

Charles Windolph Obituary – Deadwood Pioneer-Times, March 12, 1950

CUSTER SURVIVOR IS DEAD

Charles Windolph, 98, Dies Early Saturday Morning

Charles A. Windolph, 98-year-old veteran of the Battle of the Little Big Horn and the nation's oldest holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor, died at 3:30 o'clock Saturday morning in Lead. He had been in failing health for several months and critically ill about a week.

Death came to the old soldier three months and two days after he had a quiet observance of his 98th birthday at the home of his daughter and son-in-law, Dr. and Mrs. G.C. Fehlman, 614 West Main Street. He died at the Fehlman home.

LAST SURVIVOR

Windolph was the last known survivor of the famed Battle of the Little Big Horn on June 25 and 26, 1876 in which the dashing George A. Custer and five troops of the Seventh Cavalry were annihilated by plains Indians including the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe.

The aged soldier had won the Congressional Medal of Honor for completing a mission, despite a wound suffered during the battle which has gone down in history as "Custer's Last Stand".

Despite the wound, Windolph and three others completed a mission of covering other fellow soldiers who were seeking water for the wounded and dying. He has always maintained the wound was inflicted by a renegade cowpuncher.

It wasn't until three years ago – 70 years after he earned it – that Windolph was awarded the Purple Heart medal. The award was made on his 95th birthday by representatives of the Fifth Army of the South Dakota Military District, after the attention of the War Department was called to the aged soldier's achievements.

For Mr. Windolph, the Purple Heart presentation was an outstanding event. On that occasion he told the small gathering as medal was pinned to his lapel alongside the Medal of Honor: "I am the proudest man in America. I want you to know that I appreciate this award very much."

Windolph missed death on June 25, 1876 on the banks of the Little Big Horn River in Montana because General Custer split his command to engage the hostile camp.

WAS A PRIVATE

Windolph was a private at the time and his fellow troopers of companies H, K, and D of the Seventh Cavalry went to the aid of Major Marcus Reno who had been besieged in one

sector of the battlefield while Custer and his 200 men were being wiped out in another area.

Windolph claimed the defeat, one of the worst by the United States Army in plains history, could have been averted if Custer had not been a fool.

The old soldier, under the immediate command of Captain F.W. Benteen, was promoted to sergeant on the field of battle.

Two days after Custer's death, Windolph with other soldiers of Company H who still had their mounts visited the scene of the annihilation. All describing what they found, Windolph once commented: "The bodies were scattered all over the field and it was almost a mile square. The next day we worked on a burial detail, interring the mutilated dead. Contrary to reports I have heard, Custer was not cut up and was buried with the rest with a simple stick marker over his grave."

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

"There were many more 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."

Windolph, a native of Germany, came to the United States when he was 19 years old, and two months later enlisted in the army.

He served for 12 years, leaving the army in 1883 because his bride felt it "was not the place for a married man".

Most of his army career was spent in Dakota Territory. He was on the 1874 Custer Expedition to the Black Hills. Gold was discovered on that expedition, leading to the gold rush in 1876.

HOMESTAKE VETERAN

After he left the army, he came to Lead – then a booming frontier gold rush camp, and worked for the Homestake Mining Company for 49 years until he was pensioned 18 years ago.

Survivors are two daughters and a son including Mrs. P.L. Harms of Minneapolis who arrived in Lead Saturday afternoon, Mrs. G.C. Fehlman and Robert Windolph of Lead; a granddaughter, Mrs. Paul Metzen* of Lakeview, Ore., and three great grandchildren, Robert, Marcia Kay, and Patricia Metzen.

The family requests no flowers.

Funeral services will be held from St. Patrick's Catholic Church at 9:30 Tuesday morning with interment in the Black Hills National Cemetery at Ft. Meade.

Rosary services are set for 7:30 Monday evening at the chapel of the McColley Funeral Home.

* In Windolph's obituary that appeared in the Rapid City Journal on March 11, 1950, this name is spelled Metcen.