

William Nokes (- 14 Jul 1859)

The Evening Star, July 14, 1859

A Dreadful Accident

This forenoon, between 10 and 11 o'clock, while the gunner's crew at the Washington Navy Yard were engaged in their usual battery practice, a sixty-four pounder--an army gun--which had been fired once only there (though it had evidently been often fired before) burst, killing James Wilson and William Nokes. The former was a seafaring man, married with one child. The latter was a married man, and was preparing to become a gunner in the service. He leaves no children.

The accident also wounded ten men--eight severely and two slightly--as follows: Richard Gormley (cut about the head;) Charles Stuart (badly cut about the head;) Roderick McMillan, (collar-bone broken;) P. Ludwig, (splinter in the side;) Andrew Wilson (cut about the face and head;) J. Roach, (ditto;) Elijah Beacham (badly hurt;) Dennis Leary, John Conner, and John Holland (slightly hurt.)

Mr. Wilson was killed instantly, half his head being blown off; and Mr. Nokes lived but five or ten minutes after the accident; the lower part of his face and head was blown off. The force of the accident threw Mr. Wilson's body a distance of thirty feet, and Mr. Nokes and Mr. Beacham ten or twelve feet. All who were injured were on the gun platform, which is elevated ten feet from the ground. Some of the fragments of the gun were cast more than two hundred yards, to the great danger of the workmen around.

At 1 p.m. the presence of the coroner to hold an inquest over the remains of Messrs. Wilson and Nokes (who were most estimable and valuable men in all their relations in life) was momentarily expected. Indeed, all the gunner's crew are necessarily picked men.

Hopes of the recovery of all the wounded are entertained by Dr. A.W. Miller and the medical officers of the Yard in attendance.

Everything possible to relieve the condition of the wounded, has been done by the officers of the Yard.

(... See James H. Wilson for inquest and funeral ...)

The Evening Star, July 15, 1859

The Navy Yard Tragedy -- Further Particulars

The Killed

James H. Wilson was a man about thirty-five years old, who never had any knowledge of who his parents were, and had no relative that he knew of in the world. He was partially raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., and has been in the United States service here about nine years. He was a man of unusual abilities, and stood high in the service as an expert and intelligent gunner. He has been for years the keeper of the battery, and he was universally esteemed by his mates and by the officers.

Nokes was a young man, new in the service; had but been in the Paraguay expedition in the character of yeoman. He had been placed in the gunner's department about two weeks ago, on account of the fair promise he gave, under the observation of Capt. Dahlgren, of becoming a first class gunner in time.

It was rumored yesterday that the wives of both of the deceased were absent from home on an excursion at the time of the accident. Such was not the case, they both being at their homes. It is understood that every effort will be made by the officers of the yard to have their afflicted families, who are poor, properly provided for by the Department.