

Hamiltonban and Fairfield in the Civil War (1861-1865)

JEB Stuart's Chambersburg Raid of 1862

One of the most daring raids of the American Civil War occurred on October 10 and 11, 1862 when 1800 Confederate cavalymen under the command of General James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart galloped through the southern Pennsylvania countryside. The purpose of the raid was to damage the Union supply lines and gather much needed horses and provisions. Stuart's men rode through Mercersburg and Chambersburg, across the South Mountains through Cashtown to Fairfield and Emmitsburg, and finally to the Potomac River and Virginia.

During the raid Stuart's losses were minimal while he gathered hundreds of horses from area farmers and took a number of Adams Countians prisoner. This was the first time Fairfield saw Confederate troops since the outbreak of war. Stuart and his men rode the whole way around the Union Army of the Potomac, losing only one man in the process. Supplies for the Union army were also taken or destroyed. As a result of the raid, Lee gained valuable information concerning Union strength, troop positions, and movements.

This was the second time that Stuart's cavalry had ridden completely around the Army of the Potomac - the first time was near Richmond, Virginia on June 13-15, 1862. Historically, this second "ride around" and subsequent humiliation of the Union Army by General Stuart, was the "last straw" in a string of disappointments for President Lincoln. He relieved his Commander, Major General George McClellan, shortly thereafter changing, some historians say, the course of the Civil War.

The Battle of Fairfield, July 3, 1863

The town of Fairfield was probably the most contested of Adams County towns during the American Civil War. During the Gettysburg Campaign in 1863, there were no less than four separate engagements in the fields surrounding the town. While the actions of June 30, July 5 and July 6 can only be considered minor skirmishes, the cavalry fighting along Carrolls Tract Road on July 3, 1863 is referred to as the Battle of Fairfield and resulted in 300 casualties.

The U.S. 6th Cavalry under Major Samuel H. Starr came from Emmitsburg to Fairfield looking for an unprotected Confederate wagon train that was reportedly in the area. After looking for the wagon train for about 12 hours, at noon on July 3rd a detachment of the 6th Cavalry went up Carrolls Tract road from Fairfield. When they came to the top of a small hill in the otherwise flat plain, they saw elements of the 7th Virginia Cavalry. The Union force charged, driving the Confederates back until they reached the main body of Rebel cavalry just up the road. The Confederates then charged and drove the Union detachment back to Fairfield, where they were reinforced by the remainder to the U.S. 6th Cavalry. At this point in the battle, the U.S. 6th Cavalry charged again, but were routed by the superior numbers of the Confederate forces.

In this battle, the Union cavalry lost 242 out of about 400 men, and the Confederates secured Fairfield, driving the remnants of the Union cavalry back in the direction of Emmitsburg, MD. The Union cavalry leader, Major Samuel H. Starr, was wounded and captured in the battle. This battle allowed the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to retreat relatively unmolested through Fairfield the next day after being defeated at Gettysburg.

The Confederate Retreat from Gettysburg

At Gettysburg on July 1, 2, and 3, 1863, more men actually fought and more men died than in any other battle before or since on North American soil. With the failure of Pickett's Charge, the battle was over - the Union was saved. On the 4th of July after three days of heavy fighting at Gettysburg, rain began to fall on the bloody landscape of this once peaceful Pennsylvania countryside. It cooled and refreshed both armies who were now tired and had begun the process of gathering their wounded and dead.

Lee's retreat began on the afternoon of July 4. Behind him, the small town of Gettysburg (population 2,400) was left with a total (from both sides) of over 51,000 casualties. Over 172,000 men and 634 cannon had been positioned in an area encompassing 25 square miles. Additionally, an estimated 569 tons of ammunition was expended and, when the battle had ended, 5,000 dead horses and the other wreckage of war presented a scene of terrible devastation.

After the three-day Battle of Gettysburg, the Confederates had limited ammunition so they had to return to Virginia. Lee needed to give his wagon trains a head start and he hoped for a Union attack to be able to gain a tactical victory, so his army held their ground on Seminary Ridge. General Lee had his men dig trenches for defense on the west side of Seminary Ridge. He broke his retreating army into two pieces. One column, seventeen miles long would go northwest through Cashtown with the supply wagons and the wounded, and a smaller column of mostly infantry with some wagons would go southwest through Fairfield. Cavalry would protect both columns. Lee left men in the prepared positions on Seminary Ridge in defense of the retreating army. These men were sharpshooters, who kept the Union forces in check, uncertain as to what the Confederates' next move would be.

General Meade was urged by some (including President Lincoln) to attack, but he did not want to repeat Lee's mistake of attacking a strong position. Instead, on the 4th, Meade rested, fed and re-supplied his army. It wasn't until that night that Meade received reports that Lee was on the move. Meade only made a probe on the 5th towards Fairfield. Union cavalry did harass and destroy some of the Confederate wagon train.

The column of soldiers retreating through Fairfield went south on the Fairfield road, then up Iron Springs road through the Fairfield gap between Jack's Mountain and Culp Ridge, then up Gum Springs road/Furnace road, then through Monterey Gap on Charmian road, and then down towards Hagerstown on Old Waynesboro Pike. As the tail end of the retreating column went through Monterey Gap, they were attacked by Union cavalry in the middle of the night in a violent thunderstorm.

The Battle of Monterey Gap

As the Confederate column retreated through Monterey Gap, the Union cavalry under Kilpatrick came from Emmitsburg on the Waynesboro Pike to Fountaindale, where they met determined resistance from a Company of the 1st Maryland Cavalry in the middle of the night in a severe thunderstorm. Thanks to the bad weather, the treacherous terrain that lined the defile, and its own plucky determination, the little band brought Kilpatrick's column to a standstill a short distance

inside the pass. ... **Emack's twenty men had stalled three Union brigades for over five hours.** This delay allowed most of the retreating Confederate column to pass through the gap before they were attacked by the Union troops.