

Survivor of Ill Fated Sultana

A.A. Jones tells the boys about this and experiences in Andersonville –talks around the Camp Fire.

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A.A. Jones of this city has the unique distinction of being the only living survivor of the Sultana disaster in North Eastern Ohio. Mr. Jones saw service in the 115th regiment, O.V.I., being incarcerated in Andersonville prison, and was on board the luckless ship Sultana on the terrible day when a great majority of the 2500 men on board perished.

Mr. Jones tells in a very interesting manner of his life in Andersonville prison, of the filth and squalor of the place, and of the awful privations, which the prisoners were forced to undergo. He recalls distinctly how the prisoners were left without the common comforts of life, without even pure water at one time, and how many of them were left to die without medical attention.

Mr. Jones had just been released from Andersonville as an exchange and had started northward in April 1865 from Vicksburg on the Sultana, when the frightful explosion with its appalling loss of life occurred. Nearly all on board the ship were like Mr. Jones, exchanged prisoners homeward bound. The memory of the Sultana disaster is still vivid within the mind of Mr. Jones who described it at a meeting of the G.A. R. last evening.

During his prison life in Andersonville, which was for a period of three or four months, Mr. Jones was in very poor health and the exceedingly bad sanitary conditions of the prison made him so weak that when he was taken out and placed on board the transport Sultana, he was placed in a bunk bed sandwiched in between two comrades.

The instant the terrible explosion occurred on the ship, these two comrades suddenly and mysteriously disappeared and no trace has ever been found of them since. Undoubtedly they perished. A large piece of wreckage was thrown upon Mr. Jones and it was with difficulty that he extricated himself from it and climbed to the railing on the edge of the boat, there to view the heart-wrenching scene of carnage.

The piteous groans and shrieks of the dying, the neighing and braying of panic-stricken horses and mules and the hissing of the suddenly released steam still ring in the ears of the survivors of the Sultana horror. The ship quickly took fire and the only means of escape was by floating away on some piece of wreckage.

Mr. Jones escaped by grasping a plank after one had already been snatched away from him by a panic stricken comrade. He tried to guide himself as long as possible, but was soon caught in a strong current, and had to abandon all hope of getting out of it, being whirled down the river in such a manner that it is miraculous that he escaped with his life. Just as the lights of Memphis appeared before his weary eyes in the gray dawn of morning, Mr. Jones, numb and feeble from exhaustion and cold, was found by a passing

vessel, picked up and taken to comfort and safety. Two women wrapped a blanket about him otherwise he might have perished from exposure. He was finally taken to a hospital in Washington, where he was nursed back to health.

The cause of the Sultana explosion has never been absolutely determined. At the time it was supposed to have been due to a defective boiler; but it is now the opinion of most of the survivors that some Confederate had succeeded in secretly placing a torpedo among the coal under the boiler. The fact that the ship was rent to twain seems to substantiate this theory.