

7TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY
MORNING REPORT
Headquarters: Bay City, Michigan

Meeting at the Museum is Next

Our next meeting will be at the Bay County Historical Museum located at 321 Washington Ave (next to the Bay City Hall) on Wednesday, March 10th at 7 PM.

Ron Bloomfield, the museum's director and chief historian, will present and discuss the museum's Civil War artifacts.

We also invite you to come a bit early (starting at about 6:15 PM) to sample some Round Table supplied refreshments.

We will supply the light snacks and soft drinks and you can supply the conversation with the other members.

Reservations for the Annual Banquet:

The Grants to be in Attendance

The cost per plate at the annual dinner to be held at the Stein Haus at 6 PM on Wednesday, April 14 is \$20.

It would be of great help in estimating our numbers if you are planning on attending to pay the treasurer at our March meeting or at least tell him of your plans to appear.

The Stein Haus has to know how many to expect and we have to pay for the number of dinners that we have advised in advance that we expect to be present.

Attending the dinner is also our chance to thank the Stein Haus for allowing us free use of the meeting room throughout the year.

As you are likely aware, we are expecting General and Mrs. Grant to be present to tell us of their war time experiences.

For those of you who are re-enactors and have uniforms or possess period apparel, this is your opportunity to show those of us who do not what you have.

Be sure to bring your camera.

The Uncharmed Life of

ELON FARNSWORTH

Elon J. Farnsworth was born and raised in Michigan. In 1854, when he was 18, his family moved to Illinois. A year later, he returned to his original home to attend the fledgling University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

But, one night while he and his fellow students engaged in drunken revelry, one of them fell or was thrown out of an upper story window.

The student died causing Farnsworth and seven others to be expelled.

He went west where he worked as a civilian forage master for the army and as a buffalo hunter.

With the coming of the Civil War, he returned east to join the 8th Illinois Cavalry as a first lieutenant.

His regiment was sent east to be part of the Army of the Potomac where his aggressive nature in cavalry operations (and his uncle's political connections) caused him to be noticed by cavalry commander Alfred Pleasanton.



Elon Farnsworth

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In the spring of 1863, the war was not going well for the North. In May, it lost the Battle of Chancellorsville and the high command thought some restructuring was in order.

One problem was J.E.B. Stuart and his Confederate cavalry seemed far superior to that of the Union. It was thought that perhaps a younger and more aggressive leadership could obtain a better result.

Elon Farnsworth and two young staff officers, George Custer and Wesley Merritt, were all jumped from their ranks of captain to become instant brigadier generals - each to command of a cavalry brigade of 1600 men.

These three brigades were to be the only ones in a division to be commanded by another young officer, 27 year old Judson Kilpatrick, who already held the rank of brigadier general.

Kilpatrick must have had friends in high places or the gift of gab to promote himself as it certainly couldn't have been from his appearance. One of his officers commented he struck a comical appearance with his wiry sideburns, strange expression, and theatrical uniforms.

While serving in the east, he was jailed in June of 1862 for corruption and on another occasion was charged with accepting bribes. In between, he was arrested for drunkenness.

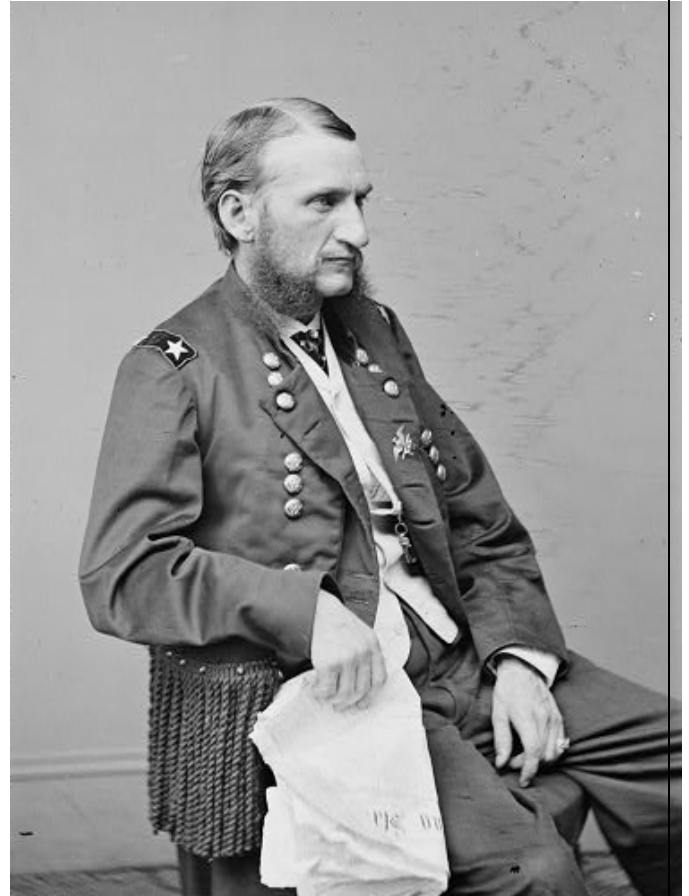
He had no great reputation for tactics or leadership either. His only reputation was for getting cavalymen killed for no good reason which would earn him the nickname "Kill Cavalry".

The first major operation of Kilpatrick's small division was at Gettysburg. The major Confederate cavalry threat was east of the town at Hanover, where it was feared J.E.B. Stuart would appear in the rear of the Union army. In the last days of June in 1863, Kilpatrick's division sparred with Stuart's cavalry east of Gettysburg.

On the third day of Gettysburg, Kilpatrick's division was assigned to the southern portion of the field to guard the Union left flank.

There being little cavalry activity there, George Custer's brigade had been loaned to General David Gregg's division at Hanover and Merritt's brigade was off fighting in another portion of the field. That left Kilpatrick on the

Union left flank with just Farnsworth's one brigade to command.



Judson Kilpatrick

The major fighting there occurred on the battle's second day. Kilpatrick and Farnsworth did not arrive there until early on the third day when the fighting had already settled down to a stalemate between the exhausted opponents.

Gettysburg's climatic third day produced Pickett's Charge in the middle of the battlefield and a major cavalry fight at Hanover. Being involved in neither, Kilpatrick started feeling a little left out.

In the late afternoon, he decided Farnsworth's brigade should charge the entrenched Confederate infantry before him.

Farnsworth was aghast. The Confederate infantry was well dug in and his men would have to ride between rocks, trees, swampy ground,

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and stone fences which would break up their cohesion. His brigade riding straight into it would be more suicide than a battle and would accomplish little even if successful.

Farnsworth raised his concerns to Kilpatrick, who responded within hearing distance of the assembled troops,

“Do you refuse to obey my orders? If you are afraid to lead this charge, I will lead it.”

Farnsworth retorted, “Take that back! I ask no man to lead my troops forward!”

Taken aback, Kilpatrick responded, “I didn’t mean it. Forget it.”

An awkward silence followed and finally Farnsworth said, “General, if you order the charge, I will lead it; but you must take the responsibility. I will obey your order.”

Kilpatrick acknowledged he would take responsibility as Farnsworth rode off to prepare for his fate.

Farnsworth and his officers shook hands and said their good-byes. The brigade charged down Bushman’s Hill into the rifles and cannons of the Confederates, who had been alerted to the impending charge by the two generals’ loud argument only 200 yards away.

The result was as predicted by Farnsworth. A large portion of his brigade were wounded or killed before it was forced to retreat.

As Farnsworth approached the Confederate line, his horse was shot from under him and he was shot several times. As he struggled to regain his feet, a Confederate volley ended his life.

The reputation Kilpatrick began at Gettysburg was enhanced in the early spring of 1864. He convinced the Lincoln administration that given sufficient cavalymen and the opportunity he could ride into Richmond, release the Union prisoners held at Belle Isle and Libby Prison, and ride out with them.

His poor leadership resulted in a catastrophic failure and the death of numerous troopers including Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, his adjutant who carried papers citing a goal of the raid was to kill President Jefferson Davis – a scandal that did not improve the chances of an early peace.

The Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid became an embarrassment causing General Grant to banish him to General Sherman’s western Atlanta theatre of operations for the rest of the war.

Kilpatrick accompanied Sherman on his march to the sea of which Sherman said of him, “I know that Kilpatrick is a hell of a damned fool, but I want just that sort of man to command my cavalry on this expedition.” (Perhaps the real reason was Sherman owed Grant a favor or two.)

Kilpatrick did not disappoint Sherman’s low expectations of him as twice his camp was raided when he was in bed with women he had met along the way. On the second occasion, he had to flee in his underwear to escape capture.

After the war, he made his way in politics mostly by political appointments. Twice he was appointed the U. S. ambassador to Chile.

Farnsworth’s story leads one to wonder how good and bad luck can determine a man’s fate.

If Farnsworth’s brigade had been assigned to General Gregg at Hanover’s East Cavalry Field and George Custer had remained with Kilpatrick, Custer would likely be the one not remembered and Farnsworth would have assumed his fame.

Instead, with the gods and the luck of the draw against him, Farnsworth is a just footnote in the lore of the Battle of Gettysburg.

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An Unconvinced George Custer