

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

05/04/62: 019

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After more than 30 days of watching the Federals prepare for a massive bombardment of their Yorktown fortifications, the Confederates realized that they could not withstand such an onslaught, and withdrew their forces under protective artillery fire early on May 4, 1862. McClellan had accumulated large numbers of the big mortars used to reduce fortifications, and planned on a bombardment for May 5th, 1862.

Federal forces set out in pursuit of the retreating Rebels but heavy rains turned the country roads into swamps. A major rearguard action was fought in nearby Williamsburg on May 5th, but the Confederates were successful in their progress of movement towards the fortifications newly constructed near Richmond. They would not make a major stand until they had reached the very outskirts of Richmond.

In Cyrus Hardaway's May 4th letter home to his mother in Pittsfield/New Berlin, Cy Hardaway appears initially excited about the developments at Yorktown. The first part of his letter is written in the early morning on May 4th. Later, as he finishes the letter around 6 pm, there is evidence of a more somber and perhaps, anti-climactic attitude. After more than 30 days of exposing himself to serious danger, the withdrawal of the Rebels from Yorktown is not the "terrible battle" he had expected. Instead of a decisive battle and a quick trip onto Richmond, and perhaps home to Pittsfield, the prospects of a lengthier war are beginning to sink into Hardaway's mind. Instead of an all out quick pursuit of the enemy, he appears confused by his own army's lack of aggression and movement, "We have been expecting to march all day but have not got off yet cant tell when we shall have to go."

There is further good news and of course, it is the arrival of the much delayed Sharps rifles. Promised to Hardaway and his fellow Berdan's Sharpshooter recruits back in the summer/fall of 1861, their procurement has been another frustrating example of the inefficiencies of warfare.