

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

5/4/63: 077

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Cyrus Hardaway's letter home dated May 4, 1863 was written near the end of the first major spring of 1863 campaign involving the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia. General Joseph Hooker had shown considerable promise in his plan to divide the 130,000 Union army into three forces. A cavalry unit would sweep north and then around Lee's forces overlooking Fredericksburg and disrupt his supply lines. The second force of nearly 70,000 men would also march northwest and cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers and outflank Lee's army from their position at the small village of Chancellorsville. The third force of 40,000 men, including Berdan's Sharpshooters, would hold Lee in Fredericksburg by an attack across the river. By the afternoon of April 30, 1863 Hooker's plan seemed highly promising. Hooker had succeeded in moving a huge Federal force onto Lee's flank without the Confederate general's knowledge. The plan now called for the Union forces at Chancellorsville to attack Lee and drive the Rebel army into the Union forces remaining at Fredericksburg. Hooker was confident that Lee would "ingloriously fly" rather than give the Federal force a battle.

Berdan's Sharpshooters were part of the 40,000 soldiers "holding" Lee in Fredericksburg and moved into defensive positions south and east across the Rappahannock River from the village on April 29. Most of Lee's army was still near Fredericksburg intently watching the Union Army's movements across the Rappahannock. On April 30th Lee finally received intelligence confirming that Hooker had stolen a march upon him and was now in a flanking position with a huge Union army on Lee's left flank .

Lee's reaction to Hooker's strategy was characteristic of the preeminent Civil War general: unexpected in approach, radical in nature, and brilliant in consequence. Guessing that the real Union attack would come from Chancellorsville, Lee divided his forces not once but twice. Leaving less than 10,000 men at Fredericksburg, he moved the balance of his forces towards Chancellorville. Next, he ordered General "Stonewall" Jackson's army to flank march all the way around Lee's forces and covertly take a position on the Union's extreme right flank.

As the battle unfolded, Hooker's confidence seemed to disappear and instead of pressing his advantage ordered his Union army to defensively retreat into the forests

near his headquarters known forever after as the "Wilderness." Lee correctly sensed that Hooker had lost the initiative and attacked. When "Stonewall" Jackson's troops finally reached their position and attacked the Union right's flank in the late afternoon of May 2nd, a wholesale Union defeat and retreat ensued.