

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

06/19/62: 026

Historical Notes

Cyrus Hardaway's letter of June 19, 1862 expresses concern for his tentmate and hometown friend, Henry Harrington's chronic health problems. Regular readers of these letters have undoubtedly noticed Hardaway's ongoing worries about Henry's health. Unlike others who found ways to be sick and return home, Harrington stubbornly found ways to remain with his friend and fellow sharpshooters. Hardaway was correct that it was the long marches that cause Harrington discomfort. Harrington's Civil War respiratory problems are well known to his modern descendants and probably would be considered as some form of severe asthma today. The long and arduous marches through hot and dusty conditions must have caused many soldiers to experience similar problems.

This letter also confirms the Richmond military situation in mid-June 1862. McClellan's forces were slowly building and approaching the Confederate defenses outside Richmond. In preparation for his own offensive operations, General Robert E. Lee, newly appointed commander of Confederate forces, authorized one of the more flamboyant missions of the entire Civil War. Confederate J.E.B. Stuart took a force of cavalry and artillery on a reconnaissance of the Federal positions outside Richmond and the Virginia Peninsula. Intended to determine where particular Federal units were located, Stuart's Rebel cavalry eventually traveled entirely around the entire Union army disturbing supplies, communications, and the morale of the Federal force. Among his Union cavalry pursuers was Stuart's own father in law, Philip St. George-Cooke, whose decision to remain loyal to the Union infuriated Stuart. Upon learning of his father in law's decision, Stuart allegedly cursed, "He will regret it but once and that will be continuously," Known to historians as Stuart's First Ride Around McClellan, it is the stuff of Civil War myth and legend and provided Confederates with a symbol of Southern heroism and defiance of the Federal invasion.

The general calm and quiet of the Richmond military operations area was evident in Hardaway's letter. On picket duty, Hardaway described the "agreement" between Rebel and Federal soldiers. Separated by little more than 100 feet, each of the combatants have agreed not to fire on each other unless the other side did so. "Birdan's boys" had achieved a legendary, perhaps mythic reputation in the first six months of the war, but they too, were willing to suspend firing for good cause.

On the same date as this letter, President Lincoln outlined his controversial *Emancipation Proclamation* outlawing slavery in all states which **continued** to be in rebellion against the Federal government. It was controversial because slavery was prohibited only in areas that continued to resist the Federal government. Slavery was permitted and condoned in all other areas.