

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

3/28/63: 071

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In his March 21, 1863 letter home to his mother Mary Ann Hardaway Beardslee in Pittsfield/New Berlin, Cyrus Hardaway indicated the receipt of "the news you wrote this time was the best I have had lately. . ." We can presume that the "news" received was the New York State Governor's approval of Hardaway's commission to Company F of the 114th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Company F was comprised primarily of Pittsfield/New Berlin "boys." Organized by Pittsfield's Adrian Foote in August of 1862, most of its duty would be in Louisiana. Hardaway's commission was that of a 2nd Lieutenant; he now needed a discharge and transfer from Berdan's to the 114th. Hardaway and his family undoubtedly thought that the difficult part of the transfer from Berdan's Sharpshooters was over; they were wrong.

Winter Camp picket duty continued to occupy Hardaway and other members of Berdan's 1st Regiment. A rotating team of soldiers were assigned picket duty from each regiment including the Sharpshooters. Such duty was new to Berdan's Sharpshooters except in an occasional emergency situation. During the winter camp of 1863, each regiment provided approximately one-third of its soldiers to occupy the picket posts. Located approximately seven miles away from camp, a tour of picket duty usually lasted four days until relieved by the next group of Sharpshooters. The picket posts were primitive; No tents were allowed in order not to expose pickets to enemy fire. Rudimentary huts built of pine boughs provided minimal protection from the sometimes brutally cold winter weather. The enemy's position was not particularly close to the picket posts but the number of pickets needed was great enough that picket duty occurred every ninth day.

Hardaway's letter indicated that the "news in the papers is a little more cheering than it has been of late (if it is true)." No details are provided but it is a likely reference to Union naval activity on the Mississippi River near Vicksburg, Mississippi. Union Admiral Farragut had successfully maneuvered several naval gunboats past the Natchez, Mississippi fortifications and was now positioned just below Vicksburg. The inevitable assault on the last remaining Confederate controlled fortification on the Mississippi River continued to successfully develop.