

W.C. “Dan” Daniel 1914 – 1988

If there were ever a story of the American Dream, it is that of W.C. “Dan” Daniel, Congressman from the Fifth District of Virginia and a native of Pittsylvania County. Born on May 12, 1914 in Chatham, Virginia to Reuben Earl and Georgie Grant Daniel, his father was a tenant farmer and Dan Daniel was raised in a log cabin in Mecklenburg County. One of eight children, he left home in 1932 to join the Civilian Conservation Corps.

During the Great Depression, many Americans who had previously enjoyed an easy life began to criticize the American political system, saying it had failed the citizenry. However, Dan Daniel found that a welfare state, such as that represented by the C.C.C. camps, was good only to keep a person from going hungry temporarily. Dan Daniel commented:

We should strengthen our free enterprise system so we can make our own way, unhampered, without being carried along and directed by an army of bureaucrats who, while running our lives for us, make an excellent living for themselves, using our tax money to do so.

He sought his own self-reliance in baseball, pitching for a team in Fredericksburg, Virginia. In one game he hit two home runs off of the famed Walter Johnson. However, in 1936, after two years in semi-professional baseball, his career came to an end when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Surgery was required, rendering one lung inactive and his long period of recovery incapacitated him for two and a half years. During this time, Dan Daniel planned his future, which included his nurse at the sanitarium, Ruby McGregor. Upon his release in 1939, he secured a job carrying bolts of cloth up a ladder at Dan River Mills in Danville. This work was not fit for someone who had been ill, but he stuck with it, and after drawing his first paycheck, he married Ruby McGregor. Their son, Jimmie Fox Daniel, was born in 1940.

During Dan Daniel’s early days at Dan River, Walter Vincent took a personal interest in him. Gradually he worked his way through the ranks under Mr. Vincent’s guidance, and eventually he was named Employment Manager for all of Dan River Mills, which employed 13,000 people at that time.

However, Dan Daniel was bothered by one thing – his lack of formal education. He took night classes and received his diploma as Valedictorian. He also became actively involved with numerous civic organizations, and when the United States declared war in 1941, his inactive lung did not deter him from military service. He tried to volunteer five times, and was subsequently turned down on each occasion. He even went to Roanoke, where he was not known, and was accepted. However, when he was selected for amphibious training at the Great Lakes Training Center, his infirmity was discovered and he was sent home.

Dan Daniel’s inability to serve his country troubled him, and as soon as he was eligible to join the American Legion he did so and was elected State Commander in 1951, and National Commander in 1956. While campaigning for the national post, Dan Daniel

said his reason for seeking the office was to serve. "By comparison, my term of military service was short," he said, "and as so many of my fellow citizens, I feel the added obligation to my fellow men." Throughout this period, Dan Daniel remained associated with Dan River Mills, and through the efforts of the late Basil D. Browder, he was allowed to pursue the projects of the American Legion. In 1957 Daniel was elevated to Assistant to the President of Dan River Mills, a post he held until 1966 when he was named Assistant to the Chairman of the Board.

From 1959 to 1968, when he was elected to Congress, Dan Daniel represented the City of Danville in the Virginia General Assembly. Before considering Dan Daniel's tenure in the House of Representatives, though, one must recall the awards that were presented to him. He was an honorary member of the Veteran's Associations in seven countries; he was presented the Star of Italian Solidarity (First Class) in 1958, signifying his outstanding achievements for the Italian nation; the 1958 Service to Mankind award, given to him by the Sertoma Clubs; Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania presented to him the George Washington Honor Medal in 1958; the Republic of France awarded him the Cross of Merit in 1960; the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy presented him with the Confederacy's Military Cross in 1966; in 1967 he was named "Distinguished Virginian" by the Virginia Exchange Clubs and was given the First Citizen Award by the Hugh T. Williams Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Danville; in 1972 he was the first Virginian to receive the "Others" award from the Salvation Army; the same year he was named Virginia's Man of the Year by the National Federation of Independent Businessmen; and he has been awarded the Freedom of Service Award by the Collinsville Jaycees, and the Pittsylvania County Soil Conservation Award. In addition, Dan Daniel belonged to numerous clubs and was appointed to the boards of directors of several businesses and served on various Presidential commissions.

In the 1950's, Vice-President Richard Nixon told Marion Saunders, Editor of the *Danville Register*, that Dan Daniel "is the kind of young man we need in Congress." When Nixon was elected in 1968, Dan Daniel was elected to his first term in the House of Representatives. Succeeding former Governor William Tuck in that seat, Dan Daniel polled more votes than his Republican and Independent opponents combined.

Dan Daniel carried to Congress business experience gleaned from his long association with Dan River, Inc., from trade missions undertaken from the Commonwealth, and from his total awareness of the economic structure of Virginia and the South. He also carried the knowledge of world affairs, but most importantly, because of his own upbringing, Dan Daniel carried a deep understanding and compassion for the needs of people. Since he had traveled the hard road, he was a firm believer in education, discipline, training and work as the keys to success.

As a Congressman, Dan Daniel did not sit aloof on Capitol Hill. Instead, he tried to make himself and his office continually available to his constituents. He maintained an office in the Post Office building in Danville, under the supervision of his longtime secretary Mrs. Frances Price. Of the most impressive of his committee assignments was his seat on the House Armed Services Committee, where he undertook several critical assignments for the Congress and the Administration

Dan Daniel passed away on January 23, 1988, while still serving in office. In 1993, Dan Daniel Memorial Park opened in Danville, Virginia.