

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

### "Death of a Naval Officer"

Carroll County Times article for 7 August 1994

By Jay A. Graybeal

On September 10, 1889, the residents of Westminster laid to rest the remains of a promising naval officer. Lt. Washington O. Sharrer joined the navy as a midshipman during the Civil War and received training at the wartime location of the Naval Academy at Newport, R.I.. By the time of his graduation in 1868, the school had returned to its original location at Annapolis. As a junior officer, he traveled extensively to foreign ports, where unfortunately, he contracted a deadly disease which led to his untimely death. His lengthy obituary appeared in 14 September, 1889 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel. The article contains a wealth of information about Lt. Sharrer's service, medical practices and funeral customs.

News of the serious illness of Lieut. Washington O. Sharrer, of the United States Navy, was received by his father and relatives in this city on Saturday evening last and on Sunday morning Mr. Francis A. Sharrer, his father, and his brother, Mr. George E. Sharrer, left for Aurora, West Va., where he was sojourning. On Sunday evening his brothers, F. C. and J. C., received telegrams announcing his death at 10:30 o'clock on Sunday morning. The immediate cause of the sad event was an attack of something like tetanus. Lieut. Sharrer had been in a debilitated condition for some months from a severe attack of Chagres fever, and was at Aurora, West Va., in search of health when stricken down with the the fatal malady that has taken him away in the strength of matured manhood. His death is traceable directly to disease contracted in the discharge of his duty as an officer of the U.S. Navy, having resulted, without doubt, from the dangerous fever spoken of. The event has sorely distressed his immediate family and relatives and brought unwonted sadness to the hearts of many who were proud to be ranked as his friends. He was a man of noble and loveable character and well worthy the esteem in which he was held by those who knew him in his youthful days, his associates and fellow-officers in the navy and those who only made his acquaintance in later years. Unassuming in demeanor, courteous and kindly in manner, he won all hearts. Beneath his quiet exterior there was a reserve of decision and force that would, in time, have carried him to eminence in the profession which he adorned. Lieut. Sharrer was a son of Mr. Francis A. Sharrer, and brother of Messrs. Francis C., George E. and Jesse C. Sharrer, well known citizens of Westminster. He was born in June, 1848, and was therefore in his 42nd year. He was appointed to the United States Naval Academy by the late Hon. Francis Thomas, and entered it at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1864, graduating at Annapolis in 1868. In the naval service he visited all climes and nearly every country on the globe. He married Miss Nettie Heape, daughter of the Consul-General to Tunis at that time, who, with two children, a daughter aged 12 and a son aged 14, survives him. His remains were brought to this city at noon on Tuesday, and at 3 o'clock the afternoon of that day borne to the Methodist Protestant church, where funeral services were held by Rev. J. T. Ward, D. D., and Rev. J. L. Mills, D. D., the former delivering an address. Lieutenants L. B. M. Mason, Duncan Kennedy, Perry Gaist, J. H. Rogers, F. Singer and J. D. Adams, who were among his classmates at the Naval Academy, acted as an escort to the remains and as active pall-bearers. The Honorary pall-bearers were: Col. Wm. A. McKellip, Messrs. Charles T. Reifsnider, Isaac E. Pearson, Hugo E. Fiddis, George R. Gehr, Thomas Turfle and A. H. Huber. A detachment of U.S. Marines from the Naval Observatory at Washington, where Lieut. Sharrer was stationed, who would have acted as a guard of honor and as pall-bearers, failed to arrive, having missed the railroad connection at Baltimore. The casket which contained the remains of the deceased officer was wrapped in the American flag and upon it lay tributes of rare and beautiful flowers. After the services at the Church, the remains were taken to the cemetery and there interred, in the

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presence of a large and sympathizing concourse of citizens. Among the relatives present was his brother-in-law, Major Heape, of New York.

Lt. Sharrer witnessed great changes in American sea power during his quarter-century of service.

Armored steamships replaced the wooden sailing vessels that Sharrer had known in his early days as a midshipman. Although he served during a time of peace, he gave his life in the service of his country.

Photo Caption: Lt. Washington O. Sharrer, USN, by A. L. Rogers, Westminster Md., c.1885. Historical Society of Carroll County, J. Leland Jordan Collection.