

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

6/7/63: 083

Historical Notes

Cyrus Hardaway's letter home dated June 7, 1863 expressed confusion regarding recent military events in the Fredericksburg area, "There has been considerable artillery firing for the last few days but I can't find out what it is for." Hardaway was not the only Federal soldier confused by General Robert E. Lee's maneuvers near Fredericksburg in early June of 1863. With Lee's movement of portions of the Army of Northern Virginia out of the Rappahannock Valley and into the Shenandoah Valley the Gettysburg Campaign had officially begun. Leaving General A.P. Hill and his corps behind at Fredericksburg to confuse Hooker, Lee and two other corps, Ewell's and Longstreet's, moved westerly and then north toward Culpepper Court House, Front Royal, and Winchester, Virginia. Federal reconnaissance efforts attempted to discern Lee's whereabouts on June 5, 1863 and precipitated severe fighting near Fredericksburg; it is not certain but it is likely that the "artillery firing" are part of these reconnaissance engagements mentioned by Hardaway.

In communications with Hooker, President Lincoln advised him to concentrate upon Lee and his army and not Fredericksburg and Richmond. In response to the Presidential directives, the Army of the Potomac finally left Fredericksburg and commenced with Lincoln's suggested "fretting" pursuit of Lee on June 10, 1863; for several weeks it remained nearly a week's march behind Lee. It soon became clear that Lee's intent was to invade the North which caused waves of alarm among northern communities north of the Potomac River. Within days of Hooker's departure from Fredericksburg, President Lincoln sought support (100,000 men) from the state militias of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and West Virginia in the face of the Lee's northward movement.

As Lee moved inexorably north, Pennsylvanians learned what Virginians had experienced for the last two years. Although forbade to pillage, Confederate soldiers stripped the areas near Chambersburg and York, Pennsylvania of shoes, money, clothing, livestock, and food. Most disturbing of all was the alleged seizure of "free" Pennsylvanian African-Americans who were sent south into slavery.