

## Henry D. O'Brien

### Born

January 21, 1842 Calais, Maine

### Entered Service – Civil War

September 28, 1861, St. Anthony Falls, MN

### Died

November 2, 1902 St. Louis, MO

### Early Years

Henry D. O'Brien was born January 21, 1842 at Calais, Maine. In 1857, he moved with his family to St. Anthony Falls, MN. He is the oldest of 10 siblings some being half-siblings.

### The War Years

The Minnesota Governor, Alexander Ramsey, made his appeal for 1000 men. Within two weeks, on April 29, 1861, the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota mustered.

Henry D. O'Brien was a corporal in Company E, 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Infantry by the time of the Battle of Gettysburg. On July 2, 1863, Corporal O'Brien was conspicuous for carrying a wounded comrade, Ernest Jefferson, back to the union lines that had cost the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota 262 casualties. O'Brien was among the remnant of forty-seven men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota which found itself defending against "Pickett's Charge" on July 3. As the Confederate, the 28<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry, neared the Union lines, O'Brien's regiment attacked the Confederate flank. The 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota's color bearer, Corporal John Dehn, was shot down, and the Flagstaff broken in two by the gunfire. O'Brien responded, picked up the flag by its remaining staff and with characteristic bravery and impetuosity led his regiment into hand-to-hand combat. He was struck in the side of the head by a spent bullet which never-the-less knocked him momentarily senseless. Still he retained hold of the flag and advanced with his unit though wounded a second time, this time by a bullet to the hand.

For his bravery, Henry O'Brien was awarded the Medal of Honor on April 9, 1890. His citation read: "taking up the colors where they had fallen, he rushed ahead of regiment, close to the muzzles of the enemy's guns, and engaged in the desperate struggle in which the enemy was defeated, and though severely wounded, he held the colors until wounded a second time".



Corporal Henry O'Brien was one of 63 men who were awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism in the battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He was promoted to lieutenant after Gettysburg. May 5, 1864, the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota was mustered out. May 12, 1864, O'Brien was appointed Second Lieutenant in Company B. Aug 14, 1864 O'Brien was shot in the right shoulder and lung. He was carried to safety by Alonzo Pickle and others. His wound forced his withdrawal from active service.

### **The Post War Years**

After the war, Henry married Emma Sinclair. They had a son, Robert Sinclair O'Brien, born June 4, 1870 in Minneapolis, MN. Later, he became a government pension agent in St. Louis, MO. Henry D. O'Brien died November 2, 1902 in St. Louis, MO. He is buried at the Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis, MO, Plot: Block 292, Lot 4482.

**Compiled by Glynne Deschene  
Maria Sanford Chapter DAR**



Photos of grave markers courtesy of Connie Nisinger

Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis, MO

Resources:

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