

# The Gun Exploded

February 26, 1844, is one of the most infamous dates in the history of the United States Navy. The most powerful warship of that time, the *Princeton*, was taking the President of the United States, the Secretaries of State and Navy, Members of Congress and other government officials down the Potomac River.

For the entertainment of the guests, the great gun on the *Princeton*, the Peacemaker, was fired. At the second discharge, the gun burst apart, killing the Secretary of the Navy and a number of others.

Just before the gun was fired, Senator Thomas Benton of Missouri was standing near it. A friend laid a hand on his shoulder. Benton turned away to speak with him, and much to Benton's annoyance, Secretary of the Navy Thomas Walker Gilmore elbowed his way into his place. At precisely that moment, the gun was fired, and Gilmore was killed.

That singular moment of providence had a great impression upon Benton. He was a man of anger and feuding, and had recently had a fierce quarrel with Daniel Webster. But after his narrow escape from death on the *Princeton*, Benton sought reconciliation with Webster. He said to him: "It seemed to me, Mr. Webster, as if that touch on my shoulder was the hand of the Almighty stretched down there drawing me away from what otherwise would have been instantaneous death. That one circumstance has changed the whole current of my thought and life. I feel that I am a different man; and I want in the first place to be at peace with all those whom I have been so sharply at variance."

Few of us ever know the many times we are spared from death. I believe in guardian angels, and I am convinced there are times in our lives when we are protected and pulled from harm's way. In reality, each day we live is a gift from God.

No matter how long we may live, we should never waste a day in anger or unforgiveness. We should seek to live each day in peace with God and with all people.

--Beecher Hunter