

Sergeant Charles Wesley McKay 1847 – 1912

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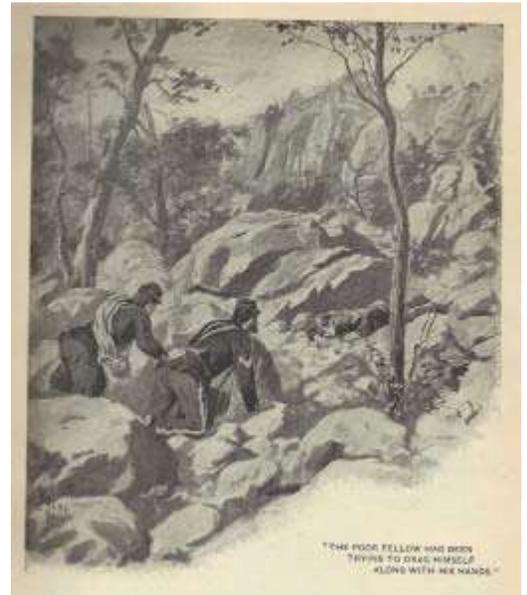
- Born: January 25, 1847 Mansfield, Cattaraugus Co, New York to Cyrus and Mary (Butterfield) McKay
- **Civil War, earned Medal of Honor during Battle of Dug Gap, Georgia**
- Enlisted: July 26, 1862, Allegheny, New York
- Mustered In: September 24, 1862
- Unit 154th New York Volunteer Infantry, Army of the Potomac, 11th Corps
- Mustered Out: June 11, 1865
- **Minnesota National Guard:**
- Enlisted: 1880s
- Unit: 2nd Battalion, Company F
- Resigned May 23, 1895
- **Death:** August 25, 1912, Staples, Todd County, Minnesota
Buried at Oak Grove Cemetery, Fergus Falls, Minnesota

Early Years/War Years

Charles early years were spent in the Mansfield, Cattaraugus County New York area. He was apprenticed as a saddler in a harness shop when the call to arms was issued. He was only 15 at his enlistment and lied about his age to join on July 26, 1862 in Allegheny, NY. He was mustered in as a Private in Company C of the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry on September 24, 1862. He was wounded in action on July 1, 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg. He was promoted to Corporal on April 1, 1865 and to Sergeant on May 1, 1865. He mustered out with his company on June 11, 1865 near Bladensburg, Maryland.

McKay and his company comrade, Stephen Welch, were both issued the Medal of Honor on April 13, 1894, for a deed they performed on May 8, 1864 at the Battle of Dug Gap on Rocky Face Ridge, Georgia. Welch later described their actions for the book, *Deeds of Valor*, (which also included an illustration of the act): *“On the 9th [sic] of May, 1864, the enemy was found in a strong position at a place called Rocky Face Ridge, near Dalton, GA. In the afternoon the brigade was got in readiness for inspection of said ridge. A few of my company were detailed to act as skirmishers. We advanced slowly and cautiously, covering ourselves as best we could till we got within four rods of a perpendicular palisade crowning the top of the ridge. I found protection behind a rock, from which point I could occasionally see three or four of the enemy on top of the hill, and had a chance to discharge my gun in that direction. Meanwhile the brigade came*

up, our regiment on the right. They all went up to the perpendicular palisade of rock, some going up the crevices and to death. After about half an hour the bugler sounded a recall, and the brigade went down that hill much faster than it had gone up, but soon we got into proper order again. About this time the major came along and told me that he had seen a wounded soldier of my company, between the lines, adding that I had better get someone to help me go up and get him. Taking a tent-mate, Sergeant Charles W. McKay, we started out under a heavy fire, not only from the enemy, but also from our own lines. We found George Greek, a corporal of the color-guard, badly wounded in both legs. The poor fellow had been trying to drag himself along with his hands, and had sunk down, overcome by faintness and exhaustion. McKay revived him with a drink from his canteen, after which the corporal, raising himself on his elbow, asked if the colors were safe. We assured him that they were, and he dropped down again, satisfied and happy. We rolled him on a blanket, picked him up, and with bullets whizzing about us, managed to get him off the field.” At age 17, then Private Charles Wesley acted with great courage which later rewarded his actions with the Medal of Honor.



Post War Years

Following the war, Charles returned to the Mansfield, New York area. On February 19, 1869, in Olean, NY, he married Clara Onan, daughter of COL Warren Onan who served as 1st LT of Company C, 154th New York in which Charles served. The couple moved to Indiana where children Grace, Blanche, and Georgia were born. They later moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota where Charles served as rail agent for the Northern Pacific railroad.

Clara McKay passed away in Moorhead, Minnesota on February 4, 1888 and is buried in the Prairie Home Cemetery there along with her parents. On July 23, 1890, Charles married Elizabeth Lockhart Thompson (born Canada April 1856) in Otter Tail County, Minnesota. Their daughter Mildred was born in 1893 in Fergus Falls. In 1903, Charles and wife Elizabeth moved to Wahpeton, ND to accept a position as rail agent there. Elizabeth died on December 23, 1909. In 1910 Charles lived in Staples, Todd County MN with his daughter Mildred, while continuing to work for Northern Pacific.

While working in Fergus Falls, Charles enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard, 2nd Regiment, Company F, and served as Lieutenant and Captain, finally resigning on May 23, 1895.

Throughout his life, Charles continued to work with and for his military comrades. As a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) he held many posts including Senior

Vice Commander and Aide to General Stewart, Commander in Chief of the Grand Army in 1902. In addition, he was a member of the New York Society, ran for Sheriff of Crow Wing County, and operated the Lyceum theater in Fergus Falls.

Charles died in Staples, Todd County, Minnesota on August 25, 1912 and is buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery, Fergus Falls with his 2nd wife Elizabeth.

Charles had 4 children: Grace, Blanche and Georgia Romaine McKay by his 1st wife Clara Onan/Owan and a daughter Mildred by his 2nd wife Elizabeth Lockart Thompson.



Bibliography/Sources:

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