

WILLIAM JOSEPH MCDERMOTT



William Joseph McDermott was born in July 1870 in Waseca Minnesota. He was the fifth of six children born to Patrick and Chloe McDermott. Based on 1880 census records, William had two older brothers, two older sisters, and one sister six years his junior.

As a child his family moved from Waseca to Kandiyohi County, near Green Lake, then eventually to the Village of Kandiyohi.

On 24 December, Christmas Eve, 1890, McDermott enlisted in the US Army, being assigned to a Cavalry regiment. He was to help relieve pressures from the Indian situations in Minnesota and the Dakotas. American policies were to move the Indians to reservations. With gold having been found in the Dakotas, and specifically the Black Hills, white settlers and people looking to make their fortunes were flocking to the area. Continued conflicts with the Indian people spark military involvement. The Indians didn't want to leave, as the land was their sacred land.

Days after he enlisted in the Army, one of the most infamous Indian war battles took place; Wounded Knee, at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

On 15 December 1890, forty three policemen surrounded the cabin of the Indian Chief Sitting Bull. He was being captured for transfer to the Indian agency at Pine Ridge. As he made his way out of the cabin under guard, a group of Sitting Bull's supporters began pushing for his release. As the Chief hesitated, one of the supporters pulled a rifle from under his blanket and fired at one of the guards, wounding him in the side. The guard, attempting to fire at his assailant, shot once, hitting Sitting Bull. Almost immediately after, another guard fired a bullet into The Indian Chief head, killing him.



US Postage stamp honoring Sitting Bull, released in the late 1980's. The death of the Indian was a spark that ignited the clash at Wounded Knee.

Due to the violence that ensued during the arrest of Sitting Bull, the US Army took every precaution when orders came to arrest then remaining Indians in the area. A group of 120 Men, and 230 women and children were intercepted, and placed in an area near a creek known as Wounded Knee.

As described in the Dee Brown book, "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee", the following morning, 29 December 1890, the people were gathered and ordered to surrender their weapons. After the Indians placed what weapons they offered and a search was made of their tepees, one lone warrior held his weapon in the air. It is said that he was saying how his Winchester rifle cost him a great deal of money and he didn't want to just hand it over. The man fired his weapon, and the soldiers immediately began to return fire on him, and on the rest of the people.

As the soldiers opened fire, men,. women and children fell to the bullets. all attempted to flee the onslaught of bullets. By the time the firing stopped, and estimated 300 of the original 350 men women and children were killed.

The Army lost 25 soldiers, and another 39 were wounded. It is believed that all dead were wounded by their own fire.

A blizzard moved in that evening, and the dead Indians laid where they fell. It would be weeks before cleanup of the battle would take place.

W J McDermott was assigned to Troop D of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment on 17 January 1891 at Smithfield South Dakota, en route to Fort Meade.

It was the Seventh Cavalry specifically that was involved in the battle of Wounded Knee, but McDermott's unit would have served a support role in the events after that battle.



Scene of the dead being buried after the battle of Wounded Knee. Although not on hand for the battle of Wounded Knee, McDermott would have witnessed the aftermath of the battle. (photo collected by McDermott, but original not in USMHC collection).

McDermott, during his time in the Fort Meade/Pine Ridge area, collected a number of photographs taken of the area of Pine Ridge and the aftermath of the Wounded Knee Massacre.

The following photos are some of the photographs collected by W J Mc Dermott, during his time in the Pine Ridge area. These are digital copies of the originals, as the original photographs were sold at auction to unknown individuals.



754. Graves of Soldiers who were killed at battle of Wounded Knee, Dec. 29th, 1890, Pine Ridge Agency, S. D., 30 in number.



Top Left Photo: The bodies of those killed at Wounded Knee laying out in the open field. Top Right: The graves of the Army Cavalry soldiers killed at Wounded Knee.

Above Left: Viewing Hostile Indian Camp. Above Right: Indian Warrior surrendering his rifle.

Right: Cattle ready to slaughter for the beef rations at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.



Left: Some of the Scouts that helped the US Army in the Dakotas in the "wars" against the Indian people.

By the time that McDermott arrived at Fort Meade, the guns had silenced from the battle of Wounded Knee. The bodies, however, remained laying out on the prairie. Due to the extreme cold of the winter, most of the dead had frozen. The priority for the US Army at the time was to care for the dead soldiers.

Although McDermott was not present for the battle itself, it is believed that he was at least a witness to the aftermath of the battle.

Life at Fort Meade during that time meant that they were on constant alert for hostile Indian activity. Although there is no information to note that McDermott was ever actually engaged in battle, all soldiers that served in this area during this time are considered to have served in connection with active Indian hostilities.



Troop Stables for "Troop D" at Fort Meade South Dakota



McDermott lived his time at Fort Meade in quarters like the one shown above. Large one-room barracks with rows of beds. The above photo is a digital scan of one of the many photos that he acquired during his time in South Dakota.

Serving in a mounted cavalry unit, he participated in numerous patrols, and preparing and worrying about an eventual Indian attack. They served drilling, and doing parade marching, practicing regular military tactics, and posting guard to offset any Indian attacks.

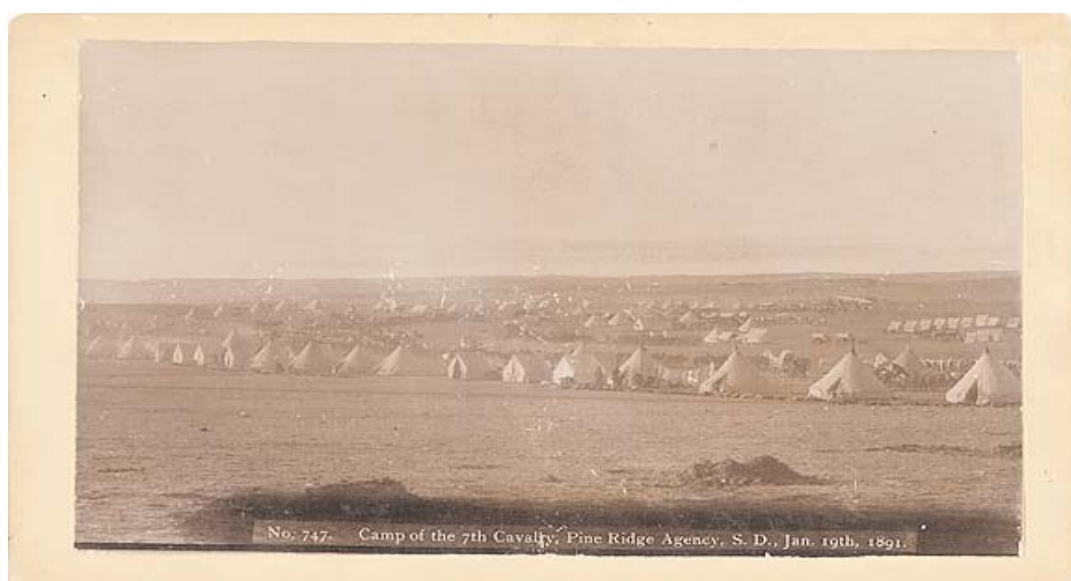


Digital scans of more of the photos WJ McDermott brought home from South Dakota.

Top, The eighth Cavalry on parade.

Middle: Camp of the 7th Cavalry near Pine Ridge

Bottom: Overview of the entire camp in South Dakota.



Another aspect of life in South Dakota was to provide support and security to the growing number of settlers to the area. Fort Meade is situated at the foothills of the Black Hills, just a few miles from Sturgis South Dakota. It was the first military outpost in the Black Hills, and was built in 1878 by the remaining 7th Cavalry forces after Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn.

When the Camp was established, it was to help protect that new booming gold towns of Lead and Deadwood. Many stages and wagon trains came through the Camp Meade area while enroute to Deadwood. They were also to keep the peace between the different tribes and the tribes with the settlers.

South Dakota was officially admitted to the union in November 1889. When McDermott arrived in the state, it was little more than a year old.

Between the settlements, that Dakotas consisted of wide open spaces which the Army patrolled.

Most of the Souix tribal members were living in the reservations, like the one at Pine Ridge.



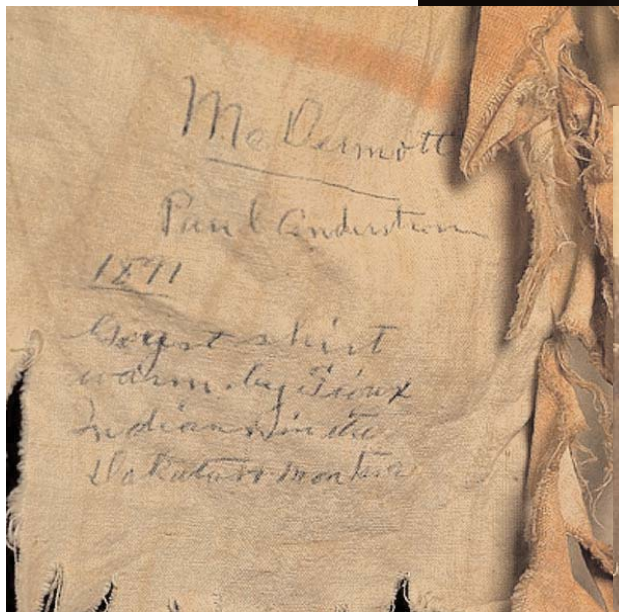
One of the things that lead to the Wounded Knee Massacre was the Indian Ghost Dance.

The Ghost dance was an Indian religious movement. The dance itself incorporated a regular circle dance as a part of its ritual.

The core of the Ghost Dance movement sought a peaceful end to the whiteman's expansion into the west. For the Sioux in South Dakota, they believed in Millenarianism, by which a large powerful force would wipe the Whiteman off their lands.



Ghost Shirt, brought home by McDermott. This items was sold at auction and is not a part of the collection. Photos from Auction house promotion



The increased practice of the Ghost Dance in the Pine Ridge area worried the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and helped instigate the crack down on Indian rituals in the area that lead up to the Wounded Knee attack.

One interpretation of the role of the Ghost Dance is shown above in the Ghost shirt brought home by McDermott. It was believed that Ghost shirts provided protection from the White man's bullets through spiritual power.



Marksmanship was important to a soldier during this time.

McDermott qualified as a Marksman on 1 October 1891. on 30 November 1892, he qualified as a Sharpshooter.

#219-21

TARGET YEAR OF 1891.

MARKSMAN'S CERTIFICATE, No. 236

Headquarters Department of DAKOTA

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SMALL-ARMS PRACTICE,

October 1, 1891.

Private Wm. J. McDermott, Troop D, 8th Regiment
of Cavalry, having made, under the rules prescribed in the
Firing Regulations for Small Arms for the United States
Army, the scores necessary for qualification as a MARKSMAN, will be
graded as such for the target year of 1891.

Wm. H. H. H.

Major 4th Cavalry

Inspector of Small-Arms Practice, Department of DAKOTA

3-412



The standard Cavalry weapon for McDermott was the Springfield Trapdoor Carbine, .45-70-405 rifle. This meant, .45 Caliber, 405 grain bullet, 70 grains of powder.

40

#219-22

TARGET YEAR OF 18 92.

SHARPSHOOTER'S CERTIFICATE, No. 38

Headquarters Department of Dakota

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SMALL-ARMS PRACTICE.

ST. PAUL, MINN. Nov. 30, 1892

Capt. William J. McDermott, Troop 2, 8th Regiment
of Cavalry, having made, under the rules prescribed
in the Firing Regulations for Small-Arms for the United States
Army, the scores necessary for qualification as a SHARPSHOOTER, is
graded as such for the target year of 1892

Wm. Morris
Major 1st Cavalry

APPROVED: W. Myrland
Brig. General, Commanding.

Inspector of Small Arms Practice, Department of Dakota.

RECORD OF PRACTICE.

KNOWN DISTANCE FIRING.				SHARPSHOOTER FIRING.						
Scores.				Total.	Range 100—			Total	Score.	
					Practic.	Tryng Figures.	Reading Figures.			
200 yds.	18	18	22 23 21	21	24	21	168			
300 yds.	17	20	22 20 20 20 21	20	160	First	6 10	1	73	
400 yds.	18	20	23 23 18 20 22	23	167	Second	18	—	72	
500 yds.	12	14	16 13 16 19 16	10	116	Third	6 10	1	73	
600 yds.	13	12	6 17 4	13	15	20	100	Fourth	4 15	80
Grand total of scores				1009.						

(3-70-23.)



The Commanding General over McDermott was General Nelson Miles. General Miles was a highly decorated Army officer from the Civil War. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for distinguishing himself at the Battle of Chancellorsville holding his command against repeated assaults, even though wounded in the neck and abdomen.

During the Indian wars, General Miles had been in command during the hunt for Geronimo in Arizona. Although the troops movements to track Geronimo down were not successful, Miles was in command when the surrender was negotiated.

the troubles with the Indians in the Dakota territory, and Miles' success in Arizona brought him to Fort Meade in advance of the Wounded Knee massacre. Although not directly involved in the incident, it is noted that he was critical of the Commanding Officer during that engagement.



Digital copy of a photograph of General Miles' mess tent that was one of the many brought home by William Joseph McDermott. General Miles is at the head of the table at the far end.

THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE

1st Regiment of Cavalry.



To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

Know Ye, That, reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities of James J. McDermott, I do hereby appoint him Corporal in Company C of the 1st Regiment of Cavalry in the service United States, to work as such from the 25th day of February one thousand eight hundred and ninety-two.
He is therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duty of Corporal by doing and performing all manner of things thereto belonging. And I do strictly charge and require all Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers under his command to be obedient to his orders as Corporal. And he is to observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time, as he shall receive from me, or the future Commanding Officer of the Regiment, or other Superior Officers, and Non-Commissioned Officers serving him, according to the rules and discipline of War. This Warrant to continue in force during the pleasure of the Commanding Officer of the Regiment for the time being.

Given under my hand at the Head Quarters of the Regiment, at Fort Verde, A. T. this twenty-fourth day of February in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-two.
By the Commanding Officer:
Wm. S. Carroll
Adjutant of the Regiment.

James J. McDermott
Lieut. Col. 1st Cavalry
Commanding the Regiment.

McDermott was promoted to Corporal on 24 February 1892, and to Sergeant on 2 November 1892.

THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE

1st Regiment of Cavalry.

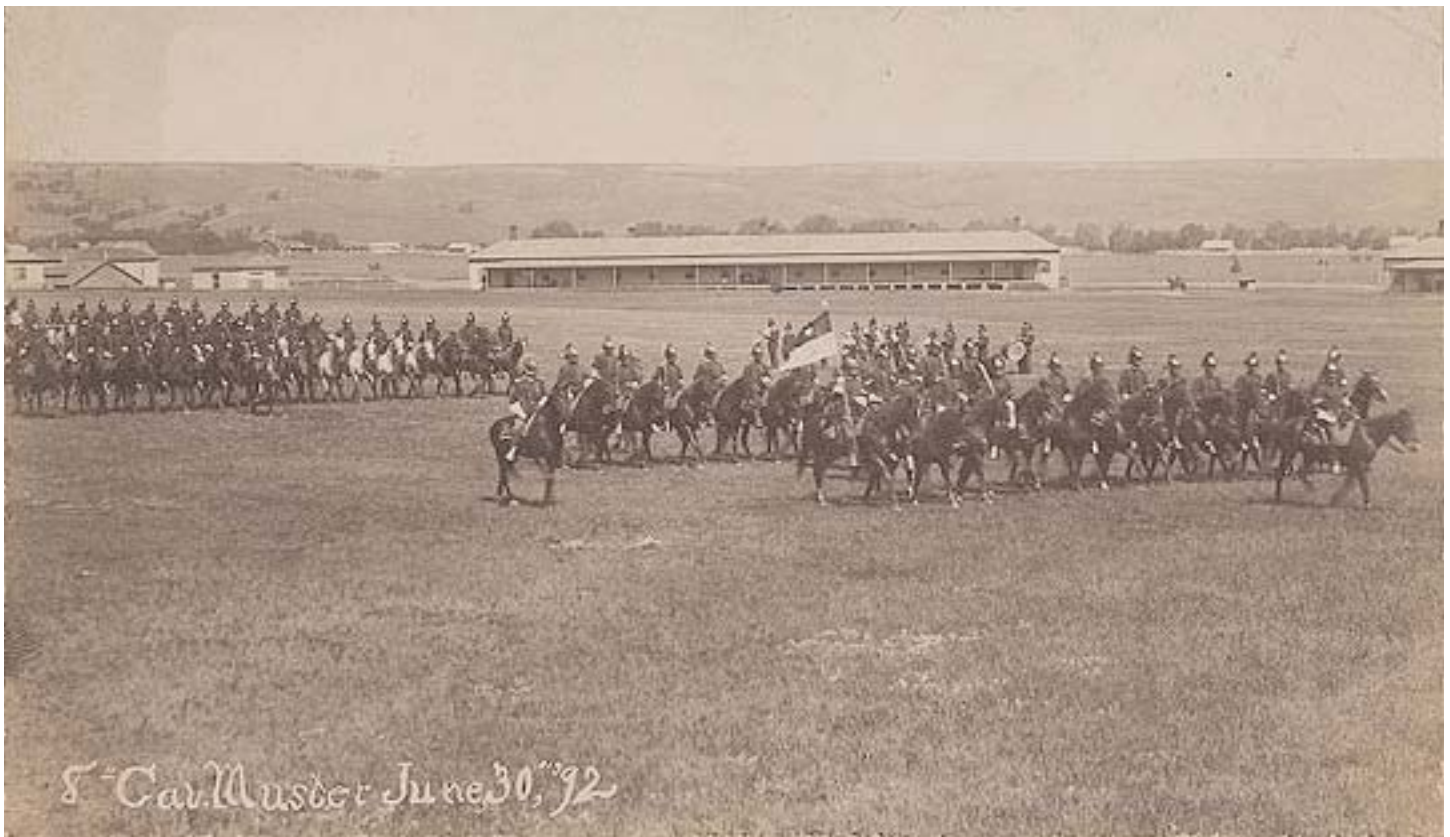


To all who shall see these presents, greeting:

Know Ye, That, reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities of James J. McDermott, I do hereby appoint him Sergeant in Company C of the 1st Regiment of Cavalry in the service United States, to work as such from the 2nd day of November one thousand eight hundred and 92.
He is therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the duty of Sergeant by doing and performing all manner of things thereto belonging. And I do strictly charge and require all Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers under his command to be obedient to his orders as Sergeant. And he is to observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time, as he shall receive from me, or the future Commanding Officer of the Regiment, or other Superior Officers, and Non-Commissioned Officers serving him, according to the rules and discipline of War. This Warrant to continue in force during the pleasure of the Commanding Officer of the Regiment for the time being.

Given under my hand at the Head Quarters of the Regiment, at Fort Verde, A. T. this second day of November in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and 92.
By the Commanding Officer:
Wm. S. Carroll
Adjutant of the Regiment.

C. H. Carlton
Colonel 1st Cavalry
Commanding the Regiment.



On 18 June 1893, WJ McDermott and Troop D of the 8th Cavalry was transferred to Fort Leavenworth Kansas. McDermott had an extended furlough in 1893, but reported with his Troop to Kansas.

Records state that McDermott was hospitalized twice while at Leavenworth.

On 31 December 1893, WJ again qualified as a Sharpshooter while in Leavenworth. His certificate (left) was signed by general Nelson Miles.

On 23 March 1894, Sergeant William Joseph McDermott was discharged from the US Army at Fort Leavenworth.

He had served three years and three months. After his discharge he returned to Kandiyohi MN.

When he arrived back to Kandiyohi, McDermott began a business creating a dog powered water pump. Along with a partner, they manufactured and distributed the pumps from Kandiyohi.

#219-23

TARGET YEAR OF 1893

SHARPSHOOTER'S CERTIFICATE, No. 108

Headquarters Department of the Missouri.
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SMALL-ARMS PRACTICE,

Chicago, Ill., December 31, 1893.

Sgt. W. J. McDermott, of Troop D, Regiment of 8 Cavalry, having made, under the rules prescribed in the Firing Regulations for Small-Arms for the United States Army, the scores necessary for qualification as a SHARPSHOOTER, is graded as such for the target year of 1893.

Nelson Miles
Captain 5th Infantry,

Inspector of Small-Arms Practice, Department of the Missouri.

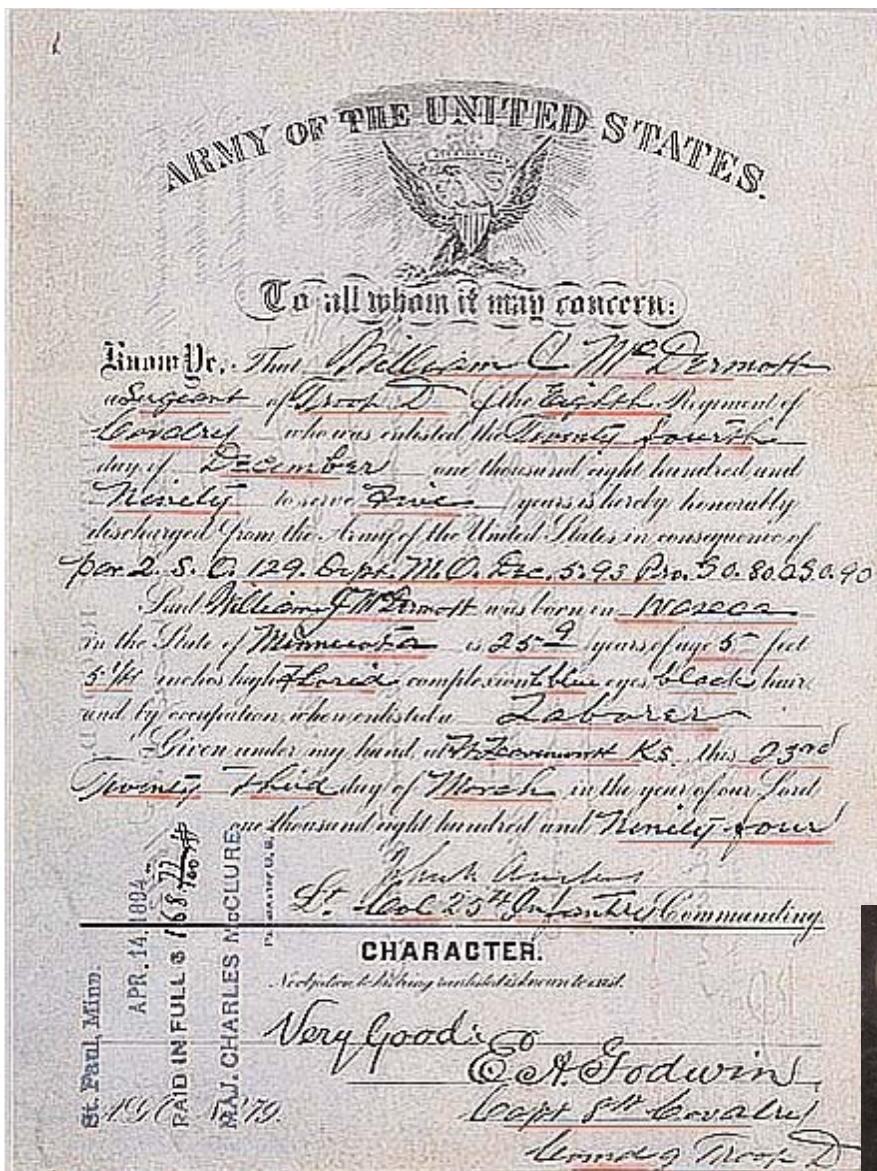
APPROVED: *Nelson Miles*
Major-General, Commanding.

RECORD OF PRACTICE.

KNOWN DISTANCE FIRING.					PAIDMENT FIRING.						
SCORES.					TOTAL.	HOW MADE.					
	1st	2d	3d	4th		PLACES.	Lying Figures.	Kneeling Figures.	Standing Figures.	PERCENTAGE.	SCORE.
200 yds.	17	21	12	22	76						
300 yds.	20	12	20	20	72	First.	0	10	7	0	61
500 yds.	21	25	24	21	91	Second.	3	10	2	0	61
600 yds.	19	21	19	8	67	Third.					
800 yds.	20	20	16	11	67	Fourth.					
						Grand total of scores 503					

(D-11-2 N.) 2-296

certified



McDermott's hat brass for Troops D & C of the 8th Cavalry. Donated by his daughter, Cathrine November 2001.



WJ's Belt Buckle and hat buttons, donated by his daughter Cathrine Braatz on November 9th and 10th, 2001.



View of Main street Kandiyohi around the time that McDermott arrived home after his time in the Army.



McDermott's Army Uniform. The uniform is not a part of the Collection. McDermott's daughter had gotten rid of the uniform prior to hearing about the collection. Photos from Auction house promotion for sale.



The Uniform was sold at Auction in 2008.



In the 1950's, McDermott's uniform was used in the local PTA event showing old clothes. A local man wore the uniform for the event. McDermott's daughter was involved in the PTA.

Early on after William Joseph McDermott arrived home to Kandiyohi, he was elected as one of the Village's town Constables.

As time progressed, he became a more and more active part of the City of Kandiyohi, and its growth.

On 14 March 1904, McDermott and two others were sworn in as judges to conduct a census for the Village of Kandiyohi. They were working on the process of Incorporating as an official City. On 17 March, he signed the papers declaring the City's desire to be incorporated.

An election was held on 3 May 1904, with McDermott acting as an election judge. 28 ballots were cast, with 26 "Yes" and 2 "No". McDermott was an early official for the beginning of the new City.

A story that his granddaughter had heard was that McDermott was one of the few people in the community to have an automobile. One day, a guy asked him to give him a ride to Willmar, about 6 miles west of Kandiyohi. Being a good natured and helpful person, McDermott did it. When he returned to town he found out that his rider was the man that was being sought for having robbed the city's bank. In the end, the robber was apprehended.

Eventually, McDermott moved away from the new city. He was married and began a family. While in Delano Minnesota, his daughter was born. In 1936, they moved back to Kandiyohi.

According to the family, WJ fell ill and was hospitalized in June 1936. It is thought that he was suffering complications from the contraction of Malaria while having been in the Army. He was a patient of the Veteran's Hospital at Fort Snelling. A VA claim was filed during this time.

On 17 April 1937, William Joseph McDermott passed away at the veterans hospital at Fort Snelling. He was 66 years old. He was buried at St. Patrick's Catholic Cemetery in Kandiyohi.

