ALONZO CUSHING MEDAL OF HONOR CELEBRATION
MCCLURG MUSEUM, WESTFIELD, NY
1 P.M. JUNE 13, 2015
Jessica Loring, First cousin, three times removed – Alonzo H. Cushing

TOPIC

It is a great honor to speak on behalf of ALONZO CUSHING and his COUSINS.

TOPIC

I want to thank the McClurg Museum for making this wonderful celebration of ALONZO’S life and heroism possible.

And a very special thanks to JOHN PAUL WOLFE, the Museum Curator, whose friendship and contact with SENATOR SCHUMER and his Aide JORDAN NICHOLSON, made it possible for our family to receive ALOZO’S Medal of Honor as my Aunt HELEN LORING ENSIGN, is ALONZO’S closest living relative.

TOPIC:

OUR FAMILY HAS BELIEVED, FROM THE DAY WE FIRST LEARNED THAT WE WOULD RECEIVE THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR ALONZO, that THE MEDAL TRULY BELONGS TO OUR NATION. It should not reside forgotten on a fireplace mantle.

To date, the MEDAL has been displayed at WEST POINT, ALONZO’S Alma Mater, and DELAFIELD, WI, where ALONZO was born. It will be in the FREDONIA CELEBRATION in July and on display at THE MCCLURG MUSEUM UNTIL SEPTEMBER.

The MEDAL is then permanently gifted to the GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELD MUSEUM.

TOPIC

Today, I want to tell you about ALONZO’s Family in Fredonia, NY.
And then describe ALONZO’S LIFE AND HIS HEROIC ACTIONS at GETTYSBURG.

ALONZO’S MOTHER, MARY SMITH is my great-great Aunt. She married MILTON CUSHING. They had 7 children, 5 of whom survived to adulthood. All 4 surviving boys served the UNION in the CIVIL WAR.

ALONZO father, MILTON CUSHING, died of T.B. at age 47.

After MILTON’S DEATH, MARY moved to Fredonia, NY where MILTON’s family lived. MARY was poor, but educated, and ambitious for her children.
IN FREDONIA, MARY started a SCHOOL in her home and educated her boys well so that ALONZO received an appointment to U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY at WEST POINT and WILLIAM, his brother, who also became a CIVIL WAR HERO, attended the U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY.

TOPIC

ALONZO was in the WEST POINT Class of 1861. There he trained for the ARTILLERY and graduated with distinguished honors.

Due to the CIVIL WAR, the Class of 1861 graduated early.

ALONZO was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the ARMY given charge of a cannon battery. HE participated in many battles leading up to GETTYSBURG. These include BULL RUN; ANTIETAM; FREDERICKSBURG and CHANCELLORSVILLE.

ALONZO'S SUPERIOR OFFICERS recognized his ability as a LEADER and promoted him to serve on UNION GENERAL SUMNER'S STAFF.

BUT ALONZO loved the ARTILLERY and he requested to be reassigned BACK to COMMAND an ARTILLERY BATTERY.

IN THE CHANCELLORSVILLE CAMPAIGN, ALONZO got his wish and was given COMMAND of the 4th US ARTILLERY, BATTERY A.

TOPIC

BEFORE DESCRIBING ALONZO ROLE AT GETTYSBURG, I want to give a brief background to set the stage for this fateful battle.

1. To this point the CONFEDERATE troops under GENERAL LEE'S COMMAND had been humiliating the ARMY of the POTOMAC.

2. The U.S. ARMY had lost at BULL RUN and skedalled in disarray back to Washington, with ALONZO's cannons helping protect the retreating Union forces.

3. At ANTIETAM, There was a HORRIFIC slaughter on both sides.

4. At FEDERICKSBURG: The UNION again suffered a massive loss of men.

5. At CHANCELLORSVILLE: THE UNION was driven back by the CONFEDERATES. ALONZO'S Battery covered the UNION retreat across the bridge over the RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER and was the last UNION FORCE to leave the BATTLEFIELD.
With these UNION DEFEATS under the leadership of SEEMINGLY TIMID, INCOMPETENT UNION GENERALS – McClellan, BURNSIDE AND HOOKER – The CONFEDERATES believed that the UNION SOLDIERS COULD NOT FIGHT with COMPETENCE and WIN.

SO LEE headed NORTH to take the WAR to UNION SOIL.

IN JULY 1863, GENERAL MEADE HAD JUST ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE UNION FORCES; AND THEN THE 2 ARMIES CLASHED AT GETTYSBURG.

ON DAY 1: JULY 1ST: The 2 sides engaged, without their Commanders intending them to. Several reconnaissance missions turned into a BATTLE AND the CONFEDERATES chased the UNION forces through the TOWN OF GETTYSBURG. HOWEVER, by the end of the Day, the UNION gained the BETTER HIGH Ground, South of Town.

ON DAY 2: JULY 2ND: ALONZO now has his 5 CANNONS in place on CEMETERY RIDGE at the CENTER OF THE BATTLEFIELD and FIGHT to protect the UNION LINE THERE.

The fighting on this day focuses on both sides of CEMETERY RIDGE: at CULPS HILL ON THE NORTH; LITTLE ROUND TOP; and the PEACH ORCHARD ON THE SOUTH. At the PEACH ORCHARD, the CONFEDERATES heavily maul the UNION TROOPS.

ON THE EVENING OF JULY 2ND, LEE BELIEVES THAT UNION TROOPS are spread out on either end of the Battlefield, leaving the CENTER – CEMETERY RIDGE – weak. THAT IS WHERE HE DECIDES TO ATTACK NEXT.

DAY 3, JULY 3RD dawns. It is blisteringly HOT. LEE orders a massive CONFEDERATE ARTILLERY attack toward CEMETERY RIDGE. This is the GREATEST CONCENTRATION OF CANNON FIRE EVER in the Western Hemisphere.

ALONZO AND HIS 5 CANNONS are on CEMETERY RIDGE, at a place that will become known as "THE BLOODY ANGLE."

When ORDERED, ALONZO'S ARTILLERY RESPONDS TO THE CONFEDERATE BARRAGE. The Cannon smoke blinds the view of the battlefield for both sides.

At Mid-afternoon there COMES a lull. The CONFEDERATES STOP FIRING.

Then out from the trees 1/2 HALF MILE AWAY on CONFEDERATE HELD SEMINARY RIDGE step 13,000 CONFEDERATE TROOPS – a mile wide line - heading straight across the field directly toward CEMETERY RIDGE. CONFEDERATE CANNONS start FIRING again.

THE MAIN INFANTRY CHARGE is headed at ALONZO'S BATTERY POSITION - THE ANGLE IN THE STONE WALL. And AT LEAST 6 CONFEDERATE BATTERIES – 30 CANNONS - ARE FIRING DIRECTLY AT ALONZO'S CANNONS AND MEN.
ALONZO’S BATTERY taking the BRUNT of PICKETT’S CHARGE.

ALONZO’S, and OTHER UNION BATTERIES, and INFANTRY START FIRING at the oncoming CONFEDERATES.

HALF-WAY ACROSS this NO-MAN’S LAND is the EMMITTSBURG ROAD bordered by a high cattle fence. CLIMBING IT, the CONFEDERATE TROOPS BECOME sitting ducks. Some refuse to advance. Others survive the CLIMB OVER THE FENCE.

Now only 200 UPHILL YARDS remain to the STONE WALL ON CEMETERY RIDGE.

ALONZO’S AND THE OTHER BATTERIES have been FIRING NON-STOP INTO THE RANKS of the oncoming CONFEDERATES, DECIMATING THEM.

3 OF ALONZO’S 5 CANNONS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. His horses are dying around him. Many of his men are shot and are unable to assist.

ALONZO IS NOW ACTING AS BOTH A GUNNER AND COMMANDER OF HIS BATTERY, REPLACING HIS WOUNDED and DEAD MEN.

CAPTAIN HAZARD TELLS ALONZO TO MOVE HIS BATTERY BACK OR THE 2 REMAINING CANNONS WILL BE DESTROYED.

ALONZO responds: “IF THE GUNS GO, WE WILL LOSE THE BATTLELINE.”

THEN ALONZO is shot painfully in the GROIN and in his upper ARM and is BLEEDING PROFUSELY. HIS FIRST SARGENT FUGER tells ALONZO to leave his BATTERY and seek medical help.

ALONZO replies: “NO, I WILL DRIVE BACK THE ENEMY, OR DIE TRYING.”

ALONZO then has FUGER help him over to GENERAL HANCOCK who is the OFFICER in charge. GENERAL HANCOCK thinks ALONZO is going to ask permission to retire to get MEDICAL HELP.

Instead, to HANCOCK’S SUPRISE, ALONZO asks to move HIS 2 REMAINING CANNONS closer to the STONE WALL to be able to fire at a BETTER ANGLE down on the enemy as they come up the hill toward HIS BATTERY.

HANCOCK GRANTS PERMISSION.

ALONZO orders his 2 cannons to move up to the STONE WALL. NOW THEY are OUT of SHOT and are firing canister loaded with rocks and bits of metal down on the charging CONFEDERATES.

The LEATHER THUMB STALL to put over the IGNITION vent on the #4 CANNON is BURNED and ruined from the heat of constant firing.
ALONZO put his unprotected thumb over the hole so the cannon can fire. His thumb is burned to the bone.

ALONZO, held up by Sargent Fuger, keeps giving firing orders to his remaining men, until a Confederate bullet hits him in the mouth and he falls dead.

Union troops race into the gap left by Alonzo's deceased battery and quickly drive back the Confederates.

Pickett's Charge has ended in a massive Confederate defeat.

On July 4th - in a driving rain - the Confederates retreat back into Virginia.

Pause

The law for awarding the Medal of Honor states:

"The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor that can be bestowed upon an individual. It is awarded ... to a person who, distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States...."

"The deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades...."

Clearly Alonzo's actions at the Bloody Angle on July 3rd, 1863, meet this high standard to earn the Medal of Honor.

Lee's defeat at the Blood Angle marks the "High Water Mark" of the Confederacy. Never again will Lee bring his troops onto Northern soil.

Alonzo's heroism at Gettysburg helped turn back Lee's Tide of Victories. It was the start of the end of the Confederacy.

Alonzo's actions personify loyalty, courage and service above self.

By sacrificing his life, Alonzo contributed to making our nation at last "one nation, under God."