

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

2/1/63: 064

### Historical Notes

Cyrus Hardaway's letter home dated February 1, 1863 confirmed his earlier prediction that despite the "remarkably fine" weather enjoyed by the Army of the Potomac at their winter encampment near Fredreicksburg, Virginia, he expected a "time for pretty rough weather." Unfortunately for Hardaway and the rest of the army, General Ambrose Burnside did not consider winter weather likely in January of 1863. Hoping that the unusually warm weather would continue, Burnside ordered the Army of the Potomac to move to upstream crossings of the Rappahannock River several miles from Falmouth and Fredericksburg. Burnside's plan envisioned outflanking Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and forcing it fight away from its fortifications overlooking Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Leaving camp on January 20, 1863, Berdan's Sharpshooters marched seven miles to Bank's Ford and established an overnight camp. During that first night, heavy rains began and quickly turned the roads into morasses of mud. Artillery sank into the mud up to their axles; horses and mules died as soldiers were unable to extricate them from their plight. Cannon, artillery, wagons, horses, and all other kinds of supplies were abandoned as it was impossible to extricate them from the effects of torrential rains. After two days of rain and mud, Burnside ordered the January 1863 "Mud March" campaign abandoned. Berdan's Regiments returned to their camp on January 23 exhausted by the hard work of building "corduroy" roads sufficient to move artillery, wagons, horses, and men through the mud.

One can only imagine Hardaway's mood, and that of every other soldier's morale in the Army of the Potomac after the pathetic "Mud March" campaign. After the catastrophic Battle of Fredericksburg, the return of "McClellan's Army" to their respective camps must have been accompanied by anger, rage, and supreme disappointment at their circumstances. It is doubtful that they had ever been as wet, hungry, tired, and as dispirited as they were at that moment. Confederate soldiers watched the "Mud March" with amazement from across the Rappahannock knowing that any such campaign was utterly foolish and doomed given Virginia's winter weather. More than one confederate soldier exhibited a wicked sense of humor by holding up signs across the river pointing "This Way To Richmond."

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