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A century later, World War I hero from Weymouth is hailed again



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Ralph Talbot School students Dishika Yadav, left, and Owen Eboh help Weymouth Mayor Robert Hedlund carry a new plaque that honors the school's namesake, a World War I hero. - Tom Gorman/For The Patriot Ledger

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WEYMOUTH -- Ralph Talbot Primary School students dressed in red, white and blue and waving small American flags gathered with veterans and town officials to see the unveiling of a bronze marker commemorating the 100th anniversary of Weymouth native Ralph Talbot receiving the Medal of Honor.

George Pontes, the town's director of veterans services, told the students that they "should be proud of your school and the person it's named after."

Members of the Weymouth Veterans Council brought in an American flag before the school's third-graders sang national anthem and Pontes, Principal Nate Thorsteinson and Hedlund gave speeches.

"He's a really important person and he did a lot of interesting things in his short life," Thorsteinson told the students. "He did a lot of great things, and I know all of you can do great things too."

In 1917, Ralph Talbot enlisted in the Navy and became an aviator. After eight months in the Navy, he resigned and enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in the hopes of increasing his chances of being stationed overseas. He was made a second lieutenant in May of 1918.

On Oct. 8, 1918, he and his gunner, Robert Robinson, were attacked by nine enemy scout planes. The two escaped and managed to shoot down one of their attackers. On Oct. 14, Talbot and Robinson became separated from their squadron while on a raid over Pittem, Belgium, and were attacked by 12 enemy planes. They shot down one of the enemy planes despite Robinson being shot several times and their plane's engine failing. Talbot managed to keep the plane aloft in the air long enough to deliver his wounded gunner to a hospital.

Talbot died just 11 days later when his plane crashed during an engine check. He was 21 years old.

Since his death, Talbot has been memorialized several ways in Weymouth and beyond. In 1936, the destroyer USS Ralph Talbot was named in his honor. The Ralph Talbot Primary School, Ralph Talbot Street in Weymouth and the Ralph Talbot Amphitheater at the Weymouth Civic Center all bear his name.

During his speech, Hedlund pointed out that five Medal of Honor recipients have come from Weymouth, more than any other community in the United States.

Later, he said honoring local heroes like Talbot contributes to Weymouth's strength and well-being. He said instilling pride in Weymouth's history goes hand in hand with making physical improvements to the town like fixing roads. Having Talbot as a role model can also have a positive impact on the Talbot School's students, he said.

"I think if kids can take pride in the school that they attend, it helps the educational environment, too," Hedlund said.

Pontes told the children that Talbot and other Medal of Honor recipients are heroes of the highest caliber.

"People like Ralph Talbot helped end the war and helped save lives, even though in doing that he gave up his own," he said.