

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

5/23/63: 080

Historical Notes

While Cyrus Hardaway wrote his May 23, 1863 letter home to his mother in Pittsfield/New Berlin, the Army of the Potomac attempted to recover from its stunning defeat at the *Battle of Chancellorsville*. Across the Rappahannock River, the Army of Northern Virginia was also recuperating; its mood was far different than the Union army and its commanders. Fresh from his brilliant victory at *Chancellorsville*, Confederate General Robert E. Lee decided, for a myriad of reasons, that the South must invade the North for a second time. Fearing further attrition of his smaller army by simply continuing to defend their own territory, Confederate President Jefferson Davis consented to Lee's plan to take the war to the North.

Lee's plan was to take a reinforced Army of Northern Virginia north and inflict a crushing defeat on the Union in its own territory. Such a strategy had huge risks, but it would also (1) remove the presence of the Army of the Potomac from the Rappahannock, (2) give relief to ravaged Virginia, (3) enable Lee to feed his troops off the rich farmlands of Pennsylvania, (4) politically strengthen those Northerners who would compromise with the South, (5) discredit Unionists, (6) promote foreign recognition of the Confederate government, and (6) perhaps, if the victory were great enough, end the war.

Most importantly, was the fundamental fact that the Army of Northern Virginia could not be supplied by Virginians anymore. Ravaged by two years of Confederate and Union armies incessantly using its resources, Lee had to find other supply sources for his soldiers. The 1863 Confederate invasion of the north was justified on many levels; but at its core it was as Lee said, "The question of food gives me more trouble and uneasiness than everything else combined."

Hardaway and his fellow Sharpshooters remained at their Stoneman's Switch camp near Falmouth, Virginia for the entire month of May and part of June 1863. As it rested and recuperated from the crushing loss at *Chancellorsville*, Berdan's Sharpshooters could not anticipate that the most important and memorable battle of the Civil War was but a few weeks away. By late May and the first week of June 1863, Lee shifted his army around the western flank of Hooker's force guarding the Rappahannock River and moved into the Shenandoah Valley. This time the Army of Northern Virginia headed straight north toward a little village in Pennsylvania named Gettysburg.