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A Soldier of the North and South: The Remembrance Day Legacy of Minion Knott

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Abstract

For the third straight semester, I have returned to the *Killed at Gettysburg* project to chronicle the life and death of another soldier who lost his life in southern Pennsylvania. My personal interest in this project has not waned since I authored the first of my five profiles of Union soldiers in Dr. Carmichael's "Gettysburg in History and Memory" course in the spring of 2017. I firmly believe that no interpretation of the Battle of Gettysburg is complete without a strong understanding of the unique lives that were extinguished there. This reminds us all that the battle was fought by men with their own personalities, hopes, and dreams, rather than faceless chess pieces on a map, and promoting this mindset has become a key goal of mine. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Confederate Soldier, Killed at Gettysburg, Minion F. Knott

Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

A Soldier of the North and South: The Remembrance Day Legacy of Minion Knott

By [Ryan Bilger '19](#)

For the third straight semester, I have returned to the *Killed at Gettysburg* project to chronicle the life and death of another soldier who lost his life in southern Pennsylvania. My personal interest in this project has not waned since I authored the first of my five profiles of Union soldiers in Dr. Carmichael's "Gettysburg in History and Memory" course in the spring of 2017. I firmly believe that no interpretation of the Battle of Gettysburg is complete without a strong understanding of the unique lives that were extinguished there. This reminds us all that the battle was fought by men with their own personalities, hopes, and dreams, rather than faceless chess pieces on a map, and promoting this mindset has become a key goal of mine.

This semester, I faced a different challenge than those presented by my past projects. Our collective task for the fall 2018 cadre of soldiers was to profile Confederate soldiers, adding a greater diversity of narratives to the project. Admittedly, this initially posed some challenges for me. I am Pennsylvanian born and raised, and a Unionist through and through. Yet I knew I had to set aside my personal foibles in order to truly gain an appreciation of the Civil War as a whole, and I feel that it has made me a better as a historian to have done so. Another difficulty of studying Confederate soldiers comes in the relative lack of documentary evidence compared to men who fought for the Union. The excellent compiled service and pension records of men like Charles Phelps and Augustus van Horne Ellis, two of my past *Killed at Gettysburg* soldiers, were not to be found in this instance. However, in the course of my preliminary research, I came across one man with a story so captivating that I knew it had to be told. It is a story of tragedy, of evolving ideas, and of a state torn asunder by the cataclysm of civil war, one with a legacy that continues to this day. It is the story of Private Minion F. Knott, 1st Maryland Battalion, C.S.A.

Even after all the research I have conducted in these past three months, Minion Knott remains, in many ways, an enigma. He grew up in a state wracked by contradictions and shifting allegiances as Maryland teetered on the edge between North and South, with a wide gulf separating supporters of the Union and the Confederacy. Slavery remained legal in Maryland during the war, providing a further point of contention. Knott seems to embody these conflicted loyalties within his own life. He enters into the historical record at only two points. The first of these, originating in the spring of 1861, shows that he spent three months in a company of the Washington, D.C. Union militia, fighting to

protect the United States' capital. Considering his eventual turn to the Confederacy, this poses fascinating questions as to why he enlisted to serve both the North and the South.

Knott likely enlisted with the Maryland Confederates in the spring of 1863, joining veterans of the former 1st Maryland Infantry, C.S.A. He first saw battle at the Second Battle of Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley during Lee's army's march northward, and as part of Gen. Edward "Allegheny" Johnson's division of Ewell's II Corps, he participated in the attacks on Culp's Hill near Gettysburg on July 2 and 3, 1863. At some point on July 3, Knott was mortally wounded in the side. He may have received care on the battlefield from Maryland Union soldiers in a moment that exemplified both reconciliation and the great tensions that wracked this border state during the war, as the Federals likely felt a mixture of compassion for their fellow Marylanders and deep anger at the Confederates' decision to betray their country.

Minion Knott's second foray into documentary history comes in the form of the record of his death at the Union hospital facility known as Camp Letterman on August 24, 1863. He was only fifteen miles from his home state. However, due to administrative confusion and the hectic nature of the preparations for the new Soldiers' National Cemetery, Knott's remains were somehow labeled as those of a Union soldier. He now rests in the cemetery's Maryland section, a location intended to be off-limits to the Confederates of the Old Line State, amid the very same soldiers whom he and his comrades sought to kill.



Minion Knott's grave in the Soldier's National Cemetery.

Every November, Minion Knott's grave in the Soldiers' National Cemetery is decorated with the flag of the United States of America. Though he spent time in the Union forces, he died under the banner of a nation that sought to rip the United States in two, presenting a complicated contrast that characterizes his legacy. On Remembrance Day, he will be among those soldiers referenced in the various ceremonies and speeches, despite his status as a Maryland Confederate. His memory, to the majority of those who visit the National Cemetery, has been fully absorbed into that of the Union through his mistaken burial. Knott's sacrifice is honored in the same way as those of the soldiers at whom he aimed and fired his gun, a fact that infuriated many Federal veterans after the war.

This Confederate soldier, buried in one of the most sacred spaces within the Union, poses several questions that remain unanswered today. How would Minion Knott have felt about being laid to rest in a Federal national cemetery, where his legacy has been subsumed by that of the Union to all but the most intrepid visitors? What can his final resting place say about war and reconciliation in Civil War-era Maryland and the United States? Should greater efforts be made to highlight his difference as a Confederate, or should he be treated the same as all the dead of the National Cemetery, as an American soldier? On Remembrance Day, we should all ponder these questions as we reflect on the complex and intertwined legacies of the Civil War. These themes of a state and a nation ripped apart, of a man who took up arms for both the North and the South, and of a difficult reunion and attempts at reconciliation must all come to mind when we gaze upon the simple carved words "M.F. Knott Co. F Regt. 1" in the Maryland section of the Soldiers' National Cemetery.

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