

Comm. Thomas Barry (- 27 Jun 1842)

Barry. Departed this life at the U.S. Navy Yard in this city by the explosion of detonating shells on Monday, the 27th instant, Mr. Thomas Barry, a master of the U.S. Navy, aged 63 years. His funeral will take place this day from his late residence in the Navy Yard, at 12 o'clock. Officers of the Army and Navy and the friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend.

The National Intelligencer, June 28, 1842

We regret to learn that a dreadful accident happened at the Navy Yard of this city yesterday evening, by which two worthy men were deprived of life--the one, Mr. Barry, an aged gunner who has been long in the service of the United States, and who had charge of the ordnance stores at the yard; and the other an assistant of his, named David Davis. We have not learnt fully the particulars of the accident, but understand that it was caused by the bursting of a shell, which they were engaged in handling or charging. They were both instantly killed by the explosion.

The National Intelligencer, July 6, 1842

The Late Thomas Barry, of the U.S. Navy

The brilliant exploits of those chivalrous and gallant spirits who have, in five successive wars, borne the "star-spangled banner" in triumph over every ocean and in every sea, however humble their station, have been the theme of many a song, and also have brightened the page of our naval history. We know of no one whose services and gallant bearing through all the wars in which the navy has taken part deserves more praise, or whose life would add more lustre to the history of the navy than the late Thomas Barry. This officer entered the navy as a gunner in 1794, when the art of war was with us on the ocean in its infancy, at a time when men of practical experience were much required. He served on board the Constellation with Commodore Decatur, while that ship was attached to the squadron under the command of Commodore Rogers, and chased the Belvidere at the commencement of the late war. He was also the gunner of the frigate United States, under the command of Commodore Decatur, when the Macedonian was captured. His services were required during the war in fitting out most of the frigates and preparing their batteries for service. To his exertions, in putting the batteries and gunner stores in order during the late war, we may attribute much of the success of the navy.

Since the war, a period of twenty-nine years, Mr. Barry had been actively and usefully employed in the ordnance department of the navy. He has had the sole charge of the pyrotechnic department--a department requiring in the individual conducting it skill, perseverance, talents, and industry. That he has performed his duties to the satisfaction of the Government the following document will prove:

"Navy Department, February 19, 1841

* "Sir: In consideration of your long and faithful services as a gunner, you are hereby appointed an acting master in the navy of the United States, and you will remain attached to the navy yard, Washington, in the performance of such duties as the commandant of the yard may think proper to assign to you until further orders from this Department.

"I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

"J.K. Paulding.

"Mr. Thomas Barry,

"Acting Gunner, Washington."

What higher reward or greater honor can be bestowed on an officer than promotion for long and faithful services. Mr. Barry received the highest reward under the Government attainable.

The late accident which deprived this faithful veteran of his life, and the country of his valuable services, is to be lamented; but it was lost in the service of his country, in a laudable endeavor to perfect a missile which would render his country invincible. No reward was asked, none expected, had the experiment proved all it professed. In the services of France, Russia, or England, the death of Mr. B. would have been considered a public calamity, and his name recorded on immortal marble. His private virtues were many; charitable to a fault; and the sailor's propensity (generosity) was a predominant trait of his character. His heart was open to the distressed sailor, and his hand ever offered to the destitute.
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* This acting appointment was conferred by the President.

The National Intelligencer, June 29, 1843

The Late Fatal Explosion at the Navy Yard

It will be seen by reference to the following statement, which bears the signature of the worthy commandant at the Navy Yard, that the unfortunate individuals who were killed and horribly mangled last Monday night by an explosion of detonating shells in the laboratory, came to their death by disregarding a positive and written order, issued by the Commandant and the Secretary of the Navy, forbidding the filling of those shells and the manufacture of the composition within the precincts of the Navy Yard. This is deeply to be regretted, not only on account of the unfortunate sufferers and their distressed families, but on account of the numerous officers, workmen, and others connected with the Navy Yard, and the valuable property which it contains, all of which were jeopardized by this reckless disregard of a positive and necessary order, which (as we are authorized to state) was in the first instance suggested by the Commandant to the Secretary of the Navy, soon after the fatal explosion which caused the death of the lamented Captain Bright.

We are sorry to learn that this terrible explosion, besides causing the death of Mr. Barry (who had charge of the ordnance and was a master in the Navy) and Mr. Davis, his fellow laborer and sufferer at this dangerous work, three other individuals were severely, if not dangerously, wounded by the explosion--Mr. Bynum, an attorney from North Carolina, and Mr. Watson, who were both strangers and viewing the Navy Yard at the time of the sad event, and corporal Lusky, of the Marine corps, who happened to be near the unfortunate men when they lost their lives. Yesterday morning it was reported that Mr. Bynum had died of his wounds, but this is erroneous; the gentleman, though severely hurt, being in no present danger.

It is extremely gratifying to learn that Mr. John F. Tucker and Mr. Thomas Goss [R49/129], members of the Anacostia Fire Company, who nobly rushed into the laboratory to extinguish the flames, which were within a few feet of the power magazine, were favorably reported yesterday to the Commandant, and it is to be hoped they will not go unrewarded, as they will certainly not go undistinguished, for their dauntless bravery and disregard of personal consequence during so appalling an emergency. Commandant Kennon does no more than justice to the Anacostia Fire Company for their "heroic exertions" on this trying occasion. Never, that we can recollect have any Firemen more distinguished themselves, or more richly deserved the thanks and approbation of their fellow citizens. We subjoin the statement of Commandant Kennon, politely furnished at our request, and the verdict of the jury who were summoned by the Coroner late on Monday night, to investigate the circumstances which led to the dreadful catastrophe.

"At about five o'clock p.m. this day, the Navy Yard was alarmed by several heavy explosions. They proceeded from the laboratory. I hastened to the spot and found the laboratory on fire, immediately over and about the powder magazine. By the most heroic exertions of the Anacostia Fire Company and the men employed in the Navy Yard, it was most providentially saved from destruction.

"Gunner Barry, and one of the men named Davis, employed in the laboratory, were killed and much mangled, and the building and its contents materially injured. The powder and all combustible things were removed as quick as possible, but the keys, being in the gunner's pocket when he was blown up, were not to be found, and the doors had to be forced at the utmost peril, the fire being directly over it and about it in various directions.

"From the men employed in the laboratory, it appears that gunner Barry and Davis, at the time of the explosion, were employed in filling combustible shells in a private room in the laboratory; if so, they were acting in violation of the orders of the Commandant of the yard and the Secretary of the Navy, which had been expressly given, forbidding this work within the Navy Yard.

"On the first alarm, Colonel Henderson and the marines from the barracks hastened to the relief of the yard, and rendered important assistance.

"B. Kennon, Com'dt Navy Yard

"June 27, 1842."

"The Jury find that Thomas Barry came to his death by an explosion of detonating shells, of highly combustible matter, while he was in the act of filling those shells, contrary to a positive written order of the Commandant of the Navy Yard and the Secretary of the Navy."

A verdict similar to the above was rendered in the case of the other sufferer, David Davis.