

Henry William Taylor

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Accidental Death

Henry William Taylor, a Marine, Killed by the Cars

Serving as Sentry at Navy Yard

Five Cars Pass Over the Man's Prostrate Body

Result of Inquest

Henry William Taylor, a member of the United States Marine Corps, was killed in the navy yard about 10:30 o'clock last night by a freight train on a switch of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company's tracks. The train had been in the yard to get two 13-inch guns and a gun carriage for shipment to Newport News. Taylor was the sentry on duty at the gate, and as soon as the train passed out he closed it. A few yards beyond five cars broke loose from the train and rolled back over the tracks through the gate. The sentry, who was standing on the track, had no way of seeing the danger he was in. Without a word of warning he was knocked down and the five cars passed over him. He was dead when the trainmen and marines picked him up. His skull was crushed, his left leg broken and both feet had been terribly mangled.

The deceased was 48 years old and had served his country for about twenty-eight years in the army. A year ago he enlisted in the Marine Corps. During his service in the army he participated in the Cuban campaign and was in the battle of San Juan Hill. He has made several efforts to go to the Philippines, but was not successful. It was believed that his long service and age unfitted him for such duty. A few days ago he remarked to one of his comrades that he was tired of the Marine Corps, as he wanted to be where he could be on more active duty. The deceased enlisted from Philadelphia, where he has a married sister.

Soon after the accident happened the body was removed to the morgue. This morning Acting Coroner Glazebrook held an inquest at the sixth precinct station. A verdict of accidental death was rendered and the jury expressed the belief that the accident was caused by defective brakes.

The Inquest

Jane Brown, colored, 516 M street southeast, was the first witness examined. She stated to the jury that she was sitting at her door opposite the gate when the accident happened. For nearly an hour prior, she said, cars were shifted in and out of the yard. When the train that killed the marine went out of the yard the latter stood and watched it for a few minutes. The train remained about a half square from the gate some time, and one of the train men went back with his lamp. He knocked at the gate, but received no response. Soon afterward she saw the cars rolling over the tracks in the direction of the gate. Had she known the marine was standing inside she could have warned him.

"Did the cars go very fast?"

"No, sir," she answered. "If they had gone very fast they would have attracted my attention."

Witness said she saw no light on the coaches. When the cars broke away the engine gave no warning. After the cars had gone through the gate she remarked that she was afraid somebody had been killed. She sent a boy over to see, and he called to her that the marine had been killed.

Harry Hall, a colored boy who lives at 510 M street southeast, gave similar testimony. He said the load was too heavy for the engine to pull around the curve, and the train had to back to get a good start. When the cars came back there was no light on them.

Horace Smith, another colored boy, who lives in the same neighborhood, was also examined. He told of the movements of the train just before the accident happened. So far as he could see there was nobody on the cars, nor was there a light. He went over with the previous witness and found the dead man's body.

Comrade's Testimony

Corporal James Albert Whalen testified that after the accident happened he went to the gate and found the dead man's body. He knew that several trains had passed in and out of the yard last night. The gate is kept closed, and when a train wants to come through a signal of some kind has to be given. Sometimes the notification is given by the ringing of a bell or the blowing of the whistle. Witness detailed the unfortunate man at the gate last night and he went on duty at 9 o'clock.

Conductor Arnel Hunter of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company told the jury that he was on engine 185 last night and went to the navy yard under orders to pull out some cars. He said he started out of the yard with eleven cars. The train "hung up" outside the yard, and it was necessary to go back in order to get another start. To get into the yard this time the gate had to be opened.

Cars "Drifted"

A second time, he said, the train "hung up," and then he discovered that the cars had cut loose and were drifting back. There was a brakeman on the cars that were drifting. When witness saw that the cars would probably go through the gate he jumped from the train and ran back to open the gate. He did not reach there in time, and the cars crashed through. So far as he knew, the engineer knew nothing of the break in the train. There is a steep grade from L street to the navy yard gate. Witness said that hand brakes were used. There was no air on the train. Janney couplers, he said, were used, and they were in first-class condition before the cars pulled out. They were also in first-class condition after the accident. The cars were joined without any repairs having been made and were sent south. He could not account for the accident.

Deputy Coroner's Testimony

Dr. P.E. McDonald, acting deputy coroner, gave evidence concerning the injuries inflicted. Death was due to shock and hemorrhage.

Thomas Farmer, brakeman, who was on the train last night, testified that he was on the train when the break occurred. He ran to the rear car and applied the brakes. Witness said he was excited when he saw that the cars would strike the gate. He called, "Lookout," although he did not know where the sentry was. Witness examined the couplers both before and after the accident and found them in perfect condition. This closed the testimony and the case was submitted to the jury.