

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

7/17/63: 086

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Cyrus Hardaway's letter home dated July 17-19, 1863 provided his family with further details of the Army of the Potomac's active pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia after the climactic battle at *Gettysburg*. Lee's bid for a glorious and war ending victory during his invasion of the North had failed late in the afternoon of July 3, 1863 on the plains between Cemetery and Seminary Ridges near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. *Picketts Charge* at the center of the Federal lines had barely failed and caused Lee to immediately order the retreat of the Confederate army southward into Maryland. The *Battle of Gettysburg*, in combination with Grant's victory at *Vicksburg* on July 4, 1863, provided evidence to both the Union and Confederacy that the South's best chance of a successful insurrection may have passed.

Berdan's Sharpshooters performed gloriously at *Gettysburg*. Assigned to the 3rd Corps under the legendary General Dan Sickles, they were at the apex of the battle on July 2, 1863. Hardaway's last letter indicated that he had ". . . been through one more terrible battle . . ." and all renditions of the events of that day prominently mention the role performed by Berdan's Sharpshooters.

Sickles 3rd Corps arrived at Gettysburg on July 1 and was assigned a position on the left of the three mile long Federal line shaped like an upside down letter "J". Located on and along the western edge of Cemetery Ridge, Sickles was to occupy a portion next to 2nd corps to his north with his left flank anchored in the Round Tops to his south. Sickles was soon displeased with the defensibility of his position and ordered his 3rd Corp further out from Cemetery Ridge by one half mile. This caused the 3rd Corps to become detached from the remainder of the Federal lines and was soon observed by Confederate officers as in a vulnerable position.

On July 2, Berdan's Sharpshooters, including Hardaway's Company D, were ordered to extend their skirmishing lines west and forward towards Seminary Ridge in order to determine the presence and strength of Rebel forces. By noon, the Sharpshooters had entered Pitzer's Woods and encountered Confederate skirmishers. Advancing further, Berdan's encountered a large body of Confederate infantry consisting of several Alabama infantry units. A major engagement soon commenced involving a few hundred of Berdan's Sharpshooters attacking Longstreet's massed infantry just as the Confederates were about to attack Sickles exposed 3rd Corps. The Confederate attack

was delayed and it was during this time period that Sickles readjusted his lines to the far more defensible Peach Orchard Ridge.

The legend of Berdan's Sharpshooters reached mythical proportions as a result of this engagement. As regimental historian Charles Stevens wrote, "Three hundred men, firing 10,000 rounds in 20 minutes stopped the advance of 30,000 foes. No greater display of heroism . . . can be cited . . . than was the courageous attack of Berdan's 300. . . it may fairly said to be a turning point in the Rebellion."