

March 18, 2022

I am pleased to nominate Union Army Captain Nathan S. Messick, commanding officer Company G (the Faribault Guards), 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry regiment for a Faribault Hometown Hero banner. Captain Messick served the United States, the State of Minnesota, and the town of Faribault from April 1861 until July 3 1863 when he was killed in action during the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg.

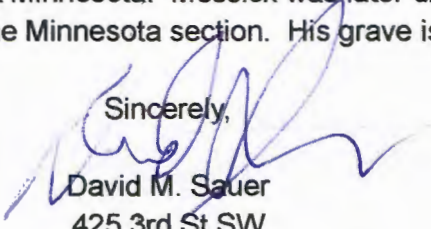
Captain Messick, his wife Amanda and their four young children moved to Faribault in 1860. He was a cobbler by profession. When the Civil War began in April 1861, Messick volunteered in Faribault and was elected by the members of Company G to be a second lieutenant of the company. He shortly thereafter became a first lieutenant when another officer was promoted out of Company G. During the Battle of First Bull Run, Messick earned a battlefield promotion to Captain for his heroism. Messick wrapped the Company colors around himself so that they would not fall after the original color bearer, Asa Miller, was shot down by Confederate forces.

On the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg (fought July 1-3 1863), Messick charged advancing Confederates with the 282 other members of the First Minnesota, stopping the Confederate advance and perhaps saving the Union Army from total defeat. The First Minnesota paid a terrible price in dead and wounded from the charge, suffering 82% casualties.

Messick, although wounded, became the commander of the First Minnesota because all of the other senior officers were dead or more seriously wounded. On the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg (July 3), Messick led the remnants of the First Minnesota. During Confederate General George Pickett's massive attack on the Union center, Messick was killed by an artillery fragment that hit him above the right eye.

Messick's men buried him. The chaplain of the Regiment later described Messick's funeral as being akin to the funeral of the First Minnesota. Messick was later disinterred and buried at the Gettysburg National Cemetery in the Minnesota section. His grave is still there.

Sincerely,



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was not present when he was buried".... "After we laid him down, I was looking at him for the last time, and thinking if there was anything more I could do, that would do any good. I asked Mr Williams, his cook, to take off his shoulder straps and send them to his wife, which he did. I am sorry that we could not save his sword, but in a battle like that there are lots of things one would like to do, but cannot"..."He died at his post, doing his duty. Thousands fell that day the same way. Capt Messick died as he would wish to die, fighting for his country."

On July 4th, Nathan Messick was buried on the Jacob Schwartz farm near Gettysburg. It was Ed Needham, of Company G, who made a head board to mark his grave site. Later the captain was reinterred at the National Cemetery in Gettysburg, along with many of the other men from Minnesota who gave their last full measure on that battlefield. He is in the Minnesota area; Section A, Grave #4.

Sources:

The Central Republican, Faribault, MN, Wed, July 31, 1861, p 3.

Descriptive List of the Men of Company G, First Minnesota Association papers, Minnesota Historical Society, page 615, box 2.

"From Bull Run to Bristow Station", M H Bassett, p 7, 28, 32 & 108.

History of Rice and Steele Counties, p 201.

Family Tree Maker CD351, Roll of Honor: Union Soldiers, Volume XVI, National Cemetery, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

The Picket Post newsletter, pub by Henry O'Brien, St Louis, MO, 1897, p 67, Minn Hist Soc.

The battle of Gettysburg was considered the "high tide of the Confederacy" in that it was as far north as the Rebel armies ever invaded. They were turned back at the cost of many lives, including that of Nathan Messick. He was struck by a piece of artillery shell though it was also mistakenly reported that he died from a gunshot wound. 1st Lt. John McCallum, Messick's second in command, wrote a letter home to Mrs. Messick detailing his service and death during the battle. In it he said,

"At daylight the enemy opened fire on our pickets. The regiment was instantly in line of battle. Thus we remained until nearly noon, when once more the enemy opened--this time in earnest. Eighty pieces of cannon vomited shot and shell on our devoted division. Under this terrific artillery fire they advanced their infantry, driving our right flank and capturing the 4th regular battery, the horses of which had all been killed. Our brigade was then ordered to support the right. In the execution of this movement, Capt. Messick being in command of his own regiment and the 15th Mass. was instantly killed by a piece of shell striking him in the head near the right eye, going clear through and coming out back of the right ear. Thus perished the gallant Captain Messick."

"George Williams of Company G, hearing of the fate of his Captain, went in pursuit of the body, and finding it, with the help of others, carried it to the rear, where he remained with it until three o'clock next morning, when an ambulance sent for the purpose by Lieut. Searles of Hastings, took it still farther to the rear. It being impossible to procure boards or nails the body was wrapped in a shelter tent, towels being put round the face to protect it; a grave was dug, and the burial service read by our Chaplain, Rev. Mr. Cornwell; green boughs were laid over the remains, and the earth closed over all that was mortal of a born hero."

"The site selected was in every way a fit resting place for the noble dead. A fine oak spreads its shadows like a pall over the spot which overlooks the field of our triumphs, and the place where he fell. Loving hands carved his name on a board which is spiked to the tree, at whose roots he reposes."

Ed Bassett, of Company I, recalled Messick's death on July 3rd during the repulse of Pickett's charge. *"As soon as they came in range of our guns, we sent them our compliments in the shape of one ounce bullets. They came determined to drive us back, but when they were about half shot down, they commenced to retreat. We chased them and took many prisoners...I passed the Captain just before he fell but did not know he was killed until after the fight. He was killed instantly, shot thru the head. After the fight I helped carry him off the field. One of the boys that had been cooking for him said that he would see that he was buried. He would also take care of his things."*

Ed wrote in a letter, *"You ask about Captain Messick? I have no doubt that he did request that his body be sent home. He must have done it before he was hit, as he certainly didn't have a chance afterwards. I helped carry his body from the field, perhaps a half hour after the rebs were driven back. We took him back to the Field Hospital where his cook took charge, staying with him until an ambulance took him back to the General hospital. His sword and pocket book were taken from him within fifteen minutes after he fell. Who took them I do not know. There was perhaps \$15 in it. There was a gold watch in his pocket, which belonged to Col. Adams, who was wounded the day before. It was returned to Col. Adams. I*

Captain Nathan S Messick



Captain Nathan Messick Mike
Cunningham

Company	G
Mustered In	04/29/61
Mustered Out	07/03/63
Wounds	Killed in Action
Gettysburg 7/3	head
Nativity	USA,NJ
Born	1826/1827
Died	07/03/63
Died Where	PA,Gettysburg
Hometown:	Faribault
Vocation	shoemaker

Nathan S Messick was born in New Jersey in about 1827. In 1850 he and his wife, Amanda, were living in Noblesville, Hamilton Co, Ohio, where he was working as a shoemaker. By 1860 they had moved to Faribault in Rice Count, MN. They had four children, ages 10, 7, 2 and 1 month. He continued his work as a shoemaker.

In April of 1861, 34 year old Messick volunteered. He was recorded as standing 5' 8 1/2" tall, with a dark complexion, hazel colored eyes and black hair. He left his wife and young family and rallied to the cause of suppressing the rebellion.

He was placed in Company G. At the beginning of the war, the men of each company elected their top officers. On the day they were all mustered in, April 29th, the men of Company G chose Messick to be their 1st lieutenant. He was promoted to captain on July 29, 1861, after the death of Captain Lewis McKune at Bull Run.

One member of the First mentioned his and other officer's courage at the battle of Bull Run by reporting, *"It is simple justice to mention the brave conduct of our officers. Lieut. Col. Miller and Major Dike dismounted and were found in the thickest of the fight. Our Lieutenant Messick, regardless of the storm of deadly hail, did his best to rally the men until the last."*

"Asa Miller, Millersburgh, who carried our Company Colors, was shot down, and our 1st Lieut. tore it from the staff and saved it. It was riddled with bullets."



Nathan S. Messick