

It being reported among the men that the boat would be at Memphis for some time, and there being no control over us, a number of us took advantage of the occasion to go up into the city in search of amusement. I was soon satisfied and returned to the boat, which shortly after moved out into the river and pulled up stream to take on coal, leaving about one hundred and fifty fortunate soldiers behind. We took coal from a boat that appeared to be out in the river, but the Mississippi at that time was over the whole country, on account of floods in the upper river and the Missouri. The water was much colder than would have been supposed, as the trees were all in leaf.

In the meantime the cots had been put up in the cabin as usual, and I went in and threw my hat in the first cot toward the bow of the boat, while I went forward to get what little worldly goods had come into my possession at Vicksburg. On coming back I found my cot occupied by Captain McCoy, I think of the One Hundred and Fifty-eighth Ohio Regiment, who refused to give it up. We were having some very unpleasant words about it, when Lew Keeler, of the Eleventh Indiana, came along and persuaded me to release my claim and take a cot at the back end of the cabin, under the one he occupied. The cots were double-deckers, one above and one below. It was some time after midnight when I retired. The last person I talked with was Captain Mason, and if I believed in presentiments I would believe that he had one that something dreadful was going to happen, for in our conversation he said that he would give all the interest he had in the boat if it were safely landed in Cairo. I was impressed at the time by what he said, but in a few moments it wore off.

It was not long after getting into my cot until I was in the land of dreams. How long I slept I cannot say, but it must have been about 3 o'clock in the morning when I was awakened. My first sensation was of a very oppressive heat, and the first thought that came into my mind was that I was in the regions of eternal torment.

The lights were dim, and they must have been obscured by the escaping steam from the exploded boiler. I was not long in getting out of bed and starting forward, but I did not go far. The cabin floor had dropped down at the front, without breaking off, and now made an inclined plane to the lower deck. The cots, including the one I had first selected, had disappeared. Looking down on the lower deck to the front, I was reminded of a fire in one of the old-time fireplaces. The lights in the chandeliers of the cabin had been turned down, but were still burning, and by their glimmer I could see a man some feet down on the inclined floor, whom I have always believed to be Captain McCoy.

Curiously enough, although the cots and staterooms were full of men, the explosion did not seem to have awakened them. Up to that time I had not heard a scream, and everything was as quiet as it was when I went to bed. I certainly was dazed or confused, and did not realize what had happened. Imaginations flew through my mind thick and fast. The thought came to me that I had the nightmare, and in that condition of mind I turned around and made for the stern of the boat, hardly knowing what I was doing. The ladies' cabin was shut off from the men's cabin only by curtains, and I pushed back a

11. Captain J. Cass Mason- (1830-1865)

From St. Louis, Missouri, he was the part owner as well as the captain of the S.S. Sultana. He began his career with steamboats working as a clerk, but advanced in rank when he married the daughter of a shipping tycoon. Along with five others, he bought the Sultana in 1864, when she was only a year old, for \$80,000. Faced with money issues after several setbacks, he was desperate for cash. In April of 1865, the Sultana was currently employed by the government to transport Union soldiers, who had been held as prisoners of war in Confederate prison camps, back home after they'd been paroled. Captain Mason was warned about the steamboat's defective boilers and he promised to repair them in Vicksburg where the soldiers came aboard. The Civil War had just ended a week earlier. However, the hole in the boiler was only patched with a thin metal plate as Mason wanted to delay any big repairs until St. Louis. Eager for money, by cooperating with the boarding officials, he was able to have a huge influx of soldiers board his steamboat. Now with over 2,400 people aboard, the Sultana was extremely overcrowded as it was legally only entitled to carry 376 passengers. Growing nervous about the capacity of his boat to hold them all, he attempted to ward off more oncoming soldiers, but was refused. When the boiler exploded on April 27, the captain tried to calm the passengers down. He perished along with his beloved Sultana as it sank in the Mississippi River. (Huffman 2009: 172-73, 175, 178-84, 186, 194-95; Sandler 2010: 138, 144)

12. Mississippi River-This is the second longest river in the United States after the Missouri

River. It measures at 2,350 miles long and goes south to the Gulf of Mexico, and then opens out into a delta in southeast Louisiana. Hernando de Soto 'discovered' it 1541. Then the French later took it as part of their Louisiana Purchase. In 1803, the U.S. took ownership of the Mississippi when the French sold the Louisiana Purchase to America. The first steamboat on the Mississippi river was in 1811. This new invention opened new opportunities for river trade. During the Civil War, the northern states stopped using the Mississippi as a trade route, as it declared to be in Confederate territory. By December 1863, almost 200 boats had been lost on the river. When the Sultana exploded, many soldiers were hurtled into the freezing water and drowned, never to return home. After the war, the North began to use the Mississippi as a waterway again. (Fact Monster from Information; Garrison 21,113,404,464)

13. Sisters of Charity- Officially called the Ladies Christian Commission, the sisters were a group of women that formed a charity to benefit those less fortunate. They reportedly handed out food and hymnbooks at Vicksburg while the Sultana's boilers were patched and the Union soldiers came aboard. They also were on hand to help out after the boilers exploded and offered comfort to the frightened passengers. (Huffman 2009: 184-85, 208, 235)