

boilers on the Sultana but repairs had been made which rendered the boat safe and capable of completing its intended journey. Repairs had been made prior to their leaving Vicksburg and again along the way before the tragic event.

Sultana's Captain, J. C. **Mason**, had his worried moments along the trip when he became aware of the very strong currents from the swollen river, which made an added burden on the boat's boilers. On April 26th, they docked at Memphis, TN. Here some of the passengers disembarked. The sugar was unloaded and a number of the soldiers went ashore to see the sights while this was being accomplished. Some of these, not knowing how lucky they were, saw so many sights that they didn't get back to the boat before it sailed.

At around midnight, the packet which was moored behind the Sultana, released its tether lines and crossed the river to take on coal. When this was completed, the Sultana continued on its way up river, bound for Cairo. The big paddle wheels clawed at the water, straining against the current, but continued on with its slow progress.

Then it happened! After passing Memphis by only a few miles, in the dark early morning hours of April 27th, the boilers exploded with such a tremendous crash and billowing of smoke and fire that it could be heard and seen miles away. The Sultana had been literally blown apart and set afire with the upper deck collapsing into the lower one with the mass of humanity on top and below standing little chance of escaping.

Many were thrown by the force into the frigid dark waters of the raging Mississippi while others fought to escape the burning inferno which had previously been their safe haven aboard the Sultana.

It was reported that there were only two lifeboats and 75 life vests on board the boat - scarcely adequate to be of any help to the nearly 2500 aboard.

The Sultana was now, of course, totally out of control and was drifting helplessly downstream. The deck supporting the main rank of passenger cabins where the officers were housed, collapsed at one end, forming a horrible steep ramp down which the screaming men slid along with a tangle of wreckage.

Hundreds of horribly burned and scalded men remained aboard the drifting hulk. Some had the presence of mind to rip apart doors or planks - anything that would float - and jump in after their man-made rafts.

Some time later, the boat drifting down river, struck a small island where there was a little grove of trees still above water level. Some of those who were still aboard the floating hulk, jumped ashore with ropes and made the hulk fast. Two or three dozen more managed to fabricate a makeshift raft from broken timbers, and cut loose just in time. Slowly, what was left of the Sultana gave up its struggle and