

## Whirlwind and Storm: A Connecticut Cavalry Officer in the Civil War and Reconstruction

**Charles E. Farnsworth**

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*Primary sources from the Civil War bring a unique voice to this biography of an officer and his era.*

*Whirlwind and Storm* by Charles E. Farnsworth is a portrait of a multifaceted, adventurous Civil War officer. The book follows Charles Farnsworth (the author is the subject's great-grandson) from his boyhood in Connecticut to his death—but his time in the Civil War and the Reconstruction are most compelling.

Farnsworth left home at age twenty and headed west, first to Chicago and then to seek fortune in the Pikes Peak gold rush. The dawn of the war found him back at home, and he eventually enlisted, initially more for adventure than for ideological agreement with the Union. As fighting progressed, Farnsworth grew discontent with the poor leadership, suffered grave injuries, and ended up a prisoner of the Confederacy. The author's comparison of different accounts of the capture gives insight into Farnsworth's character and the conditions of war. After his release from the prison and later from the cavalry, Farnsworth secured a handwritten pass from President Lincoln allowing him to travel to newly defeated Savannah and get a jump start on the Reconstruction while "General Sherman's troops were still encamped at Savannah and preparing to put South Carolina to the torch." While he traversed familiar realms of history, his imprisonment and southern migration set him apart.

The book begins with seven chapters that summarize Farnsworth's life chronologically. They are clear and smoothly paced. The longest section of the book (more than 250 pages), technically an appendix, is Farnsworth's letters, diary, and other documents pertaining to his life. This is where the voice of this "brash, opinionated, proud, impulsive, and demanding...highly-disciplined, perceptive, purposeful, and dependable" man shines through. The documents are interspersed with the author's comments and interpretation of the historical and personal significance of the letters. These insights are built on the author's extensive historical knowledge, study of the documents themselves, and familial knowledge of Farnsworth. The appendix, like the biography, is chronological.

The author's respect for Farnsworth as a man and family legend is clear, but he doesn't dodge his flaws, like his impulsiveness or his overzealous driving of his cavalry unit preceding their capture. While the author clearly has an ancestral connection to the subject of the book, he keeps the book's tone and content neutral. This authorial integrity is a strength, but the biographical chapters feel dry and encyclopedic at times—perhaps a more narrative than expository approach could bring a better balance.

The cover matches the historical tone of the biographical section but would be more inviting if it matched the liveliness of the letters. The interior images are clear; some are a bit dark, but not so much that they detract from their purpose in supporting the text.

*Whirlwind and Storm* adds a vibrant voice to Civil War history. History lovers, especially those interested in the Civil War era, will enjoy sifting through the details and becoming engrossed in an eyewitness account.

MELISSA WUSKE (July 28, 2014)

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