

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

3/15/63: 069

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From his letters home during the month of March 1863, we can safely presume that picket duty was not Cyrus Hardaway's favorite soldierly activity. By examination of his letters during this period, it appears that groups of Sharpshooters would go on picket and remain in advance positions for several days at a time. Regimental histories of Berdan's Sharpshooters are generous in establishing that these advance scout positions, "picket posts," were not the most pleasant places to spend several days. In addition to Sharpshooters, these posts were inhabited by infestations of lice commonly called "graybacks" by Civil War soldiers. On return from picket duty to regular camp, pickets went through a mandatory ritual of a general wash up and the boiling of their clothes.

During such an extended time in camp, officer's and soldier's discipline often became frayed in the day to day contact between human beings. Without the immediate prospects of imminent combat, soldiers and officers participated in interregimental squabbles of both the physical and legal types. Among the latter was the ongoing feud between Colonel Berdan and his Lt. Col. Caspar Trepp who filed and counterfiled charges leading to court martial trials of each other during the fall and winter of 1862-63. Each was ultimately vindicated from the charges of the other but not without expending great personal energy. As Berdan's regimental historian wrote regarding the entire Berdan-Trepp feud, "Bad blood enough, no doubt, but worse evidence."

At the Western Front of the Civil War, the most notable campaign in progress was that of the Union army commanded by General U.S. Grant in its attempt to capture the remaining Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Grant had been repelled in December of 1862, but by March of 1863, his army was once again at the Confederate defenses in preparation for the "inevitable" assault upon Vicksburg. Public attention may have focused upon the armies located in and near Virginia, but there is little doubt that the Union's ultimate victory was occasioned by its victories in the West.