

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

12/17/62: 055

Historical Notes

The public reaction to the *Battle of Fredericksburg* was little different to that of Cyrus Hardaway's in his letter home dated December 17, 1862. Lincoln, Burnside, and the entire Federal government were subject to extreme criticism by the general public and the reviewing military board in Washington. The fault for Union disaster at the *Battle of Fredericksburg* can be broadly distributed. The pressure by the "more battles" groups, the utter incompetence of military suppliers in their delayed delivery of the pontoons, or the inability of Burnside to change his mind are all worthy candidates for commendation. The continuing pattern of *Bull Run*, *Seven Days Battle*, *Bull Run II*, and *Antietam* was seen again at *Fredericksburg*. Overwhelming Union forces were once again incompetently led against poorly supplied but brilliantly commanded Confederates.

Hardaway's letter also contains an interesting observation regarding Federal troop behavior while they were encamped across the Rappahannock and within the village of Fredericksburg. The ransacking of Fredericksburg's private homes and the destruction of private property by Union soldiers deeply upset Hardaway; his opinions are not dissimilar from the attitude of his hero, George B. McClellan, who thought that Lincoln's pressure for aggressive warfare against the Confederacy and its peoples, was erroneous and dishonorable.

Shortly after the Federal army's devastating defeat and its withdrawal across the Rappahannock River, General Ambrose Burnside issued statements assuming complete responsibility for the loss at *Fredericksburg*. Hardaway's comments that "the night before our division crossed the river . . . Burnside passed through our lines. . .but did not get a cheer . . . I think he has made a fizzle and never can repair his reputation again" was absolutely accurate. Within a few weeks, and after a series of strange disputes with his subordinates, Burnside was replaced as Commanding General of the Army of the Potomac by General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Hooker. Burnside was reassigned to military responsibilities in the West.