

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

04/20/62: 017

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Lt. Cyrus Hardaway's "letters home" often include amusing anecdotes or observations about soldiering and the soldier's life that cause the reader to lose track that he is otherwise engaged in the deadliest of occupations. On more than one occasion he has mentioned Ed Nelson. Nelson appears to be from either New Berlin or Pittsfield is increasingly used as fodder within Hardaway's letters.

In this most recent letter Nelson is part of the ongoing frustrations surrounding the delivery and distribution of Sharps rifles. Despite the April date of this letter, it is apparent that some companies of the Berdan's Sharpshooters had still not received their Sharps rifles; indeed, some companies had refused to accept the substituted Colt 5 shot rifles, and were relegated to their 35 lb muzzle loading target rifles. "Ed Nelson is among the number the opinion is that they would not take any gun at all if they could get out of it."

As readers of these letters are now accustomed, Hardaway finds this letter as another opportunity to provide commentary upon the food situation. The menu of a soldier's life appears to be heavy on meat and some form of grain. Fresh beef, pork, "secesh" pig, and hardtack. Hardtack, or as it is referred to by Hardaway, Pilot Bread or sea biscuits, is a saltless hard biscuit, bread, or cracker. Extremely hard, durable, relatively light and containing good nourishment, it was the bane of most soldiers. Hardaway is no exception to the general dislike of hardtack by all soldiers.

On a more serious note, Hardaway also mentions that the "news from Pittsburgh landing is not verry encouraging. . ." The Battle of Pittsburgh Landing, more commonly referred to as the Battle of Shiloh, occurred near the Tennessee-Mississippi border. During the two days of battle, April 6-7, 1862, the Union and Confederate armies suffered a combined 25,000 casualties. Despite the horrific list of dead, and the fact that the Federal troops had been attacked by surprise, the battle was of decisive importance and considered a Federal victory. The Confederacy permanently lost control of western Tennessee, and the battle brought to the attention of the public a Union general who was characterized as more interested in Union victories than in minimizing troop casualties.