

## **Private Ferdinand Frederick "Fritz" Rohm, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry**

"Fritz" was the great-great grandfather of Nancy Melcher. He would become the chief bugler for the regiment, and without whom the future of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Penn State sports might have been very different.

Along with a number of other men from Juniata County, Fritz, a 19-year old immigrant from Germany, enlisted for three years in September 1862. Sent by train first to Harrisburg and onto Camp Casey in Bladensburg, MD, for training, Fritz was appointed Company F bugler by Captain John Robison, who also happened to be an old friend. The appointment resulted in a pay increase of \$1 to \$13 per month, but required Fritz to spend much of his time learning cavalry bugle calls.

Over the next six months the 16th saw limited action until Gettysburg. Captain Robison had been promoted to command of the regiment, and the new lieutenant colonel appointed Fritz Chief Bugler. On July 3rd the 16th was assigned to guard supply wagons in the rear of Union lines, but was harassed by over-shooting Confederate artillery. Over the next two weeks, the 16th would join in the pursuit of Lee's army to the Potomac River.

The regiment would see additional action in 1863 at Sheperdstown and Bristoe Station. By mid-1864, the 16<sup>th</sup> had participated in a raid toward Richmond that destroyed several supply trains at Beaver Dam and freed some 300 Union prisoners. Fritz would also be at Yellow Tavern and Haw's Station, but the fight at Ream's Station would be where he made his mark.



On August 25, 1864, 16th PA was engaged in developing the enemy lines when it came under heavy Confederate infantry fire and began to retire. In the same action, Colonel James Beaver, commanding the 148th PA Infantry, already convalescing from a wound, was directing his regiment in support of the 16th and other cavalry units when his right leg was shattered by a minie ball. He lay directly in the path of the fast-retiring cavalry and rapidly approaching Rebels.

During an interview later in life, Bugler Rohm recalled: "We suffered considerably from their fire and fell back toward our infantry. Just after we had passed a small piece of woods about 10 yards from our line of entrenchments I noticed a field officer lying on his back in the dust in the middle of the road, waving his hand toward us. My attention was particularly attracted to him by the fine, new dress uniform and the shoulder straps of a colonel which he wore. As I drew nearer I saw he was wounded. I knew if we did not take him along he would be captured by the enemy or killed. I jumped off my horse and upon examination saw he was shot through the thigh. I had three of our pioneers dismount and assist."



Colonel Beaver would subsequently have the leg amputated. Brevetted a brigadier general, Beaver would go on to become the 20th governor of Pennsylvania and later serve as a judge of the superior court. Beaver was also a Pennsylvania State College trustee who would have a street and residence hall named in his honor. However, Beaver would be better remembered and forever associated with the home field of the Penn State Nittany Lions: Beaver Stadium.

After the war, both Colonel Robison and Governor Beaver would recommend Fritz for the Medal Honor which was subsequently awarded on October 16th, 1897. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Chief Bugler Ferdinand Frederick Rohm, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on August 25, 1864, while serving with 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, in action at Reams’ Station, Virginia. While his regiment was retiring under fire, Chief Bugler Rohm voluntarily remained behind to succor a wounded officer who was in great danger, secured assistance, and removed the officer to a place of safety.”

In his letter recommending Fritz for the Medal of Honor, Colonel Robison stated, “No braver man was in the regiment, though made up of brave men.” The award attracted attention from as far away as Missouri where the *Kansas City Journal* reported a "Brave Man Rewarded" and recounted Fritz’ actions in saving future-Governor Beaver’s life.

Wounded at Farmville during the waning days of the War, Fritz would muster out with his regiment in June 1865. Returning home, Fritz went on to marry and raise a family. He served as a member of the Pennsylvania War Memorial Commission, leading the delegation that would dedicate a Pennsylvania monument in the Culpepper National Cemetery in Virginia. A grateful Governor Beaver has previously appointed Fritz to the Pennsylvania Capitol Police as one of his first official acts. The *Harrisburg Telegraph* published a Page 1 story reporting Sergeant Rohm had suffered a serious stroke on November 19th, 1917 (and had to be removed through a window by ambulance attendants!). Fritz would linger in a Harrisburg hospital before dying five days later, and would be laid to rest in Mifflintown, Juniata County.

