
“... The True Definition of War”: The Civil War Diary of DeWitt C. Markle

*Edited by Erich L. Ewald**

DeWitt C. Markle was twenty-four years old when he marched to war with the 57th Indiana Volunteer Infantry. Through a combination of luck and the civic conscience of a Madison County resident a fragment of Markle's diary of war experiences has survived. This remnant, printed below, contains periodic entries for early January to late September, 1863, and suggests that it may have been part of an extensive journal. The twenty small leaves that did survive of this diary were discovered inserted between the pages of an old book purchased at an auction by James Reed of Anderson, Indiana. Reed generously donated the manuscript to the Indiana Room of the Anderson Public library where it is now on file. Although the manuscript lacked any signature that would directly identify the diarist, there are enough clues of known residents and place names to make identification possible.¹

DeWitt C. Markle was the nephew of the founder of Markleville, a small town in Madison County, and the son of a prominent “War Democrat,” Adam Markle. The Markles appear to have been staunch Unionists; indeed, early Madison County historian Samuel Harden wrote that when DeWitt was leaving for the front Adam told him, “Were I but young enough, I would go with you.”² Little is known of Markle's early life beyond the personal and family in-

* Erich L. Ewald is a freelance writer with degrees in history from Wittenberg University and Ball State University. He is a labor relations representative for Inland Fisher Guide Division of General Motors.

¹ Markle's entry concerning his return home to Markleville led the editor to examine all Adams Township volunteers listed in Phyllis Hart Leedom, comp., *Madison County, Indiana Civil War Soldiers* (n.p., Anderson, Indiana, 1981). The reference to Joseph Huston indicated that the diarist was a member of the 57th Indiana. Process of elimination and the comparison of known service dates narrowed the search down to Markle. Final confirmation was received in the entries which mention two of Markle's sisters.

² For a biographical sketch of Adam Markle and additional information regarding the entire Markle family, see Samuel Harden, *Those I Have Met, or Boys in Blue: In Which is Remembered Those I Have Met Along the Road of Life* (n.p., Anderson, Indiana, 1888), 299-302.

formation contained in the notes below. From his entries he appears to be a most typical northern recruit, full of patriotism and Christian piety, but not without humor.

Markle entered into service with the rest of his regiment in early October, 1861. The regiment trained briefly at the old fairgrounds in Richmond, Indiana, before transferring to Camp Dumont in Indianapolis. The 57th moved by rail to Jeffersonville on Christmas Eve and was incorporated into General Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio.³ The regiment participated with Buell in an arduous winter campaign in Kentucky and marched to Grant's relief at Shiloh in April, 1862. The regiment was later engaged at the Battle of Perryville during Bragg's invasion of Kentucky in late 1862.

What remains of the diary begins on January 2, 1863, as the Battle of Stones River (or Murfreesboro, Tennessee) is reaching its bloody climax. The early extant entries reveal that Markle is among the many wounded huddled around fires in the cold winter rain, awaiting the surgeons. Readers discover in subsequent entries that Markle was one of the lucky ones whose limb did not require amputation. The entries descend from this dramatic opening to more routine descriptions regarding his treatment in Nashville and his removal to a hospital in New Albany, Indiana. The bulk of the diary provides an intimate glimpse of Markle's slow, painful recuperation. His convalescence period coincides with a dramatic shift in the treatment and employment of disabled soldiers returning from the front.

From Fort Sumter to mid-1863, the North proved itself woefully unprepared for the magnitude of the war. Large numbers of combat casualties and an even larger number of soldiers disabled by illness and disease poured back into Indiana in direct proportion to the war's escalation. The evolution to total war was much quicker than the North's capacity to react. Consequently, the first two years of the conflict were marked by a tremendous waste of available manpower. Because the North was unable to provide sufficient treatment facilities—similar to the one at New Albany described by Markle—the disabled were often given wholesale

³ Indicative of the high spirits of the men of the 57th as they rushed to the front is a letter from Delaware County recruit Joseph VanMatre to Augustus L. Sayford, December 24, 1861: "We are all well at present and we are having some of the highest times you ever saw. While I am writing you, Billy Graves, Elie Conner, and John Rinker is wrestling and George Baker is writing a letter . . . I think if they would send us down south and let us at the rebels, we would clean them out and return home in a few days. But, never will I come home again as long as there is a rebel to fight." The letter is from a collection of letters made available to this editor by Melvin Sayford of Middletown, Indiana. All information concerning the 57th Indiana's service record is derived from Asbury L. Kerwood, *Annals of the Fifty-Seventh Regiment Indiana Volunteers; Marches, Battles, and Incidents of Army Life* (Dayton, Ohio, 1868), *passim*.

discharges from their regiments. The resulting depletion of manpower was so alarming that various half-measures were adopted in an effort to utilize the disabled in secondary assignments on the home front. By a process of bureaucratic evolution the Veteran Reserve Corps (more familiarly known as the "Invalid Corps") was born on April 28, 1863—roughly midway through Markle's convalescence. Markle's many references to delays, examinations, furloughs, and reexaminations reveal the many obstacles that had to be overcome before the Veteran Reserve Corps accomplished its purpose of fully utilizing disabled soldiers.

In his postwar report, Indiana's Adjutant General William Henry Harrison Terrell explained that the disabled were divided into two main categories: those capable of carrying muskets and those so severely disabled as to be capable of performing only light clerical duties. Markle's wound was severe enough, evidently, to place him in the latter category. Of great interest is Terrell's description of the Veteran Reserve Corps members' duties. Their assignments "consisted principally in guarding rebel prisoners, assisting the Provost Marshals in enforcing the enrollment and draft, arresting deserters, escorting recruits, drafted men and substitutes to the front, keeping order at home, and crushing conspiracies of rebel sympathizers in the North. . . ." This last comment may explain Markle's occasional references to inspecting "rebel mail." While stationed in Indianapolis Markle resided, at least temporarily, at the "Soldiers' Home." The home, established in 1862, was erected to provide lodging and hospital care to soldiers passing through the city.⁴

* * * * *

Jan 2nd⁵

To-day there has be[en] very hard fighting esp[ecial]ly P.M. The hospi[tal] tents are full and a good many are lying ou[t] on the ground in the rain by fires, which is the best that can be don[e] at present. Many of the wounded have died and their bodies are lying aroun[d] among the tents. The surgeons are very busy dressing

⁴ For the best synopsis of the Veteran Reserve Corps and its role in Indiana see William Henry Harrison Terrell, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion: Vol. I, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana* (1869; reprint, *Indiana Historical Collections*, Vol. XLI; Indianapolis, 1960), 100-105, 454-58.

⁵ In an effort to provide the most authentic reproduction possible, DeWitt C. Markle's account is presented here much as it was written. However, some of the diary's leaves were damaged and portions of the script unreadable. In those instances brackets appear around words and letters which are conjectural. Ellipses appear where the manuscript was torn and words missing.

wounds & ampu[ta]ting limbs. Our surg[eon] (Hosteter) has been o[rdered] to make out a repo[rt of] the wounded in [our] division.⁶

[Jan t]he 3rd 1863

[T]here has been consid[e]rable fighting to-day and the rebels have been again repulsed [&?] after dark they are driven from a portion of their entrenchments.

Sun. the 4th, A.M.

It is rumored that the rebels have fallen back & evacuated Murfreesboro, and a [p]ortion of our troops [ha]ve occupied the [pl]ace. P.M. It is . . . stated to be a . . . in camp here. And the battle is ended after five days fighting, with a heavy loss on both sides.

Jan. the 9th 1863

Early this morning the ambulances are brought to the hospitals to be loaded with sick & wounded for Nashville. Jos. Huston Myself & another man (a stranger to me) occupy one ambulance and after a rather uncomfortable rid[e] of about 30 miles we arriv[e] at Hospital No. 21 in . . . about sunset. This is the M.E. Church on. . . It contains about 120 patients when full. have pretty good accomodations for the sick. A good many died during my stay at this place, among them my friend Jos. Huston.⁷

On the 16th of Feb. I in company with many others, (both sick & wounded) are taken down to the river and placed on board the steamer Jno. Roesbeck [a]nd the 17th A.M. begin [to] descend the Cumberland . . ., at night we lay up [near Fort] Donelson About 3. O'clock P.M. the 18th we arrive at Smithland which is at the mouth of the cum. R— and awhile after night started up the Ohio, the 19th arrived at Evansville & was detained several hours on acc't of a heavy gale. And the 21st inst. arrived at New Albany, Ind. Nothing of importance occurred during the trip. Our rations was very scant & poor accommodations generally on the boat. I was taken to Hospital No. 1, said to be the best one of the eleven which is in the city. While staying there good attention was paid the sick & wounded. Our surgeon (A.S. Green) was a Citizen and appeared willing to do all he could for those who needed his atten-

⁶ The regiment was heavily engaged at Stones River and suffered 75 casualties out of 350 men engaged. The adjutant general's synopsis of the regiment's service record is reprinted in Ann Turner, *Guide to Indiana Civil War Manuscripts* (Indianapolis, 1965), 177-79.

⁷ Huston died on February 5, 1863. See Leedom, *Madison County, Indiana Civil War Soldiers*, 32. Two other Adams Township soldiers mortally wounded at Stones River were Wesley Seward and Jeremiah Gray.

tions. The fare I présume was about as good as is furnished at any of the hospitals of the U.S. Such as a soldier should never complain of. Was granted passes at almost any time during the day to go about the City. Maj. Fry cammanded the post. He had no authority and granted no furloughs. About the middle of May I got so that I began to bear some little wait on my wounded leg, and by the 1st of June I could get around with the assistance of one crutch. The 5th of June, was transferred to Indianapolis. Was taken to Jeffersonville in an ambulance from thence to Ind'p's by R.R. where I arrived a little after dark. Walked from Depot to the Soldier's Home where I remained until the 12th inst. when I obtained a furlough for thirty days and went home, having been absent from home 18 months & 3 days. I found my friends comparatively speaking enjoying the blessings of peace. Who but the Soldier knows the true definition of "War"? The time passed swiftly & very agreeably away until the 11th of July when I reported again at Ind'p's. and on examination was pronounced unfit for duty and the 15th inst I rec'd another furlough for twenty days and returned home again. The time expiring the 5th of Aug I again reported at Indianapolis, but on account of so many coming in before me could not be examined that day, so I had to report at the Soldier's Home.⁸

Aug. 26th

Was detailed to clerk in the Post Adj't's Office at Head quarters in the city. Copied reports from the Soldiers Home all day, and at night felt very tired and bones ached considerable.

Aug. 27.

Went to H. Quarters and copied reports again but felt rather bad, had a slight chill and at night some fever. Got a place to board in the City near H.Q.

[Aug.] 28

Still worked at copying reports, had the Head ache very bad, ate some dinner, towards night went to the Home, had a chill and very high fever. Dr gave me some medicine.

⁸ The Soldier's Home progressed by stages from a single building, located in a grove north of the Terre Haute Railroad depot in Indianapolis, to a much more elaborate facility. At the time of Markle's recuperation, the Soldier's Home consisted of three large buildings incorporating barracks, mess hall, and hospital. For more detailed information see Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 454-58.

And the battle is
ended after five days
fighting, with a heavy
loss on both sides,

Sun. the 9th 1863

Early this morning the
ambulances are brought
to the hospital to be
loaded with sick & wounded
for Nashville, Ios. Houston
myself & another man (a
stranger to me) occupy one
ambulance and after a
rather uncomfortable ride
of about 30 miles we arrive
at Hospital No. 21 in
about sun set, This
is the M. C. Church, on

It contains about 120
patients when full.
I have pretty good accom-
modations for the sick,
but good many died
during my stay at this
place, among them my
friend Jos. Huston.
On the 16th of Feb.
I in company with
many others, both sick
& wounded, are taken
down to the river and
placed on board the
steamer Sns. Roesbeck
and the 17th A.M. begin
descend the Cumberland.
at night we lay up
Donelson

Sunday Morning
Aug. 30

Dr. took my name to send me to the Hospital but I begged off, and did not go. Walked down to my boarding house and ate quite a hearty dinner having ate no supper or breakfast. Came back to the Home, wrote a few lines, and went into church at 3. o'clock P.M. commenced chilling and soon had to get up and go out. Text 1st Peter 3rd chap. 15th Verse. Had a very hard chill, and also high fever 'till late at night. ate no supper, and did not sleep very well.

[Aug.] 31

Arose from my couch about 7^{1/2} o'clock, felt rather weak and bad, ate no breakfast. Went down to H'dq'rs about 9. O'clock and worked 'till nearly 11. when I went up to the Home to be mustered for pay. Waited 'till about 2. P.M. when the mustering Officer came and mustered us. Took four (4) doces of Quinine 1^{1/2} hours apart to day. Did not go back to work any. P.M. Chill came on some 2 hours later, did not shake much, but had severe headache and high fever.

Sept. 1. 1863

Ate no breakfast, but Had pretty good appetite for dinner. Felt rather bad all day. Could not sleep much at night, but had no chill. Worked all day.

[Sept.] 2

Arose little after 5. O'clock and went to my boarding house for breakfast, ate quite hearty, excepting the headache felt pretty well. Worked as usual, could not sleep much at night.

[Sept.] 3

Went down again to breakfast, did pretty well during the day, had the headache some. At night when I went up to The Soldiers Home I found Peter Julius there.⁹ Had heard I was sick and came down to see me. Run about the city some with him at night, then went to the Home & went to bed and he went to a Hotel.

⁹ Peter Julius married DeWitt's sister Sarah. For a short biographical sketch see Harden, *Those I Have Met, or Boys in Blue*, 69-70.

Sept. 4.

We met at Head Quarters about 6. O'clock and he took breakfast with me, then took a stroll through the City, and I returned to work till noon when he came in and took dinner, after which we walked to the Depot and he went out on the 2. O'clock Train and I went to Head Quarters.

Sept. 5

Felt very well. Copied reports in the A.M. and inspected rebel mail in the P.M. Just at night got a leave of absence of the Post Adj't. (in whose office I work) until the 7th.

12. O'clock. M.

got aboard the 8. O'clock train and arrived at Pendleton a little before 10. O'clock where I found Sister Hat. M.I. [Maury?] & cousin Harris awaiting for me. Got to take a buggy ride with them to Markleville, where we arrived 12. O'clock at night. All went in to sister Sarah's, had supper and after chatting awhile took a walk down the pike, got back home & went to bed a little after 2. O'clock.¹⁰

Sept. 6.

Went to Sunday School at Markleville in the A.M. After dinner went to Mr. Davis' for a walk with Miss J. Swain. Just at night went to see my — Intended — of course, had a very agreeable time with Mr. Joe and his Intended, returned home about 2. O'clock

Sept. [?]

Packed my trunk quite early & about 8. O'clock started for Pendleton. Rode down with J. Booram in buggy.¹¹ Left there on the 10. O'clock train Arrived at Indianapolis 12.15 P.M. Went up to dinner, after which I went to the office to work. Found my desks strewn with Rebel Mail for inspection. Also found a morning report from Soldiers Home of some ten pages of "Fools Cap" to Copy. In the evening went to the Home & got me some quilts and slept in the office for the first time. The 6th being a day appointed by the President for Thanksgiving & Prayer, there was no business transacted. Spent the day at the Soldier's Home.

¹⁰ This entry refers to two of Markle's sisters, Sarah and Harriet (b. 1835 and 1833, respectively). *Ibid.*, 300.

¹¹ John Booram was a prominent farmer in Adams Township. *Ibid.*, 236-38.

The 7th went to Head Quarters in the morning. Got an order for examination, waited 'till noon came up to the Home got dinner, went back, was examined, not being considered fit for field duty was assigned to the Invalid Corps.

The 8th went to the U.S. Commissary and drew Subsistence money while absent on furlough.

The 9th, Aug. 1863 [*sic*]

Not very well. Helped police awhile in morning after which read awhile, & slept a little.

P.M.

Wrote a letter to John Edgar. attended church at Soldier's Home. Text the 11 chap. 1st Verse of Heb. and then wrote a little. From this time to the 15th inst. I spent at the Soldier's Home doing some light duty but generally getting a pass each day and strolling about town a few hours.

The 15th P.M. I got a pass for two days and at night got aboard the 8. O'clock train. Went up to Pendleton, arrived there a little before 10. O'cl'k got a chance to ride about three miles, then walked the rest of the way home (four miles) was very tired, got home 12.20 A.M.

Sun 16

Tried to climb in the window & go to bed but made to much noise, roused the folks, had to be let in at the door and give an account of myself.

The 16th went up to the Baptist Association near Collier's Church¹² There was quite a large congregation, did not get to hear much of the preaching, but had a very good time. Returned home about 2. o'clock. Spent the rest of the day chatting with the neighbors. Just at night went down the Pike as usual and had a "social chat" with—yes.

Well Monday A.M. the 17th went down to Pendleton, took the 10. O'clock train for Ind'p's where I arrived 12.20 P.M. came up to the

¹² This is a reference to the Union Baptist Church. It was familiarly known as the "Collier Church" because the congregation was originally organized at the home of Mrs. Rebecca Collier in 1834. The Collier residence was located one and a half miles southeast of the present town of Markleville. The mid-September entries do not correspond with the correct dates. Markle states that September 16 was a Sunday, for example, when in fact the 16th was a Wednesday. This suggests that Markle had a tendency to periodically "catch up" his daily entries at some relatively distant date from the events.

Soldiers Home, passed inside the lines all right where I spent most of the time 'till the 20th inst. at which time the "War Democrats[""] held a Convention in the City, and several of my friends being present I procured a pass and spent the day in the City with them. At night returned to the Home where I spent several lonesome days indeed

* * * * *

Markle was honorably discharged in 1864 and returned to Markleville where he resumed his prewar career as clerk and farmer. He died on March 14, 1911, at the age of seventy-three.¹³

¹³ A short obituary is to be found in the *Anderson Morning Herald*, March 16, 1911.

William Herndon's Indiana Oral History Project, 1865

Rodney O. Davis*

The most important event in William Herndon's life, it has been said without too much exaggeration, was the death of Abraham Lincoln.¹ The national apotheosis of Lincoln that followed his assassination was an event in which Herndon shared. As Lincoln's last and by far longest-tenured law partner in Springfield, Illinois, Herndon was immediately perceived as having a special authority that derived from long and close association with him. Almost immediately upon Lincoln's assassination, Herndon was approached by writers and interviewers as one with special knowledge about the martyred president's life and career. Herndon responded as best he could but of course knew that there were many questions that he could not answer, for his close contact with Lincoln dated only from the late 1830s in Springfield. Encouraged by such friends as Horace White of the *Chicago Tribune* and by the example of early biographers such as Josiah Holland and Joseph Barrett, Herndon seems to have concluded before Lincoln was two months in his grave to write his own memories of Lincoln. He would fortify those recollections with interviews of Lincoln's associates in Springfield and elsewhere and perhaps with some investigation into Lincoln's early life through correspondence with those who had known Lincoln in his earlier homes in Kentucky and Indiana. In the process he conducted what Charles B. Strozier has called one of the first oral history projects in America.²

* Rodney O. Davis is a professor of history at Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois. With Professor Douglas Wilson, he is presently co-editing the Herndon-Weik informant materials.

¹ David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York, 1948), 167.

² Charles B. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings* (New York, 1981), xvi. Though historians have a particularly acute understanding of memory and its pitfalls, they also in recent years have accommodated that understanding to a growing appreciation of the evidence of oral history, which, as in the case of the reminiscences that Herndon collected, frequently provides information that is otherwise irretrievable. See Ronald J. Grele, "On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction," *Journal of American History*, LXXIV (September, 1987), 570-78; David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *ibid.*, LXXV (March, 1989), 1117-29; David M. Oshinsky, "Oral History: Playing by the Rules," *ibid.*, LXXVII (September, 1990), 609-614.