

Francis C. Brown

(- 27 Jul 1861)

The Evening Star, July 29, 1861, p. 3

Terrible Explosion at the Navy Yard Two Men Killed and Two Wounded

Last Saturday afternoon a terrible explosion occurred at the Navy Yard resulting in the death of two men and seriously wounding two others, one of whom now lies in a very critical condition. The rocket house just west of the ordnance department had four men at work in it, preparing detonating powder, etc. and it is thought that the explosion resulted from ignition in a copper vessel suspended from the ceiling in which powder was pulverized with a large copper ball. This, however, is not certain, and the whole affair is involved in considerable mystery. The powder in the vessel and a quantity in an iron tank was all that exploded, although there were several boxes and a barrel of powder in the room at the time. The building is nearly destroyed, the roof barely retaining its position, and the walls cracked and weakened. The windows were blown out, and everything about the building blasted and charred as though it had been in a furnace. Francis C. Brown was burnt to a crisp, and died shortly after the explosion. He was 26 years of age, and a native of Philadelphia, but has resided in Washington for about six years. He was a plasterer by trade, and leaves a wife and one child. John P. Ferguson was very badly burnt, and died on Saturday evening. He was unmarried, 26 years of age and a native of Washington. William Martin and Nicholas Ray were badly burned, and Martin is not expected to recover. Ray, it is thought will soon be able to get out again.

The National Intelligencer, July 29, 1861, p. 3

Terrible Explosion At The Navy Yard.

A terrible explosion took place in the rocket house, at the Washington navy yard, on Saturday afternoon, killing two men and wounding two. Francis C. Brown was burnt to a crisp, and died shortly after the explosion. He was twenty-six years of age, and a native of Philadelphia, but has resided in Washington for about six years. He was a plasterer by trade, and leaves a wife and one child. John P. Ferguson was very badly burnt, and died on Saturday evening. He was unmarried, twenty-six years of age, and a native of Washington. William Martin was badly burnt, but will probably recover. He was taken to his residence near the yard. Nicholas Ray was very severely burnt, but will recover.

The first explosion occurred in a large mortar suspended from the ceiling, in which there was a quantity of fuse powder and a large copper ball for crushing the composition when the pot was swung to and fro. This caused a second explosion of a tank of powder nearby. Fortunately a barrel of powder and several boxes of cartridges, which were in the room, escaped explosion. The roof of the building was lifted clear from its place, the windows all blown out, and the brick walls cracked in several places.

The workmen in the yard were quickly on the spot, and extinguished the fire before it had made much headway. The cause of the explosion is not known, but it is supposed that the ball in the mortar became heated by constant motion so as to ignite the composition.