

**FRENCH LEAVE, AN EMPTY SLEEVE, AND CARTOON FACES:**

**A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND ARMY SERVICE**

**BY PHILO A. MARKHAM**

**Edited by Mark H. Dunkelman**

**and Phil Palen**

*Philo Markham was driving a team of horses to transact some business in Gowanda, New York on a summer day in 1862 when he spotted two friends at work in a hay field. "Why don't you enlist?" he yelled to Giles Johnson and Emory Vosburgh. "We will enlist when you do!" replied the two. "Agreed!" shouted all three. Johnson and Vosburgh threw down their tools, Markham sent a man with his team to take care of his business, and a few hours later the three were standing before a recruiting officer in the town of Dayton and enlisting for three years in the service of the United States. That spur of the moment decision on July 28 launched Markham on the great adventure that he summarized in a postwar pamphlet titled Sketch of the Life & Army Service of P. A. Markham, published circa 1912. Eight of the ten pages of Markham's Sketch were devoted to his Civil War service. Markham wrote his memoir in the third person, except for one revealing first person reference, and for the sake of immediacy we have put the entire Sketch in the first person. That account, reproduced here, has been augmented by three wartime letters Philo sent to a younger sister, Phebe. We extend our thanks to Mrs. Lorraine Marvin of the Gowanda Area*

Markham--2

*Historical Society for bringing the Markham materials to our notice, and to Elizabeth Markham Bixby and Charles Markham of Gowanda, and Ed Markham of Kent, Washington, for sharing photographs and reminiscences of their great-uncle Philo with us.*

*Philo Andrus Markham was born August 27, 1837 at Windsor, Broome County, New York, one of seven children of William and Susan (Hoag) Markham. The family moved to western New York in 1844 and settled in the township of Dayton, near a hamlet named Markham after a pioneer settler and probable relation. Philo attended a district school as a youth, spent about nine months in 1855 with an uncle in Great Bend, Pennsylvania, and worked as a farmer and lumberman during his young manhood. In 1861 he purchased 125 acres of land at Markham and built a small house. On April 17, 1862 he married Julia A. Blackney of Dayton, and the two "went to house-keeping" on May 1--about nine weeks before Markham had his fateful encounter with his two friends in the hayfield and volunteered.*

In July, 1862, I enlisted, and went to Jamestown, and stayed two months. Then the regiment was organized, the 154th New York State Volunteers--I was corporal in Co. B--and was sent to Washington. The first camp was on Arlington Heights, where the regiment was put into the Eleventh Corps, at this time stationed at Fairfax C[ourt] H[ouse], under [Major General Franz] Sigel's command, [and we] went from there to Thoroughfare Gap, where we did picket duty for some time. About the [10]th of December we started for Fredericksburg, reaching there the next day after the battle, and went into camp [near Falmouth]. Company B was sent to guard a battery. On January [17]th, 1863 this company with the regiment went up the Rappahannock River and was with [Major General Ambrose E.] Burnside's "Stick in the Mud," stayed a few days in camp there, then went back to [camp near Falmouth].

*Four days after returning from the Mud March, on January 26, 1863, Markham addressed a letter to Phebe. He informed her his health had been good so far, having had just one or two short-lived "down spells", which he jokingly attributed to his diet: "I guess I eat too many*

*hardtacks." He then reflected a bit on the recent dismal campaign. "I suppose the papers have told you of the advance of Burnside's army and how it got set in the mud and had to retreat or fall back to camp. I had a pretty good chance to see the most of it as we were in the advance and were the first to come back. There were plenty of wagons of all kinds that were in the mud and could not be stirred until corduroy roads were made to drive on. If we had been one or two days earlier and got across the river and the mud stopped us, we should have been annihilated." But the 154th New York's first battle was still months in the future, and when it came, Philo was lucky and missed it. His narrative picks up the story.*

[We] stayed [in winter camp at Stafford Court House] until April [13]th, when the brigade went up the river to Kelly's Ford. The Eleventh and Twelfth Corps followed in a few days. I was detailed as sergeant to take charge of a squad that was to guard a baggage train that was going back to Stafford to get supplies. When I got back to Kelly's Ford the Eleventh Corps had crossed the river (the 154th [clearing the way for] laying the pontoon bridge the night before). The Twelfth Corps was crossing and would not let us cross. Soon I was sent back to a little church to wait [for] further orders.

On May 3rd I received orders to go to United States Ford. The firing [from the Chancellorsville battlefield] could be heard all day before I reached the ford. On arriving at the ford, my company was told that the whole [army] was coming back defeated and that I was not to cross. The 154[th] Regiment lost heavily in prisoners, killed, and wounded. I and the rest of the squad of men I was with escaped the battle by being on detailed duty.

*In another letter to his sister Phebe, Philo described his limited role in the Battle of Chancellorsville. "I suppose you have learned long before this of the battle and the part our regiment took in it and that I was not in the fight. I was in the rear with the teams. All I see of the fight was early Monday morning [May 4]. I was aroused by the Rebs throwing shells into our train. They had labored hard all night to make a road to run a battery where they could shell us. They*

*created considerable of a muss for a few moments, when their battery was taken by our men which put a stop to their fun."*

We went back to the old camp at Stafford Court House, [and] about June [12] started on the march for Gettysburg, crossed the Potomac into Maryland about June [25]th and were at Emmitsburg, about ten miles from Gettysburg [on] June 30. Marching orders were received the morning of July 1st. The company reached Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg about 3 o'clock, and formed a line on the ridge above the town. My brigade was ordered down the opposite side of the town to check the rebels and hold them so that the defeated comrades could get through the town. My regiment was soon surrounded and most of the men with myself were taken prisoners. Several were killed and some were wounded. The prisoners were marched back to the rear of the rebel army, where we could see only the smoke and hear the firing of the second and third days' battle.

The fourth day the prisoners were started with Lee's army, crossed the river at Williams[port, Maryland, and proceeded] through the Shenandoah Valley to Staunton. This took us several days [and we were] without rations until the fourth day of the march. Then we were given a half pint of raw flour. We mixed this with water into a lump of dough, stuck it on a stick, and held it to the fire to bake. Sometimes this flour was used for a gruel by boiling it in cups. This flour was a daily ration for a week with one exception, when the prisoners were given a small piece of bread, each of us, which had been baked by the citizens of Martinsburg. At Staunton the prisoners, including myself, were put on the cars and taken to Richmond where we went into prison on Belle Island. We had some old tents which provided a little shelter. We lay on the sand, which was full of what were called "gray backs". We dug holes in this sand to get water. The rations then was bean soup with sometimes about a mouthful of meat in it. The men then began to get sick and die.

When I had been in this prison about three weeks I was taken sick, and was sent to Libby prison, where I got better food and gained, so that after a week I was sent back to the island. After

a few days an order came for about 300 sick men to be paroled. I was selected as one of the number, and with the others was taken to Libby Prison, where we were kept for one night. The next day we were taken to City Point [and] put on the transport *New York* and taken to Parole Camp at Annapolis, reaching there on Friday noon, August 21st. There the men were given a bath and new clothes.

Here I found L[eonard] L. Hunt and a number of other men belonging to the 154th Regiment. Hunt and I agreed to start for home on Monday noon on what soldiers call a French furlough. We felt that we were of no use to the government till we were exchanged, and we could return as soon as we wanted. So we left camp without permission, walked across the country through Maryland into Pennsylvania to Harrisburg, up the Susquehanna River to Williamsport, following the river to the Allegheny Mountains, across to Olean[, New York] and Little Valley and Dayton. We walked this distance entirely [over 300 miles as the crow flies] with the exception of one half day when we rode on a canal-boat up the Susquehanna River, and from New Albion[, New York] to Dayton we rode with [Mr.] Chapman of Versailles. We reached Markham on Saturday afternoon, September 5th, making eleven days on the road. Having been prisoners we had no money, and were oblige[d] to beg our food, all the time endeavoring to avoid villages and officers where or by whom we might be arrested and taken back for deserters. While I was at home I gained in health and flesh and was [soon] in good condidtion for [a] soldier's life again. After receiving word that I was exchanged on Friday, October 2, on the following Sunday, the 4th of October I reported in Parole Camp at Annapolis as ready for duty, and was given quarters and rations.

On the 1st day of November I went to Indianapolis, Ind. [and] went from there to Nashville, Tenn., where with eight other men I was given a room in the Solehofher House. *[Markham was likely referring to the High Street home of Confederate General Felix K. Zollicoffer, which had been seized by the Union army.]* Leaving Nashville about the 15th, I reached Lookout Valley[, Tennessee] the 19th, [and] joined the regiment. [We] moved over the river to Chattanooga, where on the 22nd we lay on our arms in the field back of the town. General [George H.] Thomas formed

in front of Missionary Ridge, General [William T.] Sherman on the point of the ridge. Our division was sent to fill the gap between the two. The rebel pickets were driven back to their main line after some sharp firing and skirmishing. At night our division fortified in front of the rebel line. On the 24th we lay all day behind the fortification (could not raise our heads above them as any lifted head furnished a target for the enemy), while [Major General Joseph] Hooker was going over the mountain. About ten o'clock it grew less cloudy so that the smoke of the cannon could be seen. This was the battle fought among the clouds.

On the 25th Thomas and Sherman advanced and cut out my company, sending us around to Sherman's left. Just as we had our line formed in the new position, the rebels retreated and the battle was over.

The next day we started for Knoxville, Tennessee to reinforce Burnside, but when we had gotten within ten miles of Knoxville, [General James] Longstreet withdrew from the siege, so our company turned and went back to Lookout Valley. Going and coming occupied three weeks without change of clothes, and the food was mostly foraged on the country passed through. We reached camp the [17]th of December, making four weeks since we had left it.

*In a letter to Phebe from Lookout Valley dated January 13, 1864, Markham pondered the recent campaigns and the prospects for the future. "I grew poor some on the march [to Knoxville] and was not well all the time. The march was pretty hard for me so soon after laying in the rear so long. I am feeling well; do not get homesick a bit, but [am] very anxious to have the war end. I am full of hope and believe the rebellion will yield. Still I can stay the whole three years rather than to come home till the war is ended; that is, I want to see the end of the war worse than I want to come home. We gave the Rebs a good chase here [at Chattanooga]. I do not think they can stand many such, and why need they stand one more? Their case is hopeless, and why not give it up at once without more blood?" The Confederates, of course, were not ready to forsake their cause, and the blood shed in the upcoming Atlanta Campaign included that of Philo Markham.*

[On] the 4th of May, 1864, we broke camp and started with Sherman on his march through Georgia. On the eighth day of May we met the enemy near Dalton, and made a charge up the mountain [Rocky Face Ridge] near Dug Gap. There the Union forces were driven back with quite a loss of men. [In] my company half were killed or wounded who went into the action. I was wounded and went back to the field hospital where my right arm was amputated by Dr. [Henry] Van Aernam. The next day, [I] went to Ringgold by ambulance, the next to Chattanooga by rail, and on the 12th to Nashville, Tennessee, to the general hospital in that city. Here I stayed a few days and then went to Jeffersonville, Indiana, reaching there on the 18th of May. Here I stayed in the hospital till the last day of October, when I got my discharge and came home.

*Markham's matter of fact account of his wounding at the Battle of Dug Gap is also a modest one. He was, in fact, one of several members of the 154th New York killed, wounded or captured as they planted the regimental colors at the crest of Rocky Face Ridge. For his meritorious service, Markham was brevetted a first lieutenant by the State of New York. In the postwar years, memories of the war were never distant for Philo. His empty sleeve was a constant reminder of his service, and he and his brother Sylvanus, a veteran of the 44th New York, cherished the memory of a younger brother, Aaron, who was killed in action at Petersburg, Virginia as a member of the 44th.*

*Philo and Julia moved to the village of Dayton in 1868, where a daughter, Ida, was born the following year. Moved by the plight of the former slaves Philo had seen in the South during the war, the Markhams adopted a black girl named Mamie May. Markham was one of a group of veterans of the 154th New York who attended the dedication of the New York Peace Monument on Lookout Mountain in 1910, and the old soldiers made a side trip to Dalton, where the townsfolk met them with automobiles and hacks and took them for a tour of their old battlefield at Dug Gap. Two years later, Philo and Julia celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary with a fete at a Dayton church festooned with flags, daffodils and ferns. The celebration had a decidedly military flavor. A comrade of Philo's from the 154th related remembrances of the war, the local Grand*

*Army of the Republic post presented him with twenty dollars in gold, and adopted daughter May sang "Marching Through Georgia."*

*Philo Markham died at age 94 in 1932 and is buried in the Markham Cemetery. The old veteran left behind some indelible memories for his young grandnephews and -nieces. Ed Markham recalls visiting Philo and Julia in their later years, when they were living with their daughter in Orchard Park, New York. He was fascinated with Philo's long, flowing beard, the diminutive stature of Julia, and an old curio table covered with watches, old spectacles and other clutter. "And best of all," Ed recalls, "was when Uncle Philo would finally roll up the shirt sleeve and reveal the stump of the arm shot off in the Civil War, then proceed to draw a face on the end (somewhat below the elbow joint), then properly flex the muscles to the wonderment of the young witnesses as the cartoon on the stump moved about--and then the sly and bemused grin of Uncle Philo."*