

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

02/09/62: 009

Historical Notes

In this early (Instruction Camp) phase of letters from Lt. Cyrus Hardaway home to his mother in New Berlin/Pittsfield, there are few letters more intriguing than that dated February 9, 1862. Containing a mixture of admiration for the physical beauty of the South, a report of a mutiny amongst Berdan's Sharpshooters, and Hardaway's usual concerns regarding food, it is a most interesting example of a Civil War soldier's life.

There is abundant historical evidence that camp life for both Berdan's Regimental officers and enlisted men was filled with intrigue and personality clashes. Berdan's lack of military background proved controversial and Regimental records indicate a series of petty and serious charges against Berdan and countercharges against his officers.

As early as November 1861, Captain Caspar Trepp, Commander of Company A, tendered his resignation after making remarks about Colonel Berdan's capacities. At about the same time and probably related thereto, Major W. S. Towland resigned. Lt. Colonel Frederick Mears, the single individual who did more than any officer to ready the Sharpshooters for the reality of war, later voluntarily left the regiment and had a very successful military career.

It is not clear from Hardaway's letter the reason or nature of the "mutiny." It is obvious however, that Hardaway and the other eighty "good men" were suppressing some sort of problem at the Second Regiment originally commanded by Col. Henry A.V. Post. Colonel Berdan is personally present and several officers were arrested along with "most of a company."

It is an educated guess, but at about this same time, the issue of the Regiment's Sharps rifles was an extremely divisive issue. Due to bureaucratic, political, and manufacturing delays Sharp rifles were delayed in delivery to Berdan's Regiments. The First Regiment refused to accept Colt Revolver Rifles, and insisted upon "their" Sharp rifles. The Second Regiment eventually accepted the Colts but only until the Sharps were manufactured and delivered. It would not be until May of 1862 that all companies in both of Berdan's "Sharpshooter" Regiments were actually armed with Sharp rifles. It should not be forgotten that all recruits for the Sharpshooter regiments had been repeatedly promised, by recruiters, newspaper stories, and by Colonel Berdan himself, that they would be a "sharp-shooter" regiment.