

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

04/16/62: 016

Historical Notes

Lt Cyrus Hardaway's April 16, 1862 letter home is written during the 30 day siege of Yorktown by Union forces. During this time period, Union forces constructed massive siegeworks and accumulated huge numbers of siege guns in preparation for the ultimate reduction of the Yorktown fortification by Union artillery.

General George McClellan's *Peninsular Campaign* was an attempt to outflank the forces defending Richmond by an amphibious landing. After the disaster of the 1861 Battle of Bull Run, McClellan's 1862 plan was to avoid a frontal attack on Richmond. As Hardaway described in his late March letters, Union troops were marched over the "long bridge" over the Potomac and boarded ships destined for Fort Munroe at the confluence of the York river and Chesapeake Bay. From there, Union forces would move northwest up the Virginia Peninsula through Yorktown, Mechanicsville, and "onto Richmond."

Not everyone agreed with McClellan's *Peninsular Campaign* plan including those who felt the removal of Federal troops "between" Richmond and Washington, D.C. could portend disaster. Lincoln believed that the capture of Washington, D. C. by a quick Confederate invasion, would cause the opposition to the Confederacy to disappear. Lincoln tacitly agreed with McClellan's plan but held back General McDowell's 38,000 troops to protect Washington. So McClellan, who had always been considered over cautious, started on the *Peninsular Campaign* with 38,000 fewer troops than he had expected.

McClellan also had problems with political support; he had managed to to arouse the active distrust and hostility of those "radical" Republicans who saw his moderateness as Confederate sympathy. Some even believed he was potentially a traitor to the Union cause willing to allow the South win the war.

Given these personal and professional considerations, historians can understand, but not approve, of his cautiousness exhibited at the Battle of Yorktown.

Hardaway's letter is illustrative of the change of attitude within the Union forces. Instead of the "easy time marching through to Richmond," Hardaway now realizes, ". . . I was probably Sucked in," and that Yorktown will not be a quick battle. He is however, still optimistic that ". . .in the end we can take the town and that once done and then the war is over." What Hardaway does not know, is that it will not be McClellan that takes Richmond in 1862, but another Union general named U.S. Grant, and it will not be until 1865.