

# Cahaba Prison And The Sultana Disaster

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the sultana was a sidewheel mississippi steamboat carrying almost two thousand recently released union prisoners of war back north at the end of the civil war at 2 00 a m on april 27 1865 when the boat was seven miles above memphis her boilers exploded almost 1 200 people perished in the worst maritime disaster in united states history gene eric salecker covers this disaster in detail and dispels the many myths that have been connected to the sultana for too long almost every author who has written about the sultana has relied on the words of a few survivors or referred to the works of previous authors to get their story advancing the scholarship the author has visited the national archives in washington dc to comb through the handwritten transcripts of the three investigative bodies that looked into the disaster or poured over the handwritten testimony from the court martial trial of capt frederic speed the only person tried for the overcrowding of the vessel in 1996 after extensive research and using the most current sources available at that time salecker wrote disaster on the mississippi the sultana explosion april 27 1865 still there were inevitable omissions after almost twenty five years of continued research on the sultana and all those involved in the disaster salecker has gleaned unparalleled knowledge into every aspect of the disaster his research covering the national archives and thousands of pages of newspapers from around the world and government documents including pension records and service records has allowed gene to tell the story of the sultana as completely as possible by bringing his research back to primary sources salecker dispels myths and adds to the story of the sultana in destruction of the steamboat sultana the worst maritime disaster in american history paroled prisoners civilian passengers guards crewmembers rescuers and eyewitnesses tell their stories in their own words the true and complete story about

the sultana and the disaster has finally and fully been told

this book follows the life of john h king from 1831 until his death in 1893 although john was a survivor he lived a problem plagued and pathetic existence that make the fascinating events of his life an unusual and emotional story it is the story of a man whom fate chose to survive when others did not the book follows john from his birth in cincinnati ohio his training as a blacksmith his migration to indiana his enlistment in the 9th indiana cavalry his survival of the tragedies that await him from skirmishes and capture by the rebs his life threatening imprisonment at andersonville prison and his survival of the greatest maritime disaster in the history of the united states he returns home a changed and disabled man unable to live what could have been a far different life keywords sultana war civil war indiana soldier boat history historical biography fight

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the worst maritime disaster in american history wasn't the titanic it was the steamboat sultana on the mississippi river and it was completely preventable in 1865 the civil war was winding down and the country was reeling from lincoln's assassination thousands of union soldiers released from confederate prisoner of war camps were to be transported home on the steamboat sultana with a profit to be made the captain rushed repairs to the ship so the soldiers wouldn't find transportation elsewhere more than 2 000 passengers boarded in vicksburg mississippi on a boat with a capacity of 376 the journey was violently interrupted when the ship's boilers exploded plunging the sultana into mayhem passengers were bombarded with red hot iron fragments burned by scalding steam and flung overboard into the churning mississippi although rescue efforts were launched the survival rate was dismal more than 1 500 lives were lost in a compelling exhaustively researched account renowned author sally m walker joins the ranks of historians who have been asking the same question for 150 years who or what was responsible for the sultana's disastrous fate

lee surrenders president murdered booth killed screamed the headlines of american newspapers in april 1865 leaving little room for mention of a maritime disaster that to this day is america's worst on april 27 1865 the sultana a 260 foot wooden hulled steamboat smaller than the titanic but carrying more passengers exploded on the mississippi river near memphis tennessee more than 1 800 men mostly union soldiers on their way home from confederate prison camps died on board were over 2 400 passengers six times the ship's legal capacity although jubilant about the war's end most of the men were weakened by malnutrition and disease from their imprisonment at andersonville and cahaba hundreds who were not killed in the explosion drowned in the cold

swift waters of the muddy river because of the timing of the sinking coverage of the sultana's demise was scant and the tragedy has passed almost unnoticed in the pages of american history in this highly documented book author jerry potter focuses on how greed indifference gross stupidity and criminal misconduct reaching as far as the white house led to the overloading of the sultana at vicksburg such irresponsible conduct characterized the actions of president lincoln an entire chain of army command and several profit hungry civilians this authoritative work contains abundant photographs and illustrations as well as the most complete list of the ship's passengers available

the author's knowledgeable narrative is interwoven with personal reminiscences including those of the heroic rescuers he offers unprecedented details about the captain's handling of the steamboat and corrects some long held myths about the placement of the soldiers on the sultana and newspaper coverage of the disaster

includes pictures includes accounts of the explosion and sinking of the sultana includes a bibliography for further reading there is a popular saying that declares timing is everything and in no other field of study is that truer than in history for instance under normal conditions a ship that sank with more than 2 000 passengers aboard most of whom died would be big news yet today the sinking of the ss sultana is often overlooked if not entirely forgotten while it might have generated the type of publicity and reaction of the johnstown flood of 1889 or the galveston hurricane of 1900 under normal circumstances the explosion and sinking of the sultana on april 27 1865 has become something of a historical footnote the irony is that the sultana is a historical footnote because of the civil war but it was also intimately tied to the war although robert e lee's surrender to ulysses grant at appomattox was not technically the end of the civil war it took one of the last remaining confederate armies out of the field furthermore on the night of april 14 many of the union's hopes for the future were dashed when president abraham lincoln was shot at ford's theatre in washington d c the people of the nation quickly became a volatile mix of grief and outrage uninterested in anything that did not relate to the death of their beloved president in fact just the day before the disaster as the sultana was sailing up the mississippi river to her rendezvous with destiny union army soldiers cornered and killed lincoln's assassin john wilkes booth the sultana's chief engineer n wintringer tried to give his readers a sense of the context in which the accident took place when he wrote as i was chief engineer of that ill fated steamer at the time of her explosion i thought that my recollections of that terrible calamity would be of some interest i believe that george oayton one of the pilots and myself were the only officers of the boat that escaped with our lives the sultana left cairo on that fatal trip the 15th of april 1865 the day after the death of president lincoln and as all wire communications with the south were cut off at that time the sultana carried the news of his assassination and death to all points and military posts on the mississippi river as far as new orleans in short the entire nation was in a state of chaos and too exhausted from four years of war that culminated in the death of the president to give the disaster the attention and grief it deserved perhaps the crudest irony of the disaster is that the sultana was packed full of men who had survived every conceivable trial and tribulation of the war from wounds and sicknesses to being prisoners having lost hundreds of thousands america was almost numb to the loss of a couple of thousand more especially when many of the dead were soldiers themselves and in a sense it was left for future generations to try to unravel what went wrong and to pay tribute to the men who died on that dark night the explosion of the ss sultana chronicles the story of america's deadliest maritime disaster along with pictures of important people places and events you will learn about the explosion and sinking of the sultana like never before in no time at all

from the groundbreaking north south magazine article featured on the history channel in civil war terror and in pbs history detectives get the whole story of confederate boatburner and spy robert louden called the murderer of the age learn about his connection to the captain of the steamer sultana and about the band of saboteurs responsible for destroying 60 or more steamboats on the mississippi river during the civil war convicted of destroying a steamer carrying millions of payroll meant for grant's forces sentenced to death and coming within minutes of hanging find out how lincoln's stay of execution of robert louden may have led to a worse maritime disaster than the sinking of titanic among the steamboats destroyed on the mississippi river the one with the largest single loss of life was the steamer sultana the boat had been loaded with over 2000 people most of them

union pows returning from southern prison camps when the sultana exploded and burned as many as 1800 people were killed as many union soldiers died on the river that night as died on the battlefield of shiloh with them died a number of women children and civilian men was it an accident or sabotage excerpt from sultana a case for sabotage seven miles out of memphis at 2 00 a m on april 27 1865 the steamer sultana chugged northward loaded with over twenty three hundred people most of them union soldiers returning home from southern prison camps without warning an explosion ripped through the boilers scalding steam burst out and a shower of flaming coal shot upward into the night raining down on the crowded boat which in moments was engulfed in flames over seventeen hundred people died making the destruction of sultana a maritime disaster worse than the sinking of the titanic this publication also includes the full length version of the originally published north south article with all footnotes and sources

suddenly hundreds of men women and children were wringing their hands tossing their arms wildly in the air and rushing pell mell into the cold murky waters of the mississippi

the date is april 27 1865 you are crammed onboard the steamboat sultana with more than 2 000 passengers many of them are soldiers heading home after the civil war you re cruising on the mississippi river when a massive explosion rips through the ship do you dive into the water to save yourself or stay onboard to help the survivors will you try to swim for shore or wait for help to arrive will you stay with your sick friend or try to find someone to help him with dozens of possible choices it s up to you to decide how you ll survive one of the worst river disasters ever seen

in april 1865 the steamboat sultana slowly moved up the mississippi river its overtaxed engines straining under the weight of twenty four hundred passengers mostly union soldiers recently paroled from confederate prison camps at 2 a m three of sultana s four boilers exploded within twenty minutes the boat went down in flames and an estimated seventeen hundred lives were lost the worst maritime disaster in american history the sinking of the sultana is a forgotten tragedy lost in the turmoil of the times the war s end the assassination of president lincoln the pursuit of john wilkes booth alan huffman presents this harrowing story in gripping and vivid detail and paints a moving portrait of four individual soldiers who survived the civil war s final hell to make it back home

tells the dramatic story of the infamous confederate prisoner of war camp where 5 000 union soldiers were interned during the latter part of the civil war and of the ensuing maritime disaster with a death rate of 5 percent alabama s cahaba federal prison boasted a better survival rate than the notorious confederate prisoner of war camps of andersonville libby prison elmira rock island johnson s island and camp douglas yet it was a ghastly facility a hastily converted agricultural warehouse so overcrowded that each man barely had space to lie down to sleep at the war s conclusion in 1865 however in a harrowing reversal of the inmates fates captured union soldiers were sent on a grueling overland march to the mississippi river held there in camps at vicksburg along with other prisoners of war the soldiers embarked on the steamship sultana for transportation north traveling first to new orleans and then heading north the vessel held by some estimates six times more passengers than its safe limit many of them ill injured or malnourished the flow of the swollen mississippi that april was wide swift and cold and the sultana struggled to make the journey then on april 27 1865 seven miles north of memphis a series of three boilers exploded within seconds of one another the lucky passengers were flung into the water as chunks of the sultana blasted apart the remaining wooden structure caught fire and the upper deck collapsed only an estimated one third of the passengers survived hundreds of whom later died from their wounds first published in 1988 bryant s account weaves together the many strands of the cahaba story combining masterful storytelling and insightful analysis he describes civil war prisons the history of the cahaba federal prison and its construction as well as the prison s commanders prisoners and local women who provided medical care and food to the prisoners he tells of the violent struggles among union inmates a mutiny and flood that occurred during the final days of the camp and the harrowing deaths of the liberated soldiers aboard the sultana bryant s cahaba prison and the sultana disaster remains a vital part of any library of civil war history

## 64th ohio infantry 65th ohio infantry 6th ohio battery mclaughlin squadron of cavalry

excerpt from loss of the sultana and reminiscences of survivors history of a disaster where over one thousand five hundred human beings were lost most of them being exchanged prisoners of war on their way home after privation and suffering from one to twenty three months in cahaba and andersonville prisons the average american is astonished at nothing he sees or hears he looks for large things things ordinary are too tame this and the exciting events of april 1865 perhaps account for the fact that the loss of the steamer sultana and over 1 700 passengers mostly exchanged prisoners of war finds no place in american history the idea that the most appalling marine disaster that ever occurred in the history of the world should pass by unnoticed is strange but still such is the fact and the majority of the american people today do not know that there ever was such a vessel as the sultana and many of those who do recollect something about the occurrence cannot tell whether it occurred in the mississippi river the gulf of mexico or the atlantic ocean and the purpose of setting them right and instructing others thus holding in the memory of the present generation and those yet to be the sufferings of the defenders of our country is the object of this sketch the steamer sultana was built at cincinnati ohio january 1863 and was registered as near as i can learn at 1 719 tons she was a regular st louis and new orleans packet and left the latter port on her fatal trip april 21 1865 arriving at vicksburg miss with about two hundred passengers and crew on board about the publisher forgotten books publishes hundreds of thousands of rare and classic books find more at forgottenbooks com this book is a reproduction of an important historical work forgotten books uses state of the art technology to digitally reconstruct the work preserving the original format whilst repairing imperfections present in the aged copy in rare cases an imperfection in the original such as a blemish or missing page may be replicated in our edition we do however repair the vast majority of imperfections successfully any imperfections that remain are intentionally left to preserve the state of such historical works

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