

## Sergeant Albert Walter McMillan

1862 – 1948

By Merrilee Carlson, Nathan Hale Chapter, DAR



- **Born:** October 13, 1862, Stillwater, Washington County, MN
- **Indian Campaigns**
- Enlisted: Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, August 15, 1887
- Unit Company E, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry
- Promoted to Sergeant Major on 31 December 1890
- Requested reduced rank to Private, April 23, 1891
- Mustered Out: September 21, 1892
- **Death:** October 2, 1948, Sacramento, California  
Buried Oakland Cemetery (50-14), St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota

### Early Years

Albert Walter McMillan was born along with his twin brother Thomas Erskine to Judge Samuel James Renwick McMillan and Harriet Elizabeth Butler. They had nine siblings. Thomas died at the age of 4. Albert outlived all of his siblings, dying in 1948.

An intelligent young man and son of a sitting senator, Albert McMillan studied at Princeton College and during his sophomore year was president of the class of 1884. In the summer of 1883, he worked as a clerk for the Senate Judiciary Committee but did not return to Princeton for his senior year. According to that college's annual, *The Nassau Herald*, "His restless spirit took him west for more 'action' than a college course afforded."

### War Years

McMillan's travels west saw him enlist in the Army at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, on August 15, 1887. He listed his age as twenty-five, birthplace as Baltimore, Maryland and profession as school teacher. Albert was assigned as a private in Captain Isley's E Troop, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry where the young man's intelligence and drive saw him quickly rise to the rank of sergeant in his troop and later, Sergeant Major of his Regiment.

The Regiment's Sergeant Major, Richard W. Corwine was killed along with 29 other soldiers on December 29, 1890 and Colonel Forsyth saw fit to recommend to the adjutant general of the Army that Albert fill the vacancy. A number of soldiers' actions on 29 December, particularly regarding dislodging Indians from the ravine, caught the attention of the officers of E Troop, especially two privates, Mosheim Feaster and Thomas Sullivan. On March 26, Sergeant Major McMillan and Sergeant William G. Austin, both of E Troop during the battle, provided depositions regarding the conduct of Sullivan and Feaster. On April 17 and 18, 1891, 1LT Horatio G. Sickel and 2LT Sedgwick Rice wrote recommendations not only for Sullivan and Feaster for the Medal

of Honor, but for three of their non-commissioned officers as well, including McMillan. Curiously, five days after Sickel recommended that McMillan be awarded a Medal of Honor, the regiment's Sergeant Major voluntarily requested that he be reduced to the rank of private. Regardless of McMillan's request for reduction, on May 5, Captain Isley and Colonel Forsyth endorsed Sickel's recommendation for a medal. The department commander, Brigadier General Wesley Merritt, forwarded the request on to the adjutant general with no endorsement, presumably because he played no role in the previous winter's campaign. The adjutant general's office prepared the following summation and forwarded it to the commanding general of the Army, Major General John M. Schofield, who recommended approval:

*"Case of Sergt. Albert W. McMillan, Troop E, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry  
For a medal of honor.*

*1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. H. G. Sickel, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavy., recommends this man for a medal of honor for conspicuous bravery at Wounded Knee, S.D., Dec. 29, 1890, as follows: Troop E being engaged, dismounted, with Indians concealed in a ravine, McMillan, by his coolness and bravery attracted the attention of his troop commander, rendering him much assistance by placing the men on the skirmish line in good positions, directing their fire and encouraging them by good example; he frequently (exposed) himself to close fire from the ravine in order to obtain an advantage over the concealed Indians and made every effort to dislodge them. Approved by the troop and regimental commanders and forwarded by the department commander.*

*Application appears to be made under A.R. 175, which says 'medals of honor will be awarded, by the President, to officers or enlisted men who have distinguished themselves in action.'*

*If awarded, the medal should be engraved as follows:*

*"The congress to Sergt. Albert W. McMillan,  
Troop "E", 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry,*

*For bravery at Wounded Knee Creek, S.D., Dec. 29, 1890"*

*4<sup>th</sup> Indorsement War Department. June 16<sup>th</sup> 1891. Let the medal of honor be issued. L. A. Grant (Lewis A. Grant) Assistant Secretary of War."*

Medal of Honor citation:

*Sergeant Albert Walter McMillan, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 29 December 1890, while serving with Company E, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, in action at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota. While engaged with Indians concealed in a ravine, Sergeant McMillan assisted the men on the skirmish line, directed their fire, encouraged them by example, and used every effort to dislodge the enemy. Awarded on 23 June 1891.*

In the spring of 1892, Private McMillan ran afoul of military justice. He had been arrested, convicted, and jailed for "using vile and insulting language to a lady." During this time he was listed as absent without leave from his unit and faced a general court martial upon his return to Fort Riley. He pled guilty and faced his sentence and

extended his service to “make good time” for the period in which he was absent without leave. He mustered out on September 21, 1892.

### **Post War Years**

Albert returned to St. Paul, Minnesota and entered the University of Minnesota where he earned a Bachelor of Law degree in 1894. He worked for West Publishing Company for a time as the legal editor. During this time he suffered a breakdown, what we would probably refer to now as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Before 1900 he moved to Blaine, Washington and later to Brawley, California. He fell on hard times and never recovered, working as hired man, teamster, farmer and truck driver.

During World War I, he served with the American Red Cross traveling to England in September 1918. Following WWI he returned to Los Angeles and eventually retired in Sacramento, California. Albert never married.

Albert Walter McMillan died in Sacramento on October 2, 1948. His body was returned to St. Paul where he was buried in a plot next to his father, mother and twin brother Thomas in Oakland Cemetery..



### **Bibliography/Sources:**

The following article contained detailed researched information and much was used in the above biography: Samuel L. Russell, “Sergeant Albert Walter McMillan, E Troop, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry – Conspicuous Gallantry”, *Army at Wounded Knee* (Sumter, SC: Russell Martial Research, 2013-2015, <http://wp.me/p3NoJy-d4>), updated 7 Dec 2014, accessed date. <https://armyatwoundedknee.com/2014/10/29/sergeant-albert-walter-mcmillan-e-troop-7th-cavalry-conspicuous-gallantry/>

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