

James L. Brown

(- 19 Nov 1910)

Brown. Suddenly on Saturday, November 19, 1910 at Indian Head Md., James L., beloved husband of Grace A. Brown (nee Giddings). Funeral from Congressional Cemetery chapel, Tuesday, November 22 at 12 o'clock m. Relatives and friends respectfully invited to attend.

The Evening Star, November 20, 1910

Cause Not Known

Gun Explosion at Indian Head Enveloped in Mystery

Official Inquiry Ordered

Bodies of the Four Victims Brought to Washington

No Plans Made for Funerals

Lieut. Caffee's Body Likely to Rest in Arlington--

Word From Parents Awaited



**J. L. BROWN,
Battery Foreman Who Was Killed.**

But One Witness

There are no witnesses to the tragedy alive except Sydney Dyson, colored, who it is believed will not be able to describe the accident, because he was standing some distance from the gun and was overcome by the fumes from the explosive powder.

A singular fact about the explosion is that the gun is practically intact except that the gun is practically intact, except that the breech block was blown away. According to men at the post the crew had loaded the cannon on the third proof round and the breech was just being closed when the premature blast took place.

At the Navy Department it was intimated late yesterday afternoon that a bent or fouled firing pin which projected sufficiently beyond the face of the breech plug, might have caused the disaster. This might occur, it is declaimed, notwithstanding every precaution was taken to protect the firing crew from the failure of a new gun under test.

That the cause of the gun explosion at Indian Head, Md., which killed four men yesterday and seriously injured another, is a mystery and may never be ascertained, is the opinion of officers and men at the navy proving ground.

According to enlisted men and employees of the station the investigation which has been ordered by the ordnance bureau will not determine whether there was anything wrong with the locking apparatus of the firing pin on the five-inch gun which exploded and snuffed out the lives of Lieut. A.G. Caffee and three of his gun crew.

Great sorrow was expressed last night at the station bureau of the disasters, and it was a sad escort that conveyed the body of the dead naval officer to the tug which was to bear it to this city.

Lieut. Caffee was very popular at the reservation and wherever he was known, and was regarded by subordinates and superiors alike as being one of the best turret officers in the navy.

The trouble in the present case lay in the fact that the gun was discharged before it was loaded. The brass shell containing the powder and the projectile had been inserted in the piece and the breechbox swung on its hinge.

It was learned last night that the ordnance bureau of the navy has been trying for a long time to find some safety device applicable to guns of this caliber, but so far without success, and if the gun captain fails to obey the rule to pass his hand over the face of the breech lock before it is closed to detect any improper projecting of the firing pin, then such an accident as occurred yesterday may happen at any time.

Effects of the Explosion

Lieut. Caffee was standing in the rear of the gun, and his men were grouped about him. When the blast came the breech flew back, splinters flying in every direction simultaneously with the explosion. James L. Brown, the battery foreman, and J.J. Leary, ordnance man, received the full force of the charge, and the former was blown to pieces. Lieut. Caffee's body was crushed and parts of his left limbs were torn away.

The noise of the explosion shook the whole reservation, and within a few minutes scores of employees were on the scene. All the men still breathing when found were hurried to the hospital on the grounds. The officer died at 12:44 o'clock, Leary died at 1:35 o'clock and Jackson expired shortly before 1 o'clock. Neither of the men was able to explain the disaster before dying.

Dyson, the lookout man, whose duty it was to signal persons nearby and passing vessels of the discharge, was unable last night to give a description of the accident. It is said he will prove of little assistance to the investigating board.

The remains of the battery foreman, Brown, were gathered later in the afternoon, and his and the bodies of Jackson and Leary were sent to their respective homes. It is some small satisfaction to naval officials to know that the employers' liability act will come into play in this case and that the families of the victims will receive the equivalent of one year's pay.

Brown's Previous Experience

Brown was injured in a gun explosion at Indian Head about six years ago and his companion at that time was instantly killed. For several years Brown had worn a silver plate in his head.

Despite the disaster the corps employed in the proving section of the grounds are not frightened.

Last night the men took the accident philosophically. One tanned veteran man-of-wars-man who is now on duty at the station said: "Somebody's got to take the chances in testing these guns before they are placed aboard battleships."

Inspector J.H. Holden, in charge of the proving ground has been in command at Indian Head only since Tuesday last. He is greatly shocked by the sad occurrence.

Lieut. Caffee married the daughter of Medical Director Dickinson, retired, about four years ago, and with his young wife and three-year-old child lived at the Indian Head station. Mrs. Caffee was griefstricken when told of the disaster and hurried to the hospital, remaining at her husband's side until he expired.

No Plans for Caffee Funeral

No definite arrangements for the funeral of the late Lieut. A.G. Caffee, U.S.N., had been made last night, although it is expected that the services and interment will take place Tuesday. Lieut. Caffee's parents, who are in Missouri, were communicated with yesterday by telegraph, and the final announcement of the funeral will not be made until they are heard from. Interment probably will be at Arlington.

The body was placed on the tug Choctaw at Indian Head yesterday afternoon at 4:35 o'clock, and arrived in Washington about 8 o'clock. It was immediately taken to the home of Medical Director Dwight Dickinson, U.S.N., 2206 R street.

Native of Missouri

Lieut. Caffee was born in Carthage, Mo., December 20, 1882, and entered the naval service as a cadet midshipman September 7, 1900, being appointed from Missouri. After graduation from the Naval Academy in February 1904, Lieut. Caffee served on board of the U.S.S. Missouri, February 1904 to December 1905, on the Beston from December 1905 to June 1907; was promoted to ensign February 2, 1907; served on board the Nebraska July 1907 to December 1909; was promoted to the grades of lieutenant (junior grade) and lieutenant February 2, 1909; served as aid on the staff of the commander-in-chief, United States Atlantic fleet, flagship Connecticut, December 5, 1909 to April 7, 1910.

Lieut. Caffee, who was in charge of the test yesterday, has been on duty at the proving grounds since last April. He resided on the reservation with his wife and one child.

The body of J.L. Brown will be brought to Washington today.

The Evening Star, November 22, 1910

Indian Head Victims Taken to the Grave

Funeral Services Held Today for Lieut. Caffee and James L. Brown

Escorted by several companies of bluejackets and attended by six members of his class at Annapolis as pallbearers, the body of Lieut. A.G. Caffee, who, with his gun crew, was killed by an explosion at Indian Head last Saturday, was borne to its grave at Arlington cemetery this afternoon.

The burial was made with military honors, and a brief religious service was conducted by Rev. George F. Dudley. Col. W.K. Caffee and Mrs. Caffee, parents of the young officer, arrived here yesterday afternoon for the funeral. They were accompanied by Mahlon Caffee, brother of the victim.

Mrs. Caffee, widow of the lieutenant, and their three-year-old child were accompanied to the cemetery by Dr. Dwight Dickinson, U.S.N., retired, father-in-law of the dead man.

The pallbearers were Lieut. C.R.P. Rodgers, Lieut. Davis LeBurton, Lieut. W.F. Halsey, Lieut. Charles Soule, Lieut. O.C. Dodge and Lieut. Michael. The latter was Lieut. Caffee's brother officer at the proving grounds at Indian Head.

With Masonic rites conducted by Naval Lodge, No. 4, and Indian Head Lodge, the body of James L. Brown, one of the Congressional Cemetery at noon. Funeral services were held in the chapel of the cemetery. Rev. E.M. Thompson of the Chapel of the Nativity and Rev. C.J. Curtis of Indian Head officiated.

A number of employees who had worked with Brown at the proving grounds attended the funeral and accompanied the remains to the grave. The pallbearers were members of the two Masonic bodies.

The funeral of J.J. Leary, another of the victims of the explosion, was held at Philadelphia today.