

**Lead Daily Call  
December 9, 1946**

**'PROUDEST VETERAN IN AMERICA' RECEIVES  
PURPLE HEART MEDAL AT PRESENTATION**

Charles A. Windolph, 95-year-old war veteran and oldest living holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor, is as proud today as any soldier who ever wore the uniform of the United States Army.

At a ceremony at the home of Dr. and Mrs. G. C. Fehlman, 614 West Main, Mr. Windolph was awarded the Purple Heart medal for a wound received in the Battle of the Little Big Horn on June 26, 1876, a citation which had gone unnoticed by the war department until recently.\*

Colonel Paul W. Mapes, commanding officer of the South Dakota Military District and representing the Fifth Army, made the presentation in the presence of members of the immediate family, representatives of the Lead American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and of the Black Hills Reserve Officer Corps, and other guests.

**THE CITATION**

"This is a very pleasant duty to perform as ordered by the War Department," Colonel Mapes told the small gathering before the citation was read.

Lieutenant Colonel P. A. Shields, executive officer to Colonel Mapes, read the war department order which said:

**"By direction of the war department and the commanding general, fifth army, the officer in charge of the South Dakota Military District, Colonel Paul W. Mapes, U.S. Army, has been ordered to present the purple heart award to Mr. Charles A. Windolph of Lead, South Dakota.**

**"Mr. Windolph enlisted the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 1871, and served in the U.S. Army until the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 1883.**

**"As a member of Troop 'H', 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, he participated in the Battle of the Little Big Horn on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 1876, and it is for a wound received in this engagement, that the Purple Heart is awarded.**

**"The war department officially recognizes that Mr. Windolph is the oldest living holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor, an award previously made for extraordinary gallantry in action, and has directed that the present award be accomplished on the occasion of his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, December 9, 1946.**

**“On behalf of the commanding general of the Fifth army, the presenting officer extends congratulations to Mr. Windolph on this occasion of official recognition of a long life marked with gallant service to his country.”**

#### WINDOLPH PROUD

For Mr. Windolph the presentation was an outstanding occasion.

“I am the proudest man in America today. I want you to know that I appreciate this award very much,” Windolph said.

The aged veteran, although crippled, sat in a chair in front of the fireplace to receive the award. Before and after the ceremony he joked and chatted with the group which watched the presentation.

When a photographer’s flashbulb exploded during picture taking Mr. Windolph joked: “I’ve seen so much shooting that that doesn’t bother me much.”

The only decoration that Mr. Windolph wore at the presentation was the Congressional Medal of Honor, and this he had pinned over his left breast.

Members of the immediate family who were present were Dr. and Mrs. G. C. Fehlman, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Windolph of Buffalo, Mrs. George Halloran, Mrs. Marie Zuhr and daughter, Gretchen, and Frank Zuhr.

Representing the veterans organizations were Leonard Johnson of the VFW, Walter Ruzick Jr., of the American Legion, and Dr. Henry Davidson of the Black Hills Reserve Officer Corps. Official representative of the Homestake Mining Company was Kenneth Kellar.

The old veteran, telling about the wound which won him the belated Purple Heart, had this to say:

“I’ll always say it was a renegade cowpuncher who shot me. It was just a flesh wound and didn’t hurt me much.”

After being wounded Windolph stayed on his feet and carried out his mission of covering the water carriers, a mission which won him the Medal of Honor.

Windolph served 12 years in the army and said he became a civilian after that time because his wife felt the army was no place for a married man.

Windolph missed death 70 years ago because the long-haired and dashing Custer split his command to engage Sitting Bull’s horde of fighting Sioux. First Sergeant Windolph and his fellow troopers of Company H of the famed Seventh Cavalry went to the aid of Major Marcus Reno, who had been routed, while Custer and 276 men were being wiped out in

another sector on the Little Big Horn River in Eastern Montana. Relief arrived the next day and the siege was lifted.

Two days after Custer's death, Windolph and 14 other men from Company H visited the scene of the annihilation. In describing what they found Windolph says:

"The bodies were scattered all over the field and it was almost a mile square. We worked on a burial detail, interring the mutilated dead. Contrary to reports I've heard, Custer was not cut up and he was buried with the rest with a simple stick marker over his grave."

Justly proud of his Congressional Medal of Honor, Windolph nevertheless, says he was fortunate to get it.

"There were many more," he states, "whose heroic and brave stand deserved just as much recognition. It just happened that their acts didn't come to the attention of the officers who did the reporting. Many things are overlooked at a time like that but I will never forget their bravery."

No false modesty clutters Windolph's opinion of himself as a soldier, however. He unabashedly recalls:

"I was a great soldier in those days. I could do anything and frequently did."

\* - The Purple Heart was established by George Washington during the Revolutionary War. It fell out of use after the War for Independence. It was re-established in 1932. Therefore, it was not an oversight that Windolph didn't receive this award earlier as it did not exist during the Indian Wars period. It was allowed to be retroactively awarded upon application. Windolph is the only Little Big Horn Battle veteran to receive the Purple Heart.