

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

05/25/62: 023

### *Historical Notes*

By late May of 1862 Federal forces were within a few miles of Richmond and its possible capture and perhaps-the end of the Rebellion. In order to get at Richmond however, it was necessary to cross what Union commander George B. McClellan called "the confounded Chickahominy river." Swollen to nearly flood levels by the unusual rainy May weather, Federal soldiers began the strategically dangerous crossing. By May 28, 1862, the main body of Union forces were still north of the Chickahominy, with the smaller IV Corp successfully transported but isolated on the south side of the river near Fair Oaks, Virginia.

It was at this moment, May 31, 1862, that the Confederate forces defending Richmond attacked the Federal forces south of the Chickahominy. A heavy engagement, the *Battle of Fair Oaks*, occurred with neither the Federals nor the Confederates truly prevailing. The Confederates suffered more than 6130 casualties while the Federals lost 5031. Arguably, the most important casualty of the battle was that of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston who was wounded and did not return to military duty for a lengthy time period. The Confederate President immediately appointed his personal military advisor, General Robert E. Lee, as commander of the the Army of the Northern Virginia. Many historians argue that the appointment of Lee as commander of the Confederate armies prolonged the Civil War for several years.

Hardaway and Berdan's Sharpshooters remained north of the Chickahominy river as of this date. Their route of march appears to have been from White House, Virginia to Turnstall's Station on the Richmond and York River Railroad about 10 miles east of Richmond.

In writing about the march from White House, Hardaway indicated that the heat, dustiness, and lack of water caused many soldiers to fall out of the march. "Where we are encamped now . . . makes me think of the old spring at the school House at home." Local history suggests that Cyrus Hardaway would have attended the School #1 located at the northeast corner of East River Road and Wharton Creek in Pittsfield. A spring well is still in existence at that location which was the the Pittsfield School until the 1930's. The last Pittsfield school building is now located east of the Pittsfield Town Hall and has been renovated for use as a private residence.