

PHILO A. MARKHAM (1837-1932)
CORPORAL, CO. B, 154TH NEW YORK VOL. INFANTRY

The Civil War witnessed many remarkable acts by the common soldier, and though not memorialized in huge granite statues, their courage and devotion to nation and family are not to be forgotten. Such is the case with Philo Andrus Markham of the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry.

On July 28, 1862, just three months after his marriage to 20-year-old Julia Blackney, Markham left his farm in the Cattaraugus County town of Dayton and was mustered in as corporal, Company B, of the 154th NYVI at Jamestown. The Markhams were already represented in the Union Army, Philo's brother Sylvanus having joined the elite 44th New York Infantry, "The People's Ellsworth Regiment", in September 1861. [Another brother, 18-year-old Aaron, enlisted in the 44th New York in January 1864, and was killed in a trench by a Confederate sniper at Petersburg five months later.]

Philo Markham was born in Windsor, Broome County, New York on August 27, 1837 and moved with his parents to Dayton in 1844 where he was engaged in lumbering and farming at the time of his enlistment.

As part of Gen. Oliver Otis Howard's 11th Corps, his regiment saw their first hot action at Chancellorsville. Markham himself was not directly involved in the fighting on May 2, 1863 when the 11th Corps was overrun by Stonewall Jackson's famous flank attack on the old Orange Turnpike. While his untested regiment vainly tried to hold off Jackson's men near Dowdall Tavern, Philo Markham was behind the lines, detached to guard a supply train from Stafford Court House.

At Gettysburg two months later, the 154th New York, as part of Coster's brigade of Schurz's Second Division, was sent down from Cemetery Hill to cover the retreat of the 11th Corps as Jubal Early's division drove the Federals through the town on July 1. Before the battle, the 154th numbered about 300 men. That evening, only 18 men answered roll call. Markham, along with most of his regiment, was captured and could only speculate about the outcome of the next two days' fighting from behind the lines of his captors.

Sent to Richmond's Belle Isle Prison, and later to Libby Prison, Markham found himself in parole camp at Annapolis, Maryland, where he met his comrade (later his brother-in-law), Private Leonard L. Hunt of Company B. Hunt had been captured at Chancellorsville.

While paroled and awaiting exchange, the two men decided to leave for home on a "French furlough". They started from Annapolis on foot August 24, 1863, traveling through Maryland into Pennsylvania, then up the Susquehanna and Allegheny River valleys to western New York. The 11-day trip was entirely on foot with the exception of a half-day canal boat ride on the Susquehanna, and a short buggy ride home from New Albion.

An autobiography that Markham produced with his own printing press many years later described how he and Hunt had to travel by night to avoid detection, and having no money, had to beg for food along the way. After receiving word they had been exchanged, they rejoined their regiment in early October of 1863.

In September 1863, following the Union defeat at Chickamauga, the focus of fighting shifted to the west, and the remnants of the 154th New York were sent by train to Tennessee, to join General George H. Thomas's Army of the Cumberland.

On May 8, 1864, during Hooker's Atlanta Campaign, the 154th New York was ordered to assault Dug Gap, in Rocky Face Ridge, near Dalton, Georgia. During the fight, the color bearer, Corporal Lewis Bishop, fell dead from a shot through the head. Markham rushed up the hill to replant the flag and within a short time, his right arm was shattered by a Rebel ball. The arm was amputated at a nearby field hospital.

Markham recovered from his wounds and was discharged at Louisville, Kentucky on November 2, 1864. Returning home to Dayton, he became a merchant and agent. He and Julia had one daughter, Ida Caroline, who married Dr. W. B. Jolls, and lived at Orchard Park, New York. Their empathy for the plight of ex-slaves prompted Philo and Julia to adopt a black girl, Mamie May, who was born in 1877. She became a music teacher, married and lived in Gowanda.

In their later years, Philo and Julia lived with their daughter in Orchard Park, where they celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary before Philo's death in 1932. Julia survived him by eight years and died at age 98 in 1940. They are buried in Markhams Cemetery in the Town of Dayton.

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