

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

07/06/62: 029

Historical Notes

Cyrus Hardaway's letter home of July 6, 1862 was factually consistent with the momentous events of the previous two weeks. The initial Confederate attacks at *Oak Grove* and *Mechanicsville* had been repulsed by the Federals, but Union General George B. McClellan strategically relocated (retreated) his Union forces over the next week of battles comprising the *Seven Days Campaign*. By the date of this letter, the Union forces, including Berdan's Sharpshooters had retreated twenty miles to the James river and were neither an operational nor an offensive threat to Richmond.

Eventually General Robert E. Lee recognized the futility of further campaign operations. Lee's armies had suffered a 25% casualty rate; over 20,000 Confederate soldiers had been killed or wounded. Union casualties were one-half of the Confederates-10,000. The combined 30,000 killed and wounded in the *Seven Days Battles* equaled the number of dead and wounded in all the battles fought between North and South in the west in all of 1862. The *Seven Days Battles* represented the new type of warfare evolving in the Civil War. New weapons such as Berdan's breech loading Sharps rifle, as well as mortars and artillery, resulted in harder fighting and greater casualties.

Most Civil War historians consider Robert E. Lee a military genius with regards to tactics and strategy. It should be noted however, that in each of the *Seven Days Battles*, Lee's casualties exceeded McClellan's by a wide margin. It is true that Lee was on the offensive but his style took a heavy toll on Southern soldiers. Later in the war, when he was almost always on the defensive, Lee's casualties rates were greater than expected.

Hardaway's letter seems quite different than previous letters. Just as his letters from Berdan's Instruction Camp illustrate an evolution in personal maturity, the letter of July 6, 1862 exhibits something different: fatigue, fatalism, and "I have felt like a lost ship for the last week." Defeated in battle, Hardaway and his fellow Sharpshooters were not only physically beleaguered but also mentally depressed, "I hope however that we shall not have to go into battle again. It makes me shudder when I think what we have through already. . . I have had fighting enough and they can not send me home to quick. . ."