

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

7/26/63: 087

Historical Notes

As the Army of the Potomac pursued Lee's defeated Army of Northern Virginia from the climactic *Battle of Gettysburg*, it stopped long enough in its southerly trek for Cyrus Hardaway to write this letter home dated July 26, 1863. Berdan's Sharpshooters, and the rest of the Federal army under General George Meade were hampered by not only inclement weather, but also by the usual Union inertia, and did not leave Gettysburg until July 7th. As a result of that late start, Lee had a three day advantage, and as Hardaway confirmed in this letter, the march south to Antietam, Harper's Ferry, and Manassas Gap, was without significant military action until July 23, 1863. On that date the Sharpshooters participated in the *Battle of Wapping Heights* and suffered a total of six casualties. In all probability it is this action mentioned by Hardaway in his letter of July 26, 1863. At Manassas Gap, the Sharpshooters finally paused in their pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and encamped at this strategic site for over six weeks.

By late August of 1863 after nearly 20 months of combat, Hardaway's 1st Regiment of Berdan's Sharpshooters was severely reduced in numbers. When recruited in late 1861, the 1st Regiment mustered 33 officers and 981 enlisted men. By August 31, 1863 the unit could muster only eleven officers and 261 enlisted men. 15 officers and 233 enlisted men were absent as wounded, sick, or on medical leave on that date. The remainder were missing in action, deserted, or dead.

Since his induction into Berdan's Sharpshooters in November of 1861, Hardaway had written over 80 letters home to his mother in Pittsfield/New Berlin. Usually written on Sundays, this letter dated July 26, 1863 was the last written while Hardaway was a member of Berdan's Sharpshooters. His next letter, dated August 30th reflected his new status as a Lieutenant of the 114th Regiment, NYS Volunteers.

The exact details of Hardaway's transfer from Berdan's Sharpshooters to the NYS 114th are obscured by history. Readers of these letters have long known that Hardaway's family had successfully obtained a commission for him from New York political officials. We also know from a letter written by Adrian Foote to Hardaway dated July 3, 1863 from his post in New Orleans, Louisiana that the transfer had been approved at that end of the process. To further assist readers of Hardaway's "letters home," we will publish Foote's letter in this space next week. It is likely that Foote's letter reached Hardaway at Berdan's Regimental camp at Manassas Gap sometime after July 26, 1863 and prompted Hardaway's subsequent movements.