

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

1/7/63: 060

Historical Notes

The winter of 1862-63, was a particularly difficult time period for the Army of the Potomac. The *Battle of Fredericksburg*, even by the most generous historical accounts had been a tragedy of major proportions; it had seriously demoralized the entire Northern army, public, and Federal government. After Fredericksburg, and its useless slaughter of 13,000 Federal soldiers, public opinion reached a new low and in epidemic proportions. Union generals besieged President Lincoln with complaints about General Ambrose Burnside's leadership of the Army of the Potomac. Newspapers and other persons clamored for the return of George B. McClellan and a grant of "emergency" and "unlimited" powers by Lincoln or Congress to him so that he might save the Union.

Within the Army of the Potomac, desertions, absences without leave, and sicklists ballooned. Union soldiers deserted at more than a 100 a day; slack discipline was endemic within entire divisions. In Washington, there were rumors relating to Lincoln's resignation, military governments headed by McClellan, and plots by Radical Republicans to reorganize the cabinet.

For Cyrus Hardaway, his letter home of January 7, 1863 confirmed the serious level of defeatism felt by him and others in the Army of the Potomac generated by the *Battle of Fredericksburg*. Despite the arrival of his long awaited food packages from home, Hardaway commented that "I see by the papers that they are having lively times in the Southwest and I guess before they get through with our fellows down there they will lick them out as usual." We can only imagine his disappointment in learning that his "cousin," George Beardslee has been able to get out of the military after "getting a months pay and skidaddling."

Historians have described these days as the darkest of the entire Civil War for the Union and Abraham Lincoln. One can only imagine what Cyrus Hardaway's reaction would have been had he known of Lincoln's words, ". . . We are now on the brink of destruction. It appears to me that the Almighty is against us."