

ROBERT SMALLS.

APRIL 30, 1896.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

Mr. BAKER, of Kansas, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany H. R. 1874.]

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 1874) to place the name of Robert Smalls on the pension roll, having carefully examined the evidence, report:

Robert Smalls, the beneficiary of this bill, on the night of May 12, 1862, assisted by seven other contrabands, took the Confederate steamboat *Planter* from the wharf at Charleston, S. C., and carried her safely past the forts outside and turned her over to the officers of the blockading squadron. He was then employed as a pilot in the United States Navy, and later as a pilot in the employ of the Quartermaster's Department and as captain of the *Planter* until the end of the war. No record of his having been commissioned as captain can be found, but the records show that he served and was recognized and paid as such. He claimed and was allowed a pension under act of June 27, 1890, but under recent construction of that act, as set forth in the Bennett decision, he was dropped from the rolls on the ground that his was not a pensionable service under said act.

This committee by reporting and the House by passing the bill (H. R. 8271) have declared that such service as his while a pilot is pensionable under the act of June 27, 1890, but your committee are of opinion that such recognition is not adequate for the valuable services rendered by this brave man and gallant officer, but hold that he should be pensioned at total of rank of a captain in the Navy. They therefore recommend that the bill be amended by striking out the word "twenty-five," in line 6, and inserting in lieu thereof the word "thirty," and that as amended the bill do pass.

Appended is a statement made up from the official records, which shows the eminently valuable services rendered to the Government during the war by Robert Smalls.

SERVICES OF ROBERT SMALLS.

On May 13, 1862, the Confederate steamboat *Planter*, the special dispatch boat of General Ripley, the Confederate post commander at Charleston, S. C., was taken by Robert Smalls under the following circumstances from the wharf at which she was lying, carried safely out of Charleston Harbor, and delivered to one of the vessels of the Federal fleet then blockading that port:

On the day previous, May 12, the *Planter*, which had for two weeks been engaged

in removing guns from Coles Island to James Island, returned to Charleston. That night all the officers went ashore and slept in the city, leaving on board a crew of eight men, all colored. Among them was Robert Smalls, who was virtually the pilot of the boat, although he was only called a wheelman, because at that time no colored man could have, in fact, been made a pilot. For some time previous he had been watching for an opportunity to carry into execution a plan he had conceived to take the *Planter* to the Federal fleet. This, he saw, was about as good a chance as he would ever have to do so, and therefore he determined not to lose it. Consulting with the balance of the crew, Smalls found that they were willing to cooperate with him, although two of them afterwards concluded to remain behind. The design was hazardous in the extreme. The boat would have to pass beneath the guns of the forts in the harbor. Failure and detection would have been certain death. Fearful was the venture, but it was made. The daring resolution had been formed, and under command of Robert Smalls wood was taken aboard, steam was put on, and with her valuable cargo of guns and ammunition, intended for Fort Ripley, a new fortification just constructed in the harbor, about 2 o'clock in the morning the *Planter* silently moved off from her dock, steamed up to North Atlantic Wharf, where Smalls's wife and two children, together with four other women and one other child, and also three men, were waiting to embark. All these were taken on board, and then, at 3.25 a. m., May 13, the *Planter* started on her perilous adventure, carrying nine men, five women, and three children. Passing Fort Johnson, the *Planter's* steam whistle blew the usual salute and she proceeded down the bay. Approaching Fort Sumter, Smalls stood in the pilot house leaning out of the window, with his arms folded across his breast, after the manner of Captain Relay, the commander of the boat, and his head covered with the huge straw hat which Captain Relay commonly wore on such occasions.

The signal required to be given by all steamers passing out was blown as coolly as if General Ripley was on board, going out on a tour of inspection. Sumter answered by signal, "All right," and the *Planter* headed toward Morris Island, then occupied by Hatch's light artillery, and passed beyond the range of Sumter's guns before anybody suspected anything was wrong. When at last the *Planter* was obviously going toward the Federal fleet off the bar, Sumter signaled toward Morris Island to stop her. But it was too late. As the *Planter* approached the Federal fleet a white flag was displayed, but this was not at first discovered, and the Federal steamers, supposing the Confederate rams were coming to attack them, stood out to deep water. But the ship *Onward*, Captain Nichols, which was not a steamer, remained, opened her ports and was about to fire into the *Planter*, when she noticed the flag of truce. As soon as the vessels came within hailing distance of each other the *Planter's* errand was explained. Captain Nichols then boarded her, and Smalls delivered the *Planter* to him. From the *Planter* Smalls was transferred to the *Augusta*, the flag-ship off the bar, under the command of Captain Parrott, by whom the *Planter*, with Smalls and her crew, was sent to Port Royal, to Rear-Admiral Du Pont, then in command of the Southern squadron.

Captain Parrott's official letter to Flag-Officer Du Pont and Admiral Du Pont's letter to the Secretary of the Navy are appended hereto.

Captain Smalls was soon afterwards ordered to Edisto to join the gunboat *Crusader*, Captain Rhind. He then proceeded in the *Crusader*, piloting her and followed by the *Planter*, to Simmons Bluff, on Wadmalaw Sound, where a sharp battle was fought between these boats and a Confederate light battery and some infantry. The Confederates were driven out of their works, and the troops on the *Planter* landed and captured all the tents and provisions of the enemy. This occurred some time in June, 1862.

Captain Smalls continued to act as pilot on board the *Planter* and the *Crusader* and as blockading pilot between Charleston and Beaufort. He made repeated trips up and along the rivers near the coast, pointing out and removing the torpedoes which he himself had assisted in sinking and putting in position. During these trips he was present in several fights at Adams Run, on the Dawho River, where the *Planter* was hotly and severely fired upon; also at Rockville, Johns Island, and other places. Afterwards he was ordered back to Port Royal, whence he piloted the fleet up Broad River to Pocotaligo, where a very severe battle ensued. Captain Smalls was the pilot on the monitor *Keokuk*, Captain Ryan, in the memorable attack on Fort Sumter on the afternoon of the 7th of April, 1863. In this attack the *Keokuk* was struck ninety-six times, nineteen shots passing through her. She retired from the engagement only to sink on the next morning near Light-House Inlet. Captain Smalls left her just before she went down and was taken with the remainder of the crew on board of the *Ironsides*. The next day the fleet returned to Hiltonhead.

When General Gillmore took command Smalls became pilot in the quartermaster's department in the expedition on Morris Island. He was then stationed as pilot of the *Stono*, where he remained until the United States troops took possession of the south end of Morris Island, when he was put in charge of Light-House Inlet as pilot.

Upon one occasion, in December, 1863, while the *Planter*, then under Captain Nickerson, was sailing through Folly Island Creek the Confederate batteries at Secessionville opened a very hot fire upon her. Captain Nickerson became demoralized and left the pilot house and secured himself in the coal bunker. Smalls was on the deck, and finding out that the captain had deserted his post, entered the pilot house, took command of the boat, and carried her safely out of the reach of the guns. For this conduct he was promoted by order of General Gillmore, commanding the Department of the South, to the rank of captain, and was ordered to act as captain of the *Planter*, which was used a supply boat along the coast until the end of the war. In September, 1866, he carried his boat to Baltimore, where she was put out of commission and sold.

Besides the daring enterprise of Captain Smalls in bringing out the *Planter*, his gallant conduct in rescuing her a second time, for which he was made captain of her, and his invaluable services to the Army and Navy as a pilot in waters where he perfectly knew not only every bank and bar, but also where every torpedo was situated, there are still other elements to be considered in estimating the value of Captain Smalls's services to the country. The *Planter*, on the 13th of May, 1862, was a most useful and important vessel to the enemy. The loss of her was a severe blow to the enemy's service in carrying supplies and troops to different points of the harbor and river fortifications. At the very time of the seizure she had on board the armament for Fort Ripley.

Report of Flag-Officer Du Pont.

FLAG-SHIP WABASH,
Port Royal Harbor, South Carolina, May 14, 1862.

SIR: I inclose a copy of a report from Commander E. G. Parrott, brought here last night by the late rebel steam tug *Planter*, in charge of an officer and crew from the *Augusta*. She was the armed dispatch and transportation steamer attached to the engineer department at Charleston, under Brigadier-General Ripley, whose barge, a short time since, was brought out to the blockading fleet by several contrabands.

The bringing out of this steamer, under all the circumstances, would have done credit to anyone. At 4 o'clock in the morning, in the absence of the captain, who was on shore, she left her wharf close to the Government office and headquarters, with Palmetto and Confederate flags flying, passed the successive forts, saluting as usual by blowing her steam whistle. After getting beyond the range of the last gun she quickly hauled down the rebel flags and hoisted a white one.

The *Onward* was the inside ship of the blockading fleet in the main channel, and was preparing to fire, when her commander made out the white flag. The armament of the steamer is a 32-pounder, or pivot, and a fine 24-pounder howitzer. She has, besides, on her deck four other guns, one 7-inch rifled, which were to have been taken the morning of the escape to the new fort on the Middle Ground. One of the four belonged to Fort Sumter, and had been struck in the rebel attack on the fort on the muzzle. Robert, the intelligent slave and pilot of the boat who performed this bold feat so skillfully, informed me of this fact, presuming it would be a matter of interest to us to have possession of this gun. This man, Robert Smalls, is superior to any who have come to our lines, intelligent as many of them have been. His information has been most interesting and portions of it of the utmost importance.

The steamer is quite an acquisition to the squadron by her good machinery and very light draft. The officer in charge brought her through St. Helena Sound and by the inland passage down Beaufort River, arriving here at 10 o'clock last night.

On board the steamer when she left Charleston were 8 men, 5 women, and 3 children. I shall continue to employ Robert as a pilot on board the *Planter* for the inland waters, with which he appears to be very familiar. I do not know whether, in the views of the Government, the vessel will be considered a prize; but, if so, I respectfully submit to the Department the claims of this man Robert and associates.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. F. DU PONT,
Flag-Officer, Commanding, etc.

Hon. GIDEON WELLES,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D. C.

UNITED STATES STEAMSHIP AUGUSTA,
Off Charleston, May 13, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that the rebel armed steamer *Planter* was brought out to us this morning from Charleston by eight contrabands, and delivered

up to the squadron. Five colored women and three children are also on board. She carried one 32-pounder and one 24-pounder howitzer, and has also on board four large guns, which she was engaged in transporting.

I send her to Port Royal at once, in order to take advantage of the present good weather. I send Charleston papers of the 12th, and the very intelligent contraband who was in charge will give you the information which he has brought off.

I have the honor to request that you will send back, as soon as convenient, the officer and crew sent on board.

I am, respectfully, etc., your obedient servant,

E. G. PARROTT,

Commander and Senior Officer present.

Flag Officer S. F. DU PONT,
Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, D. C., January 3, 1863.

SIR: Your communication of the 26th ultimo, in relation to your services on the steamer *Planter* during the rebellion, and requesting copies of any letters from General Gillmore and other officers on the subject, has been received.

The records of this office show that the name of Robert Smalls is reported by Lieut. Col. J. J. Ellwell, Hiltonhead, S. C., as a pilot, at \$50 per month, from March 1, 1863, to September 30, 1863; and from October 1, 1863, to November 20, 1863, at \$75 per month.

He was then transferred to Capt. J. L. Kelly, assistant quartermaster, November 20, 1863, by whom he was reported as pilot from November 21 to November 30, 1863. He is reported by that officer in same capacity from December 1, 1863, until February 29, 1864, at \$150 per month.

The name of Robert Smalls is then reported by Captain Kelly as captain of the steamer *Planter*, at \$150 per month, from March 1, 1864, until May 15, 1864, when transferred to the quartermaster in Philadelphia.

He is reported by Capts. C. D. Schmidt, G. R. Orme, W. W. Van Ness, and John R. Jennings, assistant quartermasters at Philadelphia, as captain of the *Planter*, at \$150 per month from June 20, 1864, to December 16, 1864, when transferred to Capt. J. L. Kelly, assistant quartermaster, Hiltonhead, S. C., by whom he is reported to January 31, 1865.

From February 1, 1865, he is reported as a "contractor, victualing and manning the steamer *Planter*."

I respectfully inclose herewith a copy of a letter, dated September 10, 1862, from Capt. J. J. Ellwell, chief quartermaster, Department of the South, in relation to the capture of the steamer *Planter*, which is the only one found on file in this office on the subject.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ALEX. J. PERRY,
Deputy Quartermaster-General, U. S. A.,
Acting Quartermaster-General.

Hon. ROBERT SMALLS,
Member of Congress, Washington, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF QUARTERMASTER,
Hiltonhead, S. C., September 10, 1862.

GENERAL: I have this day taken a transfer of the small steamer *Planter*, of the Navy. This is the Confederate steamer which Robert Smalls, a contraband, brought out of Charleston on the 13th of May last. The Navy Department, through Rear-Admiral Du Pont, transfers her, and I receipt for her just as she was received from Charleston. Her machinery is not in very good order, and will require some repairs, etc.; but this I can have done here. She will be of much service to us, as we have comparatively no vessels of light draft. I shall have her employed at Fort Pulaski, where I am obliged to keep a steamer.

Please find inclosed a copy of the letter of Rear-Admiral Du Pont to General Brannan in regard to the matter.

I am, General, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. J. ELLWELL,
Captain and Assistant Quartermaster.