Today on *Across the Fence* the Battle of Gettysburg. 149 years after it ended we will visit the battlefield as it looks today with Vermont’s preeminent Civil War historian. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. The battle of Gettysburg was fought on July 1 second and third in 1863. During those three days of fighting there are 415 Vermont casualties. Vermont's involvement at Gettysburg and in the overall Civil War has been documented in books lectures and tours by the man who's earned the distinction as the foremost historian of Vermont and the Civil War. Howard coffin is my guests for the special half hour edition of across the fence. Always a pleasure to have you here.

Howard.: It's always nice to be here Judy.

Judy.: Our focus is on the battle of Gettysburg but first and foremost we want to remind us why the confederate army invaded the north.

Howard.: When 1862 ended Robert E lee had inflicted a serious defeat on the union army of the Potomac the big army in the east at Fredericksburg but the army of the Potomac stays right in Virginia. Come the following spring it has a new Commander Joseph hooker and they steal a march on we go up the Rappahannock river come in behind and then they think they have the old fox beat but we does something you're not supposed to do in the textbooks he divides his army and with stonewall Jackson he inflicts a stunning defeat on the army of the Potomac and sends them back across the Rappahannock river. It fills Lee with confidence. He has beaten this army convincingly although he has lost many many men and has lost Jackson. Lee decides I'm going to take this war out of my native Virginia. After all what do we need. All he needs in this war is a draw. If he can get a draw and at the union to back off and say OK will settle this thing the confederacy continues to exist. The union on the other hand hast to deliver the knockout blow. They have to defeat the confederacy convincingly and end the breakaway and secession. So will the roles in north into the union. Rules north headed for Pennsylvania trying to deliver that convincing blow that will convince Lincoln in the north to say enough.

Judy.: So why was the battle at Gettysburg?
Howard.: When Robert E. Lee goes north not only does he want to take the war out of his native state but he wants to get into Pennsylvania and he wants to get up to Harrisburg because in Harrisburg it's our rail center. If he can capture Harrisburg he can block the coming of any union reinforcements from the west. If you can capture Harrisburg he can keep people like Ulysses Grant away from the fighting in the east so that's as prime goal is to grab Harrisburg. But then where does he go? We don't know because we never wrote a memoir. He never wrote a book. He never said where he was going to go if he had won in Pennsylvania. One of the possibilities was Philadelphia. With back down to Washington Baltimore maybe even New York City. We don't know but a big win in Southern Pennsylvania would've gone a long way towards making the Confederacy a permanent nation.

Judy.: How long did the battle last and how many men were involved?

Howard.: The battle lasts three full days. July 1, 2 and three. The numbers involved are astonishing. About 73,000 Confederates about 93,000 Union soldiers about 165,000 total and the casualties 50,000 casualties. You have about one and three chance if you go into that battle of ending up killed or wounded captured or missing. Of course they never found some men because they were blown to smithereens by artillery fire. It's the biggest battle of the Civil War it's a huge battle and it's tactically very interesting.

Judy.: Can you give us a summary of those three days?

On the first day the 1st of July there were only 2500 Union soldiers at Gettysburg John you for its cavalry men. They were expecting trouble. Confederates had been in Gettysburg a couple of days before. Lee's men are prowling all over Southern Pennsylvania looking for supplies. They're picking up forage their living off the land but in the morning of July 1 here comes a pea hills core of the Confederate army. 1/3 army moving from the west right towards Gettysburg. Right towards Gettysburg. Why towards Gettysburg? 11 roads come together in Gettysburg and if you're going to move armies around Southern Pennsylvania there probably going to end up there. Lee was massing his army just to the west of Gettysburg because he didn't know where the Union army was. His cavalry commander Jeb Stuart was off on a ride around the Union army and he couldn't get back. And the cavalry was Lee's eyes and ears. Lee fought blind and the battle developed accidentally the morning. It becomes a big battle very fast because the Union first score comes on the field under John Reynolds who was killed. And then the Union 11th core comes up and soon you've got two big Union core 25,000 men fighting more Confederates and at the end of the day the Union army is forced to retreat through the town of Gettysburg to the high country just to the east and south of it. The famous Culps Hill cemetery hill and cemetery ridge. The first day's battle of vicious day of fighting is a convincing Confederate victory. Lee comes on the field hadn't intended to fight at Gettysburg he sees it's a victory and decides to stay. The second day is quiet much of the morning. There's some fighting on Culps Hill but in the afternoon James Longstreet with 18,000 Confederates takes them all the way down a secure route to the southern end of the battlefield and attacks from the south. This produces some of the famous moment at Gettysburg. The fight for little round top he were Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the 20th Maine make their stand. The fight goes to Devil's Den the peach orchard the wheat field. Longstreet hammering away trying to break through the Union line. Almost does but he doesn't make it. It's getting dark now and there's one final try made up around south of cemetery Hill near where the famous clump of trees is. One last try is made by Rans Wright and to stop this attack Winfield Scott Hancock whose command on the field have to bring up everybody he has and that includes the second Vermont brigade. They come up to
helps stabilize the line in the confederates do not break through. At the end of the secondary the union line is the same as it was up at the end of the first day. The most famous fish hook in the history of American history. That shape. On the third day we takes a strong look at that union line. He tried to break it in the south he's tried to break it in the north with no success he figures it's Got to be weak in the middle if it's so strong and the ends. He decides to send a massive attack against the Union Center. History will remember that as Pickett’s charge.

Judy.: We know that there were Vermonters involved who were they?

Howard.: Oddly enough it was the on famous Vermonters who played a starring role at Gettysburg. The second Vermont brigade. They're only in for nine months. There enlistments were almost up when they get to Gettysburg. They only have hours and days left in their enlistments. Some of the units are in the same situation we're not fighting they said know we're going home. But the Vermonters of course did fight. They're commanded by George Jerrison Standard the great hero in Vermont's Civil War history made up of five regiments the 12th 13th 14th 15th and 16th although only three of those regiments are on the battlefield at Gettysburg. They do an amazing thing. When Pickett’s charge comes in. It's coming right at them the southern part of it. Suddenly the charge of veers to the north there's nobody in front of the Vermonters and George Standard takes the military opportunity of a lifetime and has three of his regiments swing out like a great door and attack the flank. The undefended flank and it's just a slaughter. You can say I think that the Vermonters won the battle of Gettysburg.

Judy.: What is Vermont’s most famous moment at Gettysburg.

Howard.: The most famous moment is certainly the defeat of Pickett’s charge. It's the confederates who say that it was the Vermonters who beat them. The confederate soldiers when they were captured they don't know who that is firing at them from the right but they say it was the fire from the right that we did not understand. There's another famous moment at Gettysburg. The first Vermont brigade the old brigade the famous brigade may be the best brigade and the union army. It didn't get to Gettysburg and kill the end of the second day and it never fought. It was put on guard at the southern end of the union line to prevent that attack from the south which Longstreet want to do instead of making Pickett’s charge. He just wanted to come around the southern end get between the union army and Washington and make the union attack the confederates but that did not happen. If they had done that they would’ve confronted the Vermont brigade.

Judy.: Fascinating. There's a lesser known battle at Gettysburg that included Vermonters and for that we go to Gettysburg were Howard and across the fence photographer Keith Silva pick up the story.

Its July 3, 1863 the most famous day in the battle of Gettysburg. We're here at the southern end of the battlefield behind me is famous big round top and to the right of it is a smaller hill that doesn't look much like a hill called Bushman's hill. In the morning of the third Judson Kilpatrick who commanded a cavalry division brought one of his two brigades down here and put them up on Bushman's Hill. In that brigade was the 18th Pennsylvanian cavalry the first west Virginian cavalry and the first Vermont cavalry. They stayed up on that hill watching the goings on of the north that included Pickett’s charge. When the battle to most people seemed over then Kilpatrick went into action.
We are now at the foot of Bushman's Hill. A steep and very rocky eminent. Not a place to be riding horses down. Behind me is a very familiar statue. The statue of Major William Wells first Vermont cavalry. There's a replica of the statue in Burlington’s batter a park. Late on the 3rd of July after all the action took place to the north. Johnson Kilpatrick decided that he had a chance to roll up the confederate line from south to north. He decides to make a cavalry attack. His initial attack will calm down this hill behind me. It will consist of Pennsylvania and West Virginia cavalry and they will ride out into the woods and fields ahead of me to attack the confederates there and there are plenty of them. The stone walls the fences that you see today at Gettysburg thanks to the accuracy of the national park are usually in the places that they were at the time of the battle. Sitting here along the base of Bushman's Hill looking out at farm fields owned by family named slider. Judson Kilpatrick decided he should have his men attack through those fields against the southern end of the confederate line but there are Texas infantry and Alabama infantry and they rose up and fired volleys. There was brisk fighting as the union soldier broke through that line but then there were more infantry to the north and soon these attacking soldiers were under artillery fire from up around the slider farm and over near Emmetsburg road. Soon the west Virginians and Pennsylvanians were in retreat and they rolled all the way back year and back on the Bushman hill. But kill cavalry Kilpatrick that was his nickname wasn't through by any means. He was going to roll up that confederate line and now he ordered brigade commander Elon Farnsworth take the first Vermont cavalry and try again. Farnsworth said I'm not so sure this can be done. There's a lot of confederates out there the ground isn't good there's boulders out there. Kilpatrick said well take a look. Farnsworth wrote out there scouted and when it came back he said no I don't think it can be done. Kilpatrick said you're going to do it. Farnsworth said it would be suicidal. Kilpatrick said something to the effect that he tested Farnsworth honor and courage and Farnsworth said all right all do it and he took command of the charge that would be made by the Vermonters. To make the charge the Vermonters formed their 600 men into three battalions. One was commanded by the regimental commander from Danville Addison Preston. One battalion commanded by William Wells and one battalion the largest commanded by Captain Henry Parsons from saint Albans. Addison Preston brought his battalion down and they were lined up dismounted along this fence and stonewall that's adjacent to it. They would provide covering fire. Now Wells and Parsons would try to break through to the slider farm and hopefully even north to devil's den. The order was given down the hill the Vermonters came and as soon as they went into the field they were hit too by heavy fire from Texans and Alabamians but on they went. We're looking down on the slider farm home from the high ground that leads up the whole tortes Emmetsburg road. Into the field around slaughter farm came riding the Vermonters under Captain Parsons and major Wells taking fire all the time from small arms there was even some hand to hand combat. Then they came under fire from artillery. Artillery by the Emmetsburg road. Artillery from the north near devil's den. It became hopeless a melee and the Vermonters decided it was time to get away. Some came riding in this direction then going south by Bushman's Hill. Wells and Farnsworth headed east to the other slider field hoping to get out that way riding tour little round top. After the wild fighting around the slider farm the Vermonters attack began to disintegrate. Farnsworth reached the stonewall leaped his horse over it and as he did so he was hit by a fuselage of confederate bullets and down he went. The shots came from over at the base of around top and they were delivered by some tough soldiers. The men of Robert Rhodes Alabamians who the previous day had won fame for their value to attempt to take little round top away from Joshua Lawrence chamberlain's 20th main. Farnsworth was down and morally wounded. The confederates came over to them saw that he was severely wounded. Elon Farnsworth was gone and the Vermonters were saddened. The Vermonters thought the world of Elon Farnsworth. O yes he was a Michigander he enlisted in an Illinois outfit but after he led
their brigade they came to learn he was fearless and a great cavalry commander. And he just been promoted to brigadier general two days before he died. In 1889 the Vermonters veterans of the cavalry Richmond came back to Gettysburg and get a monument to themselves right here on the spot where Farnsworth died. Judson Kilpatrick got the Vermonters blame for the debacles here of this useless deadly cavalry charge but he even came two Vermont well after the war and was given a hero's welcome at a reunion in Cambridge Vermont. But the Vermonters cost of all this had been high. 65 Vermonters became casualties that day in the cavalry charge. About 20 of them died some 30 of them ended up in rebel prisons or some more of them passed away. With a tragic end of Kilpatrick charge and Farnsworth the fighting in Gettysburg comes to an end. Three days including the fighting western town little round top big round top peach orchard cemetery or ridge it all ends here. Lee would stay in position for another day and quietly in the night began his retreat back to Virginia at admitting defeat going back to fight another day and soon the Vermont cavalry and other Vermont the units would be in pursuit with the victorious army of the Potomac.

Judy.: That was a great story. So what's the battlefield like today?

Howard.: Gettysburg is beautiful for some strange reason a lot of the major battles of the Civil War were fought in beautiful places. It's a lovely college town although as you can imagine the tourists has taken over considerably. The battlefield is pretty well preserved today. They have about 6000 acres of national park. There's 1400 monuments at Gettysburg. If you go out in the woods you'll stumble over some of the little ones.

Judy.: What's the significance of the battle of Gettysburg in the overall Civil War?

Howard.: It was the biggest battle in the Civil War it was lee's last try at bringing the war into the north. I really think that he thought a victory Gettysburg would win the war. He staked it all on the last day of Pickett’s charge but he failed and he's driven back to Virginia. The union Commander George Gordon Meede just appointed to command two days before the battle does not follow up on the victory. He does not pursue lee's army and destroy it. Abraham Lincoln was furious. He wanted to publicly criticize Meede but was talked out of that. Because Meede was a national hero he had driven the confederates out of the north. But the case can be made that after Gettysburg the southerners didn't have a chance and lee's offensive ended with Gettysburg it was a defensive war for him the rest of the way and he was an essentially an offensive fighter.

Judy.: More people visit Gettysburg and any other battle site?

Howard.: By far more people visit Gettysburg then any other site. People go there around the anniversary of the battle which is too hot for Vermonters. The town is so crowded you can barely move the battlefield is almost over run by people. Gettysburg has gotten so popular that most any time of the year that you go there you're going to find a substantial number of people. I would go in the spring or in the fall if you're a Vermonter and the weather's seasonable.

Judy.: That's an interesting point because obviously Vermonters were down there that time of year and it must've been brutal.

Howard.: The temperature as far as we know was made a high eighties for the three days of the fighting and Vermonters had to march 120 miles to get to the battlefield. They were worn
out. On the third day when the big artillery battle is going on Wheelock Vassey finds his regiment of Vermonters the 16th Vermont sound asleep. I think they were worn out from the march in the hot weather.

Judy.: One of the most famous speeches in American history is of course Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. Why did Lincoln go to Gettysburg?

Howard.: Lincoln was invited to Gettysburg as an afterthought by the local people. They had to do something with the bodies so they created a national cemetery maybe 7000 bodies at Gettysburg. Edward Everett of Massachusetts invited as the keynote speaker but let's also bring up the president said the local people and we can seize the opportunity he needed to explain why the war was going on why it had not been one. He saw this as a tremendous public relations opportunity. The country's interest would be focused there. The real key to him was how important he saw it. His staff wanted him to come the morning of the talk take the train up from Washington he said no. I'm going the day before I want to be sure that I make it and did he ever.

Judy.: There are some myths regarding the address?

Howard.: Yes there are a lot of myths regarding the address. One of the most prevalent that you still here at Gettysburg is that link in wrote the speech on the back of an envelope on a train to Gettysburg. Nonsense. He started working on this beach soon after the invitation came. This was a project of I think at least a couple of weeks. Mark Twain once said if I had more time I would've written your short a letter. Will you know every word and the Gettysburg address is necessary. He had cut this thing down to the bare essentials. A literary masterpiece out of it. You don't do that overnight. Another myth I think is his bodyguard Ward Lamen said that link in remarked after the speech the speech will scour in other words that was a good speech. I don't think he ever said that Lamen was a noted Fibber and Abraham Lincoln was after all the interrupted five times during his speech by applause. He knew it had gone over well and Edward Everett's wrote him afterwards and said you said more in your 3 minutes then I said in my 2 hours.

Judy.: To close today's program we're going back to Gettysburg national cemetery where Lincoln gave that address. For recitation with Howard and photographer Keith Silva. Howard it's great to always talk with you it's always fascinating and I always learn something new or whenever I sit down and have a conversation.

Howard.: We have a good time Judy and I love to come here.

Judy.: Thank you very much. You're already preparing for the 2013 big anniversary which is the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. Looking for to that.

Howard.: It goes on and I think Vermonters are learning a lot about the Civil War and Vermont’s outsized role.

Judy.: And more to come too. That's our program for today thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are
engaged in a great Civil War testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure we're met our great battlefield of that war. We've come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who hear gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we do this but in a larger sense we cannot dedicate we cannot concentrate we cannot hello this ground the brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our pork power to add or detract the world will little note or long remember what we say here but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which are they have caught here have thus far so normally advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the unfinished work remaining before us that from these are honored dead we take increased a devotion to that cause for which they gave the last measure of devotion. And we hear highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain that this nation under god shall have a new birth of freedom and the governments of the people by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth. The applause for Lincoln went on and on and then the 20,000 people went away but really they have never stopped coming to Gettysburg which has become the shrine of the American civil war.

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