

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

1/1/63: 058

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Cyrus Hardaway's letter home dated January 1, 1863 confirms a notable reconnaissance mission assigned to Berdan's Sharpshooters in late December 1862. In addition to Hardaway's account, regimental histories and other letters provide great detail to the events at Ellis' Ford.

After the *Battle of Fredericksburg*, Berdan's Sharpshooters returned to their camp near Falmouth, Virginia and remained inactive until December 30, 1862 when the entire Regiment was ordered on a reconnaissance mission westerly along the Rappahannock River. Under the command of Col. Barnes of the 18th Massachusetts, the regiment marched more than 10 miles where they camped. On the following morning, December 31, a serious skirmish occurred with the Confederate cavalry located on the south side of the Rappahannock River. The enemy's cavalry thinking they were opposed by only a small force of Union cavalry were overwhelmed by Berdan's regiment of concealed sharpshooters and forced to "skid" or retreat over a mile to nearby woods. Hardaway's thorough enjoyment of seeing the surprised Confederates forced to hurriedly retreat to safety can only be appreciated by his comparison, "I have not enjoyed myself so much before since I have been a soldier. It did me more good than a good meal of victuals would."

Leaving some of the regiment at this location (Richard's Ford), the remainder advanced two miles further south and recrossed the river skirmishing the last nine miles through brush and woods. The regiment overnighted at Ellis Ford and returned to their Falmouth camp. By the late evening of January 1, 1863 all of the regiment was safely back at camp considerably tired, but without any casualties.

During the last portion of the reconnaissance, the regiment ran into a series of chicken coops that had been secreted there by local residents. B Company, 1st Regiment was concerned that as chicken roosts were scarce around Falmouth, and it being New Year's day, concluded it would be most appropriate to take the chickens back to camp as "prisoners of war."