

MEMORIAL DAY May 31, 2010
Remarks by Representative Norman L. Major

Memorial Day is a day to remember the dead who have given their lives for their country and also a time to pass on to the next generation stories of our dead veterans.

Today I want to tell you a story about a real Plaistow hero.

The Soldier's Monument was donated to our Town by Arthur G. Pollard, in memory of the sons of Plaistow who served the Union. It was dedicated with appropriate exercises, held under the auspices of the Village Improvement Society on September 12, 1908.

The name at the top at the top of this Civil War monument, facing the Elm Street side, reads Daniel G. George.

Daniel George was a young Plaistow man who served as an ordinary seaman on the warship "Chicopee". He is the only resident of Plaistow to ever be awarded the United States Congressional Medal of Honor, our nation's most prestigious honor given to a serviceman for exemplary effort during battle. I will share with you Daniel's story which will explain why he received the "Congressional Medal Of Honor".

Daniel George was born in Plaistow, N. H., on July 7, 1840, the son of Lyman P. and Eliza S. (Horton) George.

In 1857, Daniel, then seventeen years of age, joined a whaleship at New Bedford and set sail for a four years' adventure in the Arctic Ocean. He was instructed in the ways of a whaler's life through the school of hard knocks. He experienced the damage done by a whale that smashed the side of their vessel, he lived through the howling, fierce ocean storms, and he depended on others to rescue him from the freezing waters of the Arctic Ocean after his vessel was shipwrecked.

After four years of such experience, Daniel enlisted in the service of the United States Army. He enlisted on September 10, 1861, in Co. D, 1st Mass. Cavalry, which was commanded by Colonel Robert Williams and Captain A. H. Stevens.

Quickly, he was promoted to Orderly Sergeant in his regiment, was in many guerilla skirmishes, the battle of Antietam and twenty-one other general engagements. On June 17, 1863, he was taken prisoner at the Battle of Aldie, when fifty out of fifty-four men in his company were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The story of his capture says much about his persistence. He fractured his leg in a previous encounter at Hilton Head. During the Battle of Aldie, his horse was shot and killed and pinned his previously broken leg between the horse and the ground.

As a prisoner he was marched from Aldie to a Confederate prison in Stanton. He marched barefoot because the confederates stole the boots from Sgt George and the other prisoners. The last fifty miles of his journey his feet became so wounded and lacerated that every step was marked by blood. From Stanton he was taken to Libby prison. Ten days later he was removed, to Castle Thunder prison, and finally to Belle Isle prison, from thence he escaped, having induced his guard to run away with him. Their passage through the whole route was one of great excitement and danger. All day he lay in negro cabins, at night they pressed on in their dangerous march. After reporting at headquarters he was ordered to Annapolis and returned to his regiment.

When his term of enlistment expired he reenlisted, and every man but two of the company followed his influence, the only company of the regiment to reenlist as a whole.

Soon after, he received a lieutenant's commission in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, but having applied for a transfer to the navy he declined the commission.

He then became an able seaman in the United States Navy and was ordered to the Receiving Ship stationed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

While on the Receiving Ship a draft was made for men for the U. S. sloop of war Chicopee. During all of his service his firm friend, or chum (as George calls him) was Edward J. Houghton; they had resolved not to be separated. The draft for the Chicopee took Houghton but not Daniel, but he resolved to go with his friend if possible. They found one William Smith, an ordinary seaman, who had been drafted but preferred to remain where he was. An exchange of papers was made. Daniel George became William Smith, an ordinary seaman, and Smith became George, an able seaman, each to answer to the other's name. When the drafted men were called and William Smith was named, Daniel George stood as Smith, and became one of the crew of the Chicopee stationed in Albemarle sound, Capt. Arnold in command, and was made coxswain (the sailor in charge of the navigation and steering of the ship) of Lieut. Walker's boat.

The Confederates had built an ironclad ship called the Albemarle. This was a wooden ship covered with 4.5 inches of steel armor. She was launched on the Roanoke River in early April of 1864. Written in a description of the Rebel Ram Albemarle, by one who helped build her, "She was the most perfect vessel of her size ever constructed."

On the 19th of April the Albemarle engaged the heavily armed Union Warships, Southfield and Miami. The Union gunners were frustrated; they were scoring hit after hit with their heavy guns only to see the shots ricochet harmlessly off the Confederate man-of-war. The Southfield was sunk and the Miami damaged.

On April 20th the Albemarle bombarded the city of Plymouth forcing the city to surrender to the Confederates. 1600 Union prisoners and 25 pieces of artillery were taken as well as immense quantities of supplies. There was only one Rebel sailor killed, who had stuck his head out of one of the ram's portholes and been shot

through the brain by a musket ball. The Albemarle ruled the seaways along the Roanoke River giving the South free access to two of the richest counties in NC.

On May 5th, a Union fleet of seven warships engaged the Albemarle off the mouth of the Roanoke River.

"In this battle the Albemarle received over three hundred heavy shot and shell (including 100 pounders), was rammed by a vessel of thousands of tons burden, steaming at a speed of eleven miles an hour without being damaged by her, fighting single-handed, seven heavily armed Federal gun boats from 3 P. M. until dark, on a spring day, without losing a man, with no damage beyond a denting on her armor, and at her own pleasure returning to her moorings at Plymouth." All seven of the Union ships retreated damaged, some severely. The Federal Forces suffered heavily. One of their commanders said "She is too strong for us." This then was the Goliath. The Albemarle ruled the waterway for the next six months. The United States Congress called for an investigation.

A strong force of Union ships had to be kept from other tasks to guard against the Albemarle reappearance. Admiral Lee, commander of the North Atlantic fleet, and all, agreed 'the Ram must be destroyed'.

Upon learning of Commander Cushing's intended purpose of capturing or destroying the Albemarle, Daniel George, Houghton, and another ordinary seaman, volunteered to go with Cushing, the only men who volunteered unasked. Their request was granted. Thus George, Houghton, and thirteen others, including Lt. Com. Cushing, constituted the crew of one of the most daring, successful and important expeditions of any war, which was to destroy a mighty engine of war.

On the night of October 26, a group of volunteer sailors, including Seaman George, commanded by Lt. Cushing set out to capture or sink the Albemarle. They went up the Roanoke in a forty-foot open

picket boat which was powered with a steam engine and fitted with a cannon and a torpedo. They kept to the riverbanks and traveled in the swamps so not to be detected. Around three o'clock in the morning a sentry from the Albemarle detected them when they were within sight. With shots being fired all around them the small picket boat sped directly at the Albemarle and was launched over a sea of logs that were placed around the ironclad as protection. With the enemy within thirty feet and firing directly at them, the crew had to stand on the bow of the boat and bravely raise, lower, launch and fire the torpedo. The torpedo immediately blew a six-foot hole in the side of the Albemarle which caused the previously indestructible vessel to sink. The blast from the torpedo also destroyed Seaman George's boat and propelled each of the crew members into the water. Lt. Cushing and one other seaman made it back to the Union vessels. The rest of the crew was either killed or taken prisoner.

Thrilling indeed, is the story in which Seaman George (doubted by none), himself told of how he sat on the bow of the picket boat with his friend Houghton and Lt. Cushing. Then at Cushing's order to lower the torpedo, Daniel and Houghton quickly managed the wrench, Houghton detached it from the end of the spar, which he did by pulling his lanyard (it is a length of cord or wire with a hook at the end used to fire an artillery piece). This left the torpedo afloat under the bottom of the ram, several feet under water, but not wholly separated from the boat, for Daniel still held it by his lanyard. Daniel's lanyard was a small cord attached to the mechanism, which, when pulled, would explode the torpedo. Daniel held the lanyard tight and awaited the final order by Lt. Cushing to pull the lanyard which would explode the deadly engine of destruction.

While he believed that this action would be instant death to every man in the crew, he obeyed the order without any hesitation. Cushing and Daniel pulled their lanyards together. In another instant they, their boat, and their comrades, were being hurled over

logs, through the air in every direction, into the river, some thirty feet away. He says there existed not a doubt in his mind that he had pulled his last earthly rope, but immediately, however, he found that he was not dead, but in the Roanoke River, and that he had one more effort for life, which he did by swimming to where he thought the shore to be. He was seriously impeded by the weight of his sidearm, sabre, ammunition, and a heavy peajacket, with pockets full of hand grenades. He fought to rid himself of this heavy load which he found near impossible. Then, as if to prove the old adage true that "fortune favors the brave," he touched a log, and, clinging on with one hand, he divested himself of useless arms and ammunition. He was soon captured again and dragged, with ten of his brave comrades to the shore as prisoners and taken to Plymouth, and afterward to Salisbury, where they remained until they were released at the end of the war.

It has been said that one Southerner was a match for several Yankees, but on this occasion of sending these eleven boys to Salisbury prison, it required one hundred rebel soldiers fully armed and equipped, to do the simple duty of escorting them.

The horrors of that prison have been often related, but never realized until we listened to the tale of one who has experienced the horrors and miseries endured by the victims.

After five months in that dreadful den, George was released among a ragged, starving multitude of 2,000 wretched, emaciated (abnormally thin) men, who were permitted to once more look upon beautiful nature, and walk with freedom the soil of their native land. When he entered that fatal enclosure there were 10,000 men strong in their courage, but death had taken 8,000 from the ranks.

Daniel George rejoined his messmates, who gladly received him on board the U. S. sloop of war Chicopee, where he remained until the 17th of June, 1866, when he returned to his childhood scenes.

Daniel married Miss Lizzie Beardsley of Exeter, N. H. They had ten children (eight sons and two daughters) born between 1868 and 1887. He was a farmer and lived in Derry, NH in 1880, Lawrence, MA in 1900 and Merrimac, MA in 1910.

He died February 26, 1916 and is buried in the cemetery in Merrimac, MA.

One of his sons, named Daniel G. George, according to the 1920 census was living in Haverhill, MA, age 42, employed as a shoe maker.

In Report No. 157, of the 2d Session of the 44th Congress of the United States, the committee stated that " the Rebel Ram Albemarle was destroyed by a torpedo boat under command of Lieut. W. M. Cushing, on the night of Oct. 27, 1864,at Plymouth, N. C.

This report says, "Lieut. Cushing and his men received the thanks of Congress on Dec. 20th, 1864." They were signed by Schuyler Colfax and Abraham Lincoln.

In Report No. 849, of the 47th Congress in the Senate of the United States, we read, "Lieut. Cushing, the pride of the American Navy." "Daniel G. George and W. B. Cushing pulled the lanyards which immortalized them both."

In the same Congressional Report an honorable senator is made to say, "The romance of war has seldom developed a more extraordinary character, and never has exhibited more elevated though unconscious patriotism and sublime courage than Daniel G. George."

This report from Congress was to the fact of Mr. George having been paid prize money for his aid in capturing the Albemarle, and led to attacks upon his claims which were silenced by the following

letter which was written to sustain the rights of Daniel G. George " alias Bill Smith."

Cambridge University, March 21, 1883.

I recognize this day Mr. William Smith, whom I have not seen since 1866, as the William Smith who served with me on board the U. S. Ship Chicopee as an ordinary seaman in the years 1864, 1865, 1866.

He is genuine. During my association with him he won the reputation of being an honest, faithful, and brave man, and during my term of service with him he received from the U. S. Navy Dept. from my hands, as the Executive Officer of the Chicopee, a Medal of Honor for an act of gallantry performed on Oct. 27, 1864, in participating in the destruction of the Rebel Ram Albemarle.

Very respectfully,

*A. R. McNair,
Lt. Com. U. S. Navy.*

The following is the paper which accompanied the Medal of Honor handed to Mr. George by Lt. Com. McNair of the U. S. Navy.

"Forwarded Mar. 15, 1865. I. B. Montgomery, Commandant Navy Department, Washington. I have the pleasure of transmitting herewith the Medal of Honor awarded to you by the Secretary of the Navy, in General Orders No. 45, dated Dec. 31, 1864, for gallant and meritorious conduct while serving on picket boat which destroyed the Rebel Ram Albemarle, at Plymouth, Oct. 27, 1864.

Please acknowledge the receipt,

Very respectfully,

G. Wells, Secretary of the Navy.

William Smith, Seaman,

Washington Navy Yard."

As a result of the sinking of the Albemarle the Union fleet was able to take control of the Roanoke River. The next day the city of Plymouth was recaptured. President Abraham Lincoln sent congratulations and on December 31, 1864 the Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded to this brave crew of sailors.

Daniel G. George is a hero's hero. He served his country well. He was willing many times to face danger and lay down his life for his country. Without any hesitation he met and overcame danger head-on.

- **As a sailor on a whaleship, he was tossed into the sea a number of times.**
- **In the Army, Daniel George had seen severe army service as a member of the First Massachusetts Cavalry in a number of battles and skirmishes, and endured many hardships, including wounds received in battle and imprisonment in the notorious Libby and Belle Isle Rebel prisons (Libby Prison is generally regarded as second in notoriety only to Andersonville Prison in Georgia - Belle Isle Prison: From fifteen to twenty and twenty-five die every day and are buried just outside the prison with no coffins- nothing but canvas wrapped around them).**
- **In the Navy as an ordinary seaman he volunteered to accompany Lieutenant Cushing upon the expedition against the Albemarle, and again taken as a prisoner of war and**

survived the death camp at notorious Civil War Salisbury Prison. He gave more to his country than any of us can conceive.

Because of Daniel George, the Town of Plaistow will forever be known as the home of one of the most honorable heroes of our nation.

He is a hero, and today, Plaistow and our nation reveres his memory by unveiling this special plaque recognizing Seaman Daniel G. George as a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. It is now and forever will be located on the front side of the Soldier's Monument for all to see as a lasting tribute to our hero who served his country and our community with distinction.

PLAQUE UNVAILING

Tom Cullen and Roy Jeffreies, two WWII veterans will unveil the MEDAL OF HONOR PLAQUE honoring Daniel G. George.

Now that we have forever memorialized Seaman George with this plaque, perhaps in the future we can also honor him with the naming of a street, a bridge or a community structure.

Daniel G. George – I salute you as a Sailor, a Cavalryman, a Seaman and as a Citizen.