

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

12/21/62: 056

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Cyrus Hardaway's letter home of December 21, 1862 was his most opinionated and sarcastic letter written to his mother in Pittsfield/New Berlin. Written in the aftermath of the *Battle of Fredericksburg*, Hardaway's statements are not unusual compared to other soldier's, politician's and newspaper's. The carnage occurring at the *Battle of Fredericksburg* affected Northerners more profoundly than any previous battle. Other soldiers also wrote home indicating that their loyalty to the Union and Lincoln were wasted by incompetent Federal generals; many more indicated that a compromise with the South was necessary before any more massacres such as *Fredericksburg* occurred again. Popular magazines, including *Harper's Weekly*, condemned Union political and military leadership as characterized by "imbecility, treachery, and failure." It was the lowest point for the Union to date in the Civil War.

Hardaway's comment regarding the "brilliant" defeat suffered by the Army of the Potomac is a probable reference to the attitudes of several Union generals regarding the *Battle of Fredericksburg*. One such report written by Union General Reynolds stated, "The gallantry and steadiness of the troops brought into action on the left is deserving of great praise, the new regiments vieing with the veterans in steadiness and coolness. That the brilliant attack made and the advanced position gained by them were not more successful in their results was due to the strong character of the enemy's defenses; the advantage he had of observing all our dispositions, while he made his own to meet them entirely under cover." Most every Federal soldier knew, including Hardaway, that all of the "Confederate advantages" mentioned by Reynolds were patently obvious to any observer well prior to the *Battle of Fredericksburg*.

During the *Battle of Fredericksburg* Confederate General Robert E. Lee watched the battle from his vantage point on the southern heights overlooking Fredericksburg. As a Federal assault on the Union left was driven back by artfully placed Confederate reserves, he saw the pursuing Rebels deeply upset when commanded to retire in the face of powerful Union artillery. Lee allegedly turned to his military aide and said, "It is well that war is so terrible-we should grow too fond of it."

On the other side of the Rappahannock River valley, Cyrus Hardaway observed the battle from the reserve position assigned Berdan's Sharpshooters. A similar attitude to that of Lee's was expressed by Hardaway in his letter of December 21, 1862. Describing his observations of the battlefield, he wrote "I wish you could have been here to see the battle field . . . just after the fog cleared off . . . We were on the high hill where we could see the whole length of the lines and see the batteries fire on both sides. . .It was the most splendid sight I ever saw."