to the State of Alabama. This monument shows a woman pointing the way for two soldiers to go perform their patriotic duty and fight. This woman may be a mother telling her sons to go and fight. These two common soldiers, just like the Ivey brothers, were fighting to protect their women, their home, and their way of life, particularly slavery.



***Battle Flag of the 8th Alabama.***

Finding information on Ivey and his family proved to be a challenge. Ivey did not hail from the aristocracy and he left no letters behind. That meant I could not learn about Ivey from Ivey himself. I began my research by searching the United States Census, and with a little luck, I was able to find Ivey and his family. From the census, I was able to determine who William's siblings were, the town they lived in, and that he was a laborer prior to enlisting. In addition to his brother Hinton, Ivey had a sister, Milly, and his parents, Henry and Mary. Through secondary readings, such as James McPherson's *What They Fought For* and Gary Gallagher's *The Confederate War*, I was able to piece together the background of a common southern soldier like Ivey and provide social and cultural context for the world in which he lived. Non-slaveholding southerners, such as Ivey, fought to protect their families and to protect their right to own slaves. All common southerners aspired one day to become slaveholders. I used various online sources, including the Alabama Department of Archives and History, to find information on the 8th Alabama and their actions prior to Gettysburg. To find information on the 8th Alabama at Gettysburg, I made a trip to the Gettysburg National Military Park Archives. These sources provided me information concerning the 8th Alabama, including the muster-in date of the regiment, the battles they fought, and reports on their actions at those battles. Although reading through census records, historical documents, and secondary readings was more time consuming than I had anticipated, I was rewarded when I came across useful information and was excited to see Ivey's story unfold in front of me.

As I was researching Ivey, I realized that he was a perfect embodiment of the common southern soldier. Although he came from a poorer background and he owned no slaves, like many other southerners, he fought for the right to own slaves and the benefits of a slaveholding society. He also fought for the protection of southern women from the ravages of African American men, whom many southerners feared posed an immediate threat, as well as the protection of his home from invading Yankees. Ivey is also an embodiment of the common Civil War trope of communities and families literally

fighting in arms, as he and his brother joined the same regiment and fought together in numerous battles. Ivey has an important story to tell because through him we can personalize and thus better understand the worldviews of ordinary southern soldiers and how they experienced the Civil War. For many, stories like Ivey's are not nearly as romantic as those of Confederate officers, and can easily be overlooked or oversimplified. However, through Ivey's story, we are able to see how his experiences compare to that of the iconic, wealthy, slave-owning southern aristocrats. In doing so, we can not only gain a fuller understanding of the rich texture of southern society, but we can recognize important differences between these two classes, as well as the key similarities that bound them together in common goals, interests, and worldviews as they fought together for the future of the Confederate States of America.

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