

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

4/3/63: 072

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Cyrus Hardaway's letter to his "Brother Gust," dated April 3, 1863 is the second such letter during his tour of duty with Berdan's Sharpshooters. As with the first letter, a decidedly different tone is evident. Written to his step-brother and close friend, the letter is filled with those thoughts, things, and events which young men share.

As winter camp slowly warmed in early April of 1863, it was decided by the officers of Berdan's Regiments to sponsor a grand celebration of the first anniversary of the Sharpshooter's advance upon Yorktown, Virginia in April of 1862. A committee was established to organize field events, competitions, and establish prizes. A secondary purpose was to provide the soldiers with healthy competition in preparation for the forthcoming spring campaigns.

The principal feature of the competition was the Grand Shooting Match. Commencing with competition in each company, the final match produced a Regimental Champion who won a gold medal. The shooting test was the shortest "string" of five shots, at 100 yards, open sights, with each participant using his favorite Sharps rifle. Additional competition was held in 200 yard foot races, 100 yard sack races, and a 400 yard relay race. The competition concluded with greased pole, cock fighting, wrestling, and jumping contests.

The greased pole contest was a favorite of the regiment and always provided good competition and many laughs. A well known member of the regiment, known as the "Wild Jerseyman," failed in his first attempt and promptly removed his pants. Clad only in his government issued cotton flannel underwear, he was well up the pole and on his way toward victory when the government issue, appropriately known as "shoddy" during the Civil War, failed to the delight of the observers.

Hardaway also substantiates that gambling was present within the Regiments. Considered by the regimental historian as a "prevailing passion" amongst the Sharpshooters, it was strictly against orders which were never enforced. Horse races, chicken fights, shooting contests, and simple card playing were commonly accompanied by "interesting" side bets. Some bets, especially those connected with horse racing, escalated till purses totaled several hundred dollars.