

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

1/15/63: 062

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As readers of these historical notes may recall, Berdan's Sharpshooters were considerably delayed in their receipt of the Sharps rifles promised to them as part of their recruitment. Once received however, the historical records indicate great satisfaction by Hardaway and his fellow Sharpshooters, "On receiving the new arms, the men were impatient to get again within shooting distance of the enemy. These rifles shot both linen and skin cartridges of .52 caliber. We also had primers-little round, flat, coppered things-which were inserted below the hammer. . . . A regiment of Sharpshooters in line could play havoc with an approaching column . . . The superiority of breechloaders over muzzleloaders was plainly manifest."

The superiority of the Sharps rifle was based in two characteristics. First, as a rifle it possessed great accuracy at great distances. Most Civil War muzzle loaders were not rifled and were not effective beyond 75 yards. Massed infantry volleys at relatively close ranges were the tactic of necessity for unrifled guns. The second technological advance, breech loading, was alternatively the strength and weakness of the breech loading rifle. Unlike the muzzle loaders which could perhaps inaccurately fire three times a minute, Sharpshooters could easily, and with great accuracy, fire and reload ten times a minute.

The inherent problem in this technological advance was in supplying Sharpshooters with sufficient ammunition. In this letter home dated January 15, Hardaway acknowledged that the normal quantity carried by each Sharpshooter was 40 rounds. In anticipation of battle, Sharpshooters were allotted 60 rounds. Considering that each of the Sharpshooters was a skilled marksman, and had been trained to load, fire, and reload as many as 10 times a minute, meant that Hardaway had as little as six minutes of ammunition available to him. An additional consideration was the weight of the cartridges and primers carried by each Sharpshooter. It is obvious from Hardaway's comments that 40 rounds was "quite enough for comfort" and anything more an encumbrance in hard marches.