

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

11/21/62: 050

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In his November 21, 1862 letter home to his mother, Cyrus Hardaway "celebrated" his first anniversary as a member of Berdan's Sharpshooters. Berdan's regiments were the only such unit in the entire Federal army and were particularly noted for their *esprit de corp* by military observers. Hardaway's letter clearly communicated a different mood as his circumstances gave little reason to celebrate. Cold, hungry, wet, and without money for either his beloved food or tobacco, his mood was a desultory "Think I am pretty hard up." As a part of their regimental insignia, Berdan's used the abbreviation of "USSS," from its official title of United States Sharp Shooters. On days such as November 21, 1862, many of Hardaway's colleagues considered themselves more appropriately called "Uncle Sam's Sorry Soldiers."

Berdan's regimental movements from Warrenton to Falmouth, Virginia were part of the McClellan plan as modified by newly appointed Army of the Potomac Commanding General Ambrose Burnside. From November 18th until the *Battle of Fredericksburg* on December 13-14, 1862, Union and Confederate forces continued to concentrate on opposite sides of the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Military historians believe that Lee would have been content to wait out the winter in this charming colonial town; Burnside however, was expected to use the immense advantage in men and supplies in a sustained manner that would "take the war to Richmond" and force the Confederate army to fight until it was exhausted. Spurred on by Lincoln and others who wanted constant pressure brought upon the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, Burnside set about to find a way to cross the Rappahannock without Lee destroying his Federal army.

It is within this plan that Berdan's Sharpshooters was expected to operate. Waiting for river crossing materials and bridge builders to arrive, the Federal forces continued to build in strength and numbers on the north side of the Rappahannock. By early December over 122,000 Union soldiers, including Cyrus Hardaway of Company D, Berdan's 1st Regiment, waited for the attempted river crossing to begin. Awaiting them on the other side, with the advantage of their "higher ground" was the Confederate army of 75,000 men.