

Alonzo Huntingdon Pickle

Born

July 2, 1843, Farnham, Quebec, Canada

Entered Service

August 14, 1862

St. Charles, Winona County, Minnesota

Company K

First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment

Transferred to

Company B

First Minnesota Infantry Battalion

Civil War

Died

May 24, 1925, Sleepy Eye, Brown County, Minnesota



Early Years

Alonzo Huntingdon Pickle, son of Simon and Sarah (Taylor) Pickle, was born July 2, 1843. He was baptized, along with his sister Alma on April 9, 1849 at the St. James Anglican Church, Farnham, Quebec, Canada.ⁱ

In 1855, the Pickle family came to the United States, settling first in Illinois and two years later, on a quarter section of land obtained by Alonzo's father midway between Dover and Eyota, Olmsted County, Minnesota. Alonzo worked on the family farm until he enlisted in the Union Army.

The War Years

Alonzo was mustered into service in Company K, First Minnesota Regiment on August 14, 1862, at St. Charles, Winona County. The tall blond 19-year-old was photographed in his neat grey uniform which was presented to members of Company K by the citizens of Winona.ⁱⁱ Of the First Minnesota, this company appears to have been the only one with proper uniforms. The state had issued black pantaloons, black felt caps, along with red flannel shirts, and this outfit comprised the uniform of the other companies.

Although Company K, First Minnesota, was engaged at Antietam in September, Alonzo may not have been present. He probably would have been on the march up Loudoun Valley and on to Falmouth, Virginia, October 30-November 17, 1862, and saw his first action at Fredericksburg in December 1862.ⁱⁱⁱ He observed his twentieth birthday—if he had time to think about it—while he was engaged in action at the battle of Gettysburg on July 2, 1863.

He is quoted as saying of Gettysburg: "The Minnesota Monument represents the place we started down the slope and the figure atop faces the direction we went down into the woods with our 262 men. After we did what we were ordered to do, we rallied around our flag - 47 of us were left, the other 215 lay wounded and dead."

Fifty years later he attended the famous "blue and gray" reunion on that field.

After being promoted to corporal on February 1, 1864, he was sent home with a recruiting squad. In the meantime the First Minnesota was ordered to Fort Snelling, Minnesota on February 5 and was on duty there until April 29 when they were mustered out at the expiration of their three year term. The men of the First Minnesota Regiment, whose term of enlistment had not expired, re-enlisted and became the First Minnesota Infantry Battalion. Alonzo, of Company B, was promoted to sergeant on July 22, 1864. In August the unit fought on the 13th to 20th at a place called Deep Bottom, Virginia. It would be here that the unit was driven back after attempting an assault. But while most backed away Alonzo remained because he saw his officer, [Major H. D. O'Brien,^{iv}] being knocked to the ground by bullets, he crawled out to save the man and brought him back to safety.”^v Many years later, Alonzo was awarded one of the nation’s highest awards, the Medal of Honor, for this act of bravery.

Although he did not mention Alonzo Pickle, H. D. O’Brien wrote “At Deep Bottom, Va., August 14, 1864, I took part in a charge after being excused from duty on account of sickness, and was shot through the right lung while in advance of my company.”^{vi}

Alonzo was present at Lee’s surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. “The battalion was on picket duty at the time and he watched, as many beaten rebel soldiers crossed their lines and surrendered their arms.” He was promoted to first sergeant on May 1, marched with his regiment to Washington, D.C., May 2-12 and participated in the Grand Review in Washington on May 23. He was discharged at Bailey’s Cross Roads, Virginia, on June 7, 1865.^{vii}

According to his biographical sketch in the *History of Brown County, Minnesota*, he saw action at Loudoun Valley (Oct 30-Nov 17, 1862), Fredericksburg (Dec 12-15, 1862), Hay Market (Jun 25, 1863), Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863), Bristow Station (Oct. 14, 1863), Mine Run (Nov 27-Dec 2, 1863), Petersburg (series of campaigns), Jerusalem Plank Road (June 21–23, 1864), Deep Bottom (Aug. 14-20, 1864), Reams Station (Aug. 25, 1864), Hatchers Run (Feb. 5-7, 1865), Farmhill and High Bridge (April 6-7, 1865).^{viii}

The Post War Years

After the war he returned to his father’s farm near Eyota, Minnesota. He may have met Rhoda Jane Smith in Rochester, Minnesota. In any event, they were married in Rochester on October 24, 1867. She was from Burlington, Iowa.

Shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to Winona and Alonzo found a job working for W. S. Nevins, a horse dealer according to the 1870 census. Alonzo also hauled brick for the construction of the first normal school in that city.

Within a year or two, he moved back to Olmsted County and rented a farm where he made his home for the next fifteen years.^{ix} The 1875, 1880 and 1885 censuses confirm that Alonzo and his family were living in Dover Township, Olmsted County. Alonzo worked for Nevins again from 1886 until the fall of 1888, presumably when “He was engaged as the overseer of the big Nevis ranch at Tracy, where he remained for two years and six months.”^x

About the fall of 1888, he moved to land he had purchased earlier near Golden Gate, a town that took its name from the U. S. Post Office established in 1868. “Two general stores, blacksmith shop, a grist mill, the post office and a few dwellings scarcely merited the high-toned name ‘Golden Gate’ so the pioneers used the nickname ‘Podunk’.” The railroad by-passed the village in the early 1870s and the community slowly vanished. A Historic Marker indicates the site of the former village in Home Township, Brown County, Minnesota.^{xi}

Alonzo retired from farming after four years at Golden Gate and moved to Sleepy Eye, a community with a population of 1513 in 1890, roughly fifteen miles from Golden Gate. The 1895 state census confirms that he and Rhoda were there although his biographical sketch claims that he moved to Sleepy Eye in 1906—probably a typographical error in Fritsche’s *History of Brown County*.^{xii}

Alonzo's next undertaking was in the real estate and insurance business, at first in partnership, then as the sole proprietor. "He was the local agent for a number of the leading insurance companies of the country and had a very well-established business in Sleepy Eye."^{xiii}

On June 12, 1895, Alonzo was awarded one of the nation's highest awards, the Medal of Honor.

The commendation reads:

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Alonzo H. Pickle, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 14 August 1864, while serving with Company B, Minnesota Infantry, in action at Deep Bottom, Virginia. At the risk of his life, Sergeant Pickle voluntarily went to the assistance of a wounded officer lying close to the enemy's lines and, under fire carried him to a place of safety.^{xiv}

Alonzo died in Sleepy Eye on May 24, 1925, at the age of 81.^{xv} He was buried in Home Cemetery, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. His wife, Rhoda, died 31 Aug 1923.^{xvi}

His biographical sketch in the 1915 *History of Brown County*, listed his children: Frank A., born 1868, deceased; Burton O., born 1869, who married Milla Burkhardt and has three children; Anna, born 1871, who married George Dreher and has five children; Ella, born 1872, who married Ernest Tompkins and has one child; Roy B., born 1883, who married Josie Wisby and has four children; and Arthur T., born 1886, unmarried.

Compiled by Lorraine Hall Keith
Rochester Chapter DAR



Photos of grave markers courtesy of Don Morfe, "Find A Grave" contributor who researches and photographs Medal Of Honor Recipient gravesites.



SOURCES

Alonzo Pickle's gr-gr-grandson, Lee Skold provided the photo of Alonzo as an older man and the quote from Alonzo Pickle about Gettysburg.

Armstrong, Bart, *Canada's Medal of Honor Recipients*, <http://www.canadianmedalofhonor.com>

Fritsche, L. A., M. D., *History of Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions*, vol. 2, Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Company, Inc., 1916, 425-28.

<https://ia600509.us.archive.org/6/items/mn-brown-1915-fritsche-1/mn-brown-1915-fritsche.pdf>

Historical Marker Project, http://www.historicalmarkerproject.com/markers/HM1CH3_golden-gate_Sleepy-Eye-MN.html

Minnesota in the civil and Indian wars, 1861-1865, two volumes/ prepared and published under the supervision of the Board of Commissioners appointed by the act of the Legislature of Minnesota of April 16, 1889.

United States Federal census records and Minnesota State census records.

NOTES

ⁱ St. James Anglican Church Register, Drouin Collection, Montreal, Canada, viewed on Ancestry.com.

ⁱⁱ Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865, 1:4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fritsche, *History of Brown County, Minnesota*, 2: 426-28, biographical sketch for A. H. Pickle.

^{iv} The officer's name was reported in Alonzo Pickle's biographical sketch in the History of Brown County.

^v Bart Armstrong, *Canada's Medal of Honor Recipients*, <http://www.canadianmedalofhonor.com>.

^{vi} J.W. Jones, *The Story of American Heroism: Thrilling Narratives of Personal Adventures*, 1895, p. 310, viewed on books.google.com

^{vii} Fritsche, 2:426-28.

^{viii} Civil War Union Regimental Histories - Minnesota. <http://www.civilwararchive.com/Unregfst/unmninf1.htm>

^{ix} Fritsche, 2:426-28.

^x Ibid., 2:426-28.

^{xi} The 1890 Veterans Schedule confirms that Alonzo Pickle lived in Home Township, Brown County, Minnesota, and his post office was Golden Gate. His name was indexed as "Alonzo Picker" on Ancestry.com

^{xii} Fritsche, 2:427 and the 1895 state census, Sleepy Eye, Brown Co., MN, Alonzo H. Pickle. (The census was difficult to decipher, as a result Alonzo was Indexed as Alonzo H. Cush on Ancestry.com.)

^{xiii} Fritsche, 2:426-28.

^{xiv} Military Times Hall of Valor <http://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=130>

^{xv} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1925-MN-001718, Alonzo H. Pickle [*sic*].

^{xvi} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1923-MN-001683, Rhoda Jane Pickle.