

January 15, 2009 Remarks about Benjamin Drummond Made by Former Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates

“Benjamin Drummond was born a free man in New York in 1843, and at the age of 18 he enlisted in the Navy. While serving aboard the USS Morning Light in the Gulf of Mexico, he was shot three times and was taken prisoner. After a miraculous escape and return to Union lines, he re-enlisted in 1864.

When his war wounds failed to heal properly, he became the first patient of any color at the Old Naval Hospital on Capitol Hill. Drummond was discharged in 1868, and years later received a disability pension of \$4 a month, just over a dollar per gunshot wound.

This was less than half the amount normally allotted for whites. Drummond fought for an increase, and he eventually received a lump-sum payment of \$210 just before his death. His wife then began her fight for what was then called a widow's pension.”

The Drummonds' struggle for what they were due presaged, both literally and figuratively, the promissory note to which Dr. King referred from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial nearly a century later," Gates said. "There, in his words, he came to cash the check of freedom and equality that for too long had been returned marked 'insufficient funds.'