

# HONORING FOREVER

## NEWSLETTER

### Holidays Away From Home Are A Necessary Sacrifice

**"I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas, Just like the ones I used to Know..."**

by **Greg Banicki MS, LMFT**

**O4B, 509th ASA Group, Vietnam 1972**

*A lot of GI's over the past 80 years have heard the call of home echoed in Bing Crosby's rendition of White Christmas. It became the best-selling Christmas single of all time and still serves to connect serving soldiers to memories of home and family.*

One major sacrifice servicemen and women face is being away from home during major holidays. While this can be emotionally challenging, especially for men and women with children, it is a duty and commitment that is necessary when serving in the military.

During the holiday season, American armed forces remain deployed all over the world. The 1.4 million men and women who volunteer and perform a crucial national service represent just .04 percent of the American population. Within the Army alone, there are nearly 182,000 Soldiers deployed to 140 countries, at any given time.

Although these service members would rather be home with their loved ones, they accept their duty with pride and dignity, without complaint, and carry on with the mission.

Regardless of a soldier's duty station, it is not the same as being home for a holiday like Christmas or Thanksgiving. Homesickness is the #1 malady of serving during the holidays. Frequently, civilians unfamiliar with the military only think of soldiers serving away from home as those serving in combat zones and forget about those who are serving in other countries, like Japan, Korea, Kuwait, and countless other duty stations, many of which are isolated.

It's a situation where you have to make the best of things when away from home for major holidays.

*Here's what a few area veterans had to say about a memorable holiday away from home:*

**Bud Mendenhall, U. S. Navy, Gunner's Mate 3rd Class. (1952-56).** Mendenhall served two years in Korea aboard the U.S.S. Carmick, a high-speed minesweeper. "Our first year there was "on station" off the coast of North Korea, patrolling around the island of Yang Do," he reflected. "We learned that there was a small detachment of U. S. soldiers stationed on the island who were isolated there. Our Captain decided that we would bring a taste of home to these men. We took them a Thanksgiving meal and they were able to have a feast and share it with local children."

*While not easy, service members most always made the best of their situation so far from home.*

**Bruce Lehman, Spec 4, U. S. Army. (1968-71).** Lehman served with MACV, Company D, Troop Command, and was away from home for two Christmas seasons. In 1969, he was stationed at Long Binh in South Vietnam.

"Bob Hope was entertaining there but I was not part of the crowd that got to go to the show," Lehman remembers. "So, I spent the day in the sun and lounging about. During Christmas the next year I was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington. It was lonely being one of only a few that didn't get leave for the holiday. Not being home for two Christmases in a row was tough. In Nam you just settled in and

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## Holidays Away...

*Continued...*

understood thousands of other service men and women were in the same boat as me.”

*Sometimes serving in the continental U. S. could be more challenging than being deployed overseas.*

**Robert Thomas, SFC (E-7), U. S. Army, (17 years).** In December of 1986, when he was still a Specialist stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, he decided to remain on post at Christmas time. “I figured that this would be an easy thing to save some money and allow me to have more time for leave later next year”, Thomas says. “At first, it was not too bad even though almost everyone left for home. I had a small Christmas tree in my room that my parents had sent me. After a couple of days, it got lonely as hardly anyone was around in the barracks. I was kept busy with some minor duties and playing some video games. On Christmas, I called home to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and I found out that my horse passed away. I was already beginning to regret not going home to see everyone, and the loss of my horse just saddened me even further,” he states. “I learned that I could get through it, and it made me realize how important the time with family and friends was. I avoided staying away on Christmas for the rest of my career in the military, unless it was required by duty.”



**Bob Hope USO Tour - 1963**

*Photo from Armed Forces Heritage Museum*

*But no matter the location, holidays away were always made better when Care packages were received from friends and family at home.*

**Eric Johnson, Sgt. (E-5), U. S. Army, First S&T Battalion, 1st Infantry Division, Lai Khe, South Vietnam, 1969-1970.** “Being away from your friends and family was very hard,” says Johnson. “You think about all the good times you have had in the past and just wish you could talk to your family on Christmas Day,” he says. “What I enjoyed about the holidays overseas were the Care Packages I received from family: Mom’s chocolate chip cookies, Seyfert’s potato chips, snacks, and of course words of encouragement. It means a lot to connect with home when you’re away at this special time of year!”

*Sometimes though, the holiday blues would get the best of you, especially for the married men and women with children serving so far from home.*

**Vincent Humes, Sgt. (E-5), U. S. Army (9 years), Afghanistan 2011-2012.** Humes spent Christmas 2011 stationed at Jalalabad in Nangihah Province, Afghanistan. “We spent our Christmas there because we deployed in October. I missed my wife and girls especially for Christmas because we always made a big family time of it”, he reflects. “I felt very down, almost gloomy. The Afghans put up a Christmas display outside that was supposed to be Jesus and the three wise men, but it ended up looking like Jesus with the three Taliban. My battle buddy and myself laughed at it every time we walked by it to eat chow. I hated that display, and I was reminded that I had ten more months to go.”

*Holiday celebrations could often be bittersweet and remind the soldiers that they were far, far from home, but duty to the mission was always the primary focus of those serving. Still, the time with fellow GI’s and battle buddies during holidays were valued.*

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# HONORING FOREVER

## Holidays Away...

*Continued...*

**Timothy Schild, SFC (E-7), U. S. Army (17 years /Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve).** “I remember being away for many holidays throughout my service in the U. S. Army. During Christmas 2005, while serving in Baghdad, Iraq, units throughout the FOB made efforts for the soldiers to be able to celebrate the holiday”, he remembers. “However, the insurgents had other plans and launched several attacks throughout Baghdad”. “Our FOB received mortar attacks at three different times during the holiday. Despite the attacks we still exchanged gifts and had a holiday meal together,” he notes. “We were separated from our families back home but still got to celebrate with our brothers and sisters deployed with us. Sharing that experience is one I’ll never forget.”

*Often, the bond between service members and the shared experiences of holidays away from home, especially in a war zone, created memories that will never be forgotten.*

*Bu Dop  
South Vietnam -  
Dec. 1967  
Photo by  
John Olson -  
Stars and Stripes*



**Pat Frazier, U. S. Air Force, 12 TAC Fighter Wing, 412 Munitions Maintenance Squadron, Combat Support Group.** “I was in Vietnam prior to the Big Build-up, and we were asked to do different jobs in order to keep the mission attainable,” said Frazier. “I was assigned to the bomb dump and would volunteer to run emergency ammo when it was necessary. In addition to this, I would

help with the wounded when needed at the hospital,” he stated. “It was very sad and lonely; however, the bright moment was when my aunt sent a small Christmas tree for all to enjoy. It also made me appreciate God, country, family, and freedom,” he notes. “Would I go again? YES,” he reflects, “It is a bond of brotherhood that I will never forget and still have today.”

No matter where a Soldier’s duty assignment takes them, it is not the same as being home for major holidays, but the sense of camaraderie with others serving with you sometimes can help offset the separation from family.

Soldiers may be serving at a post in the U.S., but must remain at their duty station and cannot return home to visit. If you don’t know someone directly serving away from home, contact your friends or relatives to get the name and address of a soldier serving away from home. Simple acts, such as a Christmas card with a note of appreciation and encouragement, will go a long way for someone that is not home. They will be grateful knowing that someone is thinking about them. During this holiday season, please try and do something for the men and women deployed away from home, here or overseas.

For information, on how to find a serviceman or woman to honor and support, go to **[www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com)** or contact the Public Affairs office at your local Reserve or Guard unit.

## Legacy Bricks Deadline

All Legacy bricks that will be installed on the front of new Sterling Chapel should be ordered no later than January 31, 2023. We already have over 130 bricks that have been delivered for this project. Order forms are available at the Shrine or on our website

**[honoringforever.org](http://honoringforever.org)**



## Happy Holidays Veterans and Staff

by *Greg Bedford, Commander*

This time of year is a very good time to reflect on the past 12 months. It has been a busy year at the Shrine with the naming of the new W. Paul Wolf War History Museum, which is in the final stages of construction. Soon we will start the Jeanette Sterling Chapel to be completed by Spring 2023. We are scheduled to finish the refurbishing of the 40/8 Merci Box Car by Summer.

On a sadder note, I just recently lost my older brother Randy, who died unexpectedly at the age of 60. It sure makes us all realize that our time on this earth is short, so we must enjoy each and every day like it's our last!

That is why our mission of "No veteran will ever be forgotten" holds so true. We appreciate all those that have served, past and present and honor those Veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice. I wish to thank the staff here at the Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum, our Board of Directors and all the great volunteers who help us each and every week! May you and your family have the Happiest of Holidays and enjoy a very prosperous New Year! Be safe, stay well!

## The Mission of the Shrine

- To provide a forever memorial for all military Veterans of the United States.
- To preserve artifacts of their service; to give future generations a better understanding and appreciation of the historical past of the United States.
- To educate today's youth on the history of war and conflicts that the United States has been involved in defending the freedoms we enjoy every-day.

## Did You Know That...?

- In the forty years since its dedication, the Vietnam Memorial Wall has become the most visited memorial in Washington D.C, according to Militarytimes.com.
- During the Gulf War to repel Iraq from Kuwait, the U.S. sent about 270,000 troops to the Middle East. Along with the help of a massive coalition, the allies sent Saddam Hussein's men running for their lives.
- The First American Regiment was created in 1784, just after the Revolution. It was the country's first peacetime regular army, and it was limited to just a few hundred men. The Founding Fathers didn't believe in the idea of standing armies, so after the Revolutionary War, they essentially dismantled the Army.
- Only one president (James Buchanan) served as an enlisted man in the military and did not go on to become an officer.
- The U. S. Air Force is the biggest air force on Earth. And when combined, the Navy and Marines have the planet's second-largest air force.
- Air power is critical to today's style of warfare. The U.S. has about 3,500 tactical air-craft, 2,800 tanks, and 970 attack helicopters.
- "Semper Paratus" is the official song of the Coast Guard. The title means "Always Ready".



## The Famous Christmas Truce of 1914

### *When War Took a Holiday*

Late on Christmas Eve of 1914, men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) heard German troops in the trenches opposite them singing carols and patriotic songs, and saw lanterns and small fir trees along their trenches. Messages began to be shouted between the trenches.



The following day, British and German soldiers met in no man's land and exchanged gifts, took photographs and some played impromptu games of soccer. They also buried casualties and repaired trenches and dugouts.

The truce was not observed everywhere along the Western Front. Elsewhere the fighting continued, and casualties did occur on Christmas Day. Some officers were unhappy at the truce and worried that it would undermine fighting spirit.

After 1914, the High Commands on both sides tried to prevent any truces on a similar scale happening again. Despite this, there were some isolated incidents of soldiers holding brief truces later in the war, and not only at Christmas.

In what was known as the 'Live and Let Live' system, in quiet sectors of the front line, brief pauses in the hostilities were sometimes tacitly agreed, allowing both sides to repair their trenches or gather their dead.

*Reprinted from an IWM (Imperial War Museums) publication 2022*

## The Terrible Cost of WWI

Of the 60 million soldiers who fought in the First World War, over 9 million were killed – 14% of the combat troops or 6,000 dead soldiers per day. The armies of the Central Powers mobilized 25 million soldiers and 3.5 million of them died. The Entente Powers deployed 40 million soldiers and lost more than 5 million. Data on civilian casualties from WWI are very limited and uncertain, suggesting an estimated 6 million casualties among the civilian population.

Often called the Great War, and the War to end all Wars, but sadly, it did not! The day the war ended, November 11, 1918, (the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month) was celebrated as Armistice Day for many years. In 1954, Armistice Day was changed to Veterans Day in the United States to honor all veterans who served this country in war and in peace.

## Calendar of Events

### December

- Dec. 7 - Pearl Harbor Day of Remembrance
- Dec. 13 - Army National Guard Birthday
- Dec. 17 - Wreaths Across America
- Dec. 18-26 - Hanukkah
- Dec. 20 - Space Force Birthday
- Dec. 25 - Christmas Day
- Dec. 26 - Jan. 1 - Kwanzaa
- Dec. 31 - New Year's Eve

### January

- Jan 1 - New Year's Day
- Jan 16 - Martin Luther King Day

### February

- Feb 1 - National Freedom Day  
Start of Black History Month
- Feb 13 - Lincoln's Birthday
- Feb 14 - Valentine's Day
- Feb 20 - President's Day



## Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum Honors Famous Civil War Nurse

Saturday October 22nd was a beautiful fall day, as over seven veteran organizations honored Eliza E. George (better known as Mother George) at a ceremony at Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne. Tom Schmitt, board member and organizer of the event was the master of ceremonies during the 45 minute tribute.



Known as the “angel of mercy”, she accompanied Indiana regiments during the Civil War nursing the sick, wounded and sitting by the side of dying soldiers. She gave her life, like thousands of others, in the terrible struggle to preserve the Union. Mother George died of typhoid fever in 1865.

All those who participated in the ceremony were dressed in period clothing. Rifle volleys were fired and taps was played at the end of the ceremony. Thanks to Tom for organizing a wonderful event.



*Eliza E. George*



# HONORING FOREVER

## Still Serving All of Us.

*Our newsletter will be featuring articles about those still serving all of us. We hope you enjoy meeting active duty women and men.*

Kurt Briner was born and raised in North Manchester, Indiana where his father worked in agriculture all his life, specifically the local veal industry. His mother was an all-level educator, having taught in elementary, high school and some collegiate teaching as well.



Currently, he is a Command Sergeant Major stationed with the 122nd Fighter Wing, Blacksnakes in Fort Wayne.

"I graduated from North Manchester High School in 2000. After multiple starts and stops over the years, I have eventually earned my Bachelor's and Master's degree in Organizational Leadership through Purdue University, Fort Wayne."

Briner is extremely proud to have come from a very patriotic family with a deep history of military service. Grandfather, Ross Briner, was a waist gunner on a B-29, the "Rush Order", flying 30+ missions over the Burma Hump and mainland Japan in the Pacific during WWII. Father Steve Briner is a Vietnam-era US Army Veteran. Initially trained as 11B Infantry. According to Kurt, he was quickly identified as an excellent typist ('my grandmother demanded it,') and he was then transferred to Headquarters company at Landstuhl, Germany for his entire commitment. Two other uncles served in the US Army/Army National Guard as well. "

Briner initially joined in April of 1999, during his Junior year of High School in a program called "The delayed enlistment" option. "I knew I wanted to join the service long before my buddies. They were still trying to figure out which college or job they

wanted." He left for Basic Training in San Antonio, TX in September of 2000. He was at his first duty station less than one year when 9/11 happened.

"I've been stationed in Montana (Big Sky!) and short tours in Maryland (Fort Meade), Japan (Misawa Air Base) and deployed to Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan in 2018. Currently I serve as the Senior Enlisted Leader, 122d Maintenance Squadron and manage the health, welfare, morale and combat readiness of just under 100 A-10C Aircraft Maintenance Airmen."

This past spring he had "...the absolute honor of being promoted to Chief Master Sergeant (E-9) with both my father and my daughter helping tack-on my new stripes in the traditional fashion! Currently I serve as the Senior Enlisted Leader, 122d Maintenance Squadron, managing the health, welfare, morale and combat readiness of just under 100 A-10C Aircraft Maintenance Airmen."

Service to country is also a commitment made by his wife, Katie. They married in 2009. She's a key spouse volunteer at the 122nd here, and works with the Northeast Indiana Base Community Council to design their yearly Race For The Warrior 5K fun run logos to support local soldiers & Airmen in need. "We have one amazing daughter, Stella, who attends Carrol Middle School. We live on the North side. We enjoy Fort Wayne and all the greenway trails, parks and wonderful festivals downtown during the summer!"

## Volunteers Needed

If you have a heart for Veterans,  
**We need you!**

- Special Events
- Museum Tour Guide
  - Gardening
- Computer work

OR

Join us every Wednesday  
from 10:00am - 1:00pm  
for museum cleaning and  
sprucing up the grounds.

[vnmsfw@gmail.com](mailto:vnmsfw@gmail.com)

## New Artifacts at the Museum

by Robert Thomas

### US M1 120mm Anti-Aircraft Gun

Since the aircraft became an instrument of war during World War I, the defense from aircraft has been a challenge. Two ways to stop enemy aircraft are by fighters or Anti-Aircraft Armaments. The war planes of World War I flew at lower altitudes than what would be used in World War II. The US Military saw that war was coming over the horizon by the actions in Europe and Asia. The US Army created two new AA guns; one would become biggest ever made in the US arsenal. The M1 120mm Gun would be the super-heavy anti-aircraft gun of World War II and the Korean War. It fired a single 50 lbs. shell to a height of 60,000 ft, which earned it a the nickname of "Stratosphere Gun". The gun was never fired at enemy aircraft in World War II, but was used mostly as defense in case of an Axis invasion of the US. The gun would see action in Korea, but the jet was beginning to show the limits of the system.

The shell seen to the right is the original brass shell casing with a 3-D created bullet with timer fuze. Shell is 4' 10.66" in height and the type of shell is High Explosive (HE).

Mass: 32 tons	Crew: 13
Length: 24½ ft	Carriage: Towed
Barrel Length: 23½ ft	Elevation: 80 Deg.
Rate of Fire: 12 rnds/min.	Traverse: 360 Deg.
Muzzle Velocity: 3,100 ft/s	
Maximum Firing Range: 82,000 ft	
Years of Service: 1940 – 1960	
(Replaced by Nike Missiles)	



*120mm AA Battery Firing*

### Shoe Box Mine

After World War I, cheap alternatives for mines were created to hinder and direct military operations. Several countries would develop wooden mines; one of the first countries to use them would be Finland. These explosives were easy to develop and help in the defense against the Russians in the Winter War. This would be further exploited by the Germans in World War II. The Germans would use the shoe box mine to defeat the mine detectors used by Allied troops.



These low powered explosives were enough to seriously wound a soldier and rarely kill them. This would require medics to assist in a hurry, or else the injured soldier would die. The wooden shoe box mine was further developed for use in many conflicts that followed. The design of these mines has a

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**We accept donations either  
Military Collectibles or monetary  
donations for operations!**

## New Artifacts at the Museum

*Continued...*

tendency to become in operable or explodes within a year. Although in dry climates, these mines are just as deadly as regular mines, because they don't break down as quickly. Civilians suffer the most from these mines after the wars are over. This mine was found in Israel, part of the mines used in the Gaza Strip by the Arab forces. A US Soldier found this mine buried in the sand and it had already been removed of its explosive material and detonator.

## New Columbarium Plans

The new Columbarium structure has been revealed to all veterans who want their cremains laid to rest at a National Memorial.

The final structure will have three separate pieces of solid granite; two side Columbariums and a center piece featuring all service emblems. The entire structure will hold 152 niches. Each niche will accommodate a veteran's container and one other (either spouse or significant other). The Columbarium will be located next to the new Sterling Chapel and face the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

For more information on pricing and reserving your niche contact Board Member Tim Schild at 260-494-5865.



## Indiana Tech Students - Meet the Veterans Day!

October 3rd was a very special day at the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum. Students from Indiana Tech's, creative writing class came to the Shrine and interviewed veterans from the Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq War and other conflicts.



*Alysa Williams & Ngor Agwick  
with Eric Johnson - Vice Commander*

Over 20 students interviewed 12 veterans for over an hour and then enjoyed a lunch in the Pavilion afterwards. Each veteran was interviewed by two students, so they could get a better idea of what life was like before, after, and during their service time. It gave students a unique perspective of the work they did in the service, and what life was like after the war.

After lunch, students were assigned projects that needed to be completed at the Shrine and Museum. Bonnie Davis, coordinator of the event, heard students talking later: "After today, I have a whole new respect for veterans and what they did for us." The students were also very moved by the Wall. "It was a great day for both the Veterans and the students, as they got to learn more about each other and what it was like to serve your country. What a great bunch of kids!" Bonnie added.



# HONORING FOREVER

## Gold Star Families Monument Announced

On Saturday September 24th, The Woody Williams Foundation announced that the Gold Star Families monument will have a permanent home at the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum.

Tiffany and Matt Careins, Co-Chair of the committee to raise funds for this special monument made the announcement at the press conference held at the Veterans Memorial grounds.



*Terry Hudson, major donor pictured with Gold Star Family members Dave and Lori Grames.*

Terry Hudson, a former Board Member and Vietnam Veteran, presented a check in the amount of \$50,000 to jump start the fund raising efforts.

Plans are to raise \$125,000 to erect this black granite monument that stands 6ft tall and measures 16 ft from end to end. Four granite benches will also sit near the two-sided monument when it is completed. All donations are welcome: contact Tiffany Careins at 260-437-4835 or by email at TKCareins85@gmail.com



## ★ Donations Accepted ★

*The Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum operates solely on donations from our visitors, private individuals, and patriotic organizations. We welcome in-kind donations of services or materials that enhance our mission. We are a 501(C)(3) not for profit organization as recognized by the IRS regulations. All donations are tax deductible.*



[Donate Online](#)

# HONORING FOREVER

## The PACT Act Expanding Veteran Coverage

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA Health Care and Benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. Several of the key components are as follows.

The Act expands and extends eligibility for VA healthcare for veterans of the Vietnam Era, Gulf War era, and Post 9/11 era veterans. VA has improved and updated the decision making process for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status. Every enrolled veteran will receive an initial toxic exposure screening and follow up screening every five years. All VA healthcare staff will receive toxic exposure related education and training, and an additional 31 new medical facilities are to be opened across the country, creating greater access to VA healthcare. The PACT Act also requires research studies on the mortality of veterans who have served in Southwest Asia during the Gulf War, Post 9/11 veterans health trends, and veteran cancer rates.

The PACT Act also makes it easier for the survivors of veterans to receive dependency and indemnity compensation, which is a monthly payment to surviving spouse and dependent children or parents of the veteran or servicemember if the veteran passed as a result of a service related disease, injury, or illness. Survivors and dependents of veterans may also qualify for healthcare benefits such as CHAMPVA, which is a type of medical insurance for those survivors.

Veterans with previously denied claims related to toxic exposure are encouraged to file a supplemental claim. That claim will be reviewed under the new laws created by the PACT Act. For more information go to [www.va.gov/PACT](http://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-698-2411.



*“We Salute Our Fallen Heroes”.*

## AmazonSmile Helps the Veterans Memorial Shrine and Museum



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## The Sultana Disaster

by Tom Schmitt

On April 27th, 1865 at 2:00 am, the Sultana, a Mississippi river boat exploded, killing between 1195 and 1547 union soldiers. Some accounts say there were 1800 killed. These men were on their way home after being released from southern prisoner of war camps. There were also 70 paying passengers and 85 crew aboard the boat. The records kept about who survived were very poorly kept. This is a greater number killed than the Arizona at Pearl Harbor or the sinking of the Titanic in the North Atlantic. To compare, if this disaster had been a battle, it would have ranked 11th in the number of Union soldiers killed in one day in the entire war.

These Union soldiers had just been released from Andersonville and Cahaba Confederate prisoner of war camps. They were being returned home, after surviving the war and being held prisoner. All were in poor condition.

There were approximately 2200 soldiers on board plus 70 paying passengers and 58 guards on a boat that was licensed to carry 376 passengers. Due to the spring thaw, the river was running 20ft above its normal level. This caused strong currents, through which the boat had to travel...as well as being overloaded by 5 times its rated limit. There was also a lot of debris floating down stream, uprooted trees and wooden buildings, that the boat had to steer around. This caused the boat to go slower and put more strain on the engines.

The Sultana was constructed in Cincinnati, Ohio in January of 1863. The boat was approximately 260 ft long and a beam of 42 ft. there were four decks, including the pilot house. The boat was powered by four interconnected boilers, which drove two 34 ft diameter paddle wheels. After the fall of Vicksburg, the normal route for the Sultana was from St Louis to New Orleans, then back to St Louis, stopping along the way wherever there was some business. On April 15th 1865, she was tied up at Cairo, Illinois

when news came that President Lincoln had been shot. The captain grabbed a armful of Cairo newspapers and headed south wanting to be the first to spread the news. The southern railroads and telegraph system were pretty much destroyed, and the cities depended on the river boats for news.



Upon arrival at Vicksburg, Captain Mason of the Sultana was approached by Captain Ruben Hatch, the Union quartermaster at Vicksburg. Captain Hatch suggested that he could provide 1400 released Union prisoners of war that needed to be taken north. The US government would pay \$2.75 for each enlisted man and \$8.00 for each officer. He would guarantee that the Sultana would get the load of prisoners, if he would get a kick back. Almost everything was done with bribes and kickbacks. Each person who had control of the prisoners would need to be bribed.

The Sultana continued its trip to New Orleans. On the return trip one of the boilers started leaking. When it arrived at Vicksburg to pickup the load of soldiers, a mechanic was brought aboard to repair the boiler leak. The mechanic wanted to repair the leak properly. However, Captain Mason did not want to waste the time and risk losing the load of released prisoners. He instructed the mechanic to just patch the boiler and he would have it repaired properly later. The mechanic informed him that it was not safe to do so.

The Sultana then started to load released prisoners from Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan, and West Virginia. This was significantly more

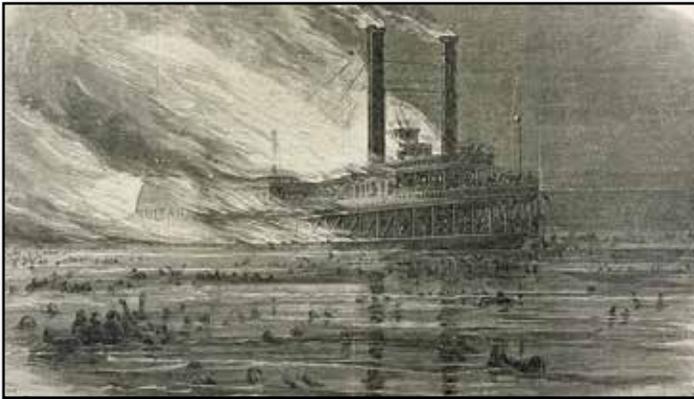
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## The Sultana Disaster

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than the 1400 that were agreed upon at the insistence of the officer in charge. He was in charge of the temporary camp where they were all staying, and had been bribed to accept more prisoners. There were 2130 on board when the boat finally left Vicksburg.

On April 26th, the Sultana stopped at Helena Arkansas, and a picture of the extremely overloaded boat was taken. Fighting the river's current and being completely overloaded, the boat stopped at Memphis to unload some sugar and to load more coal. The ship started north again. Just north of Memphis a boiler exploded followed seconds later by two more boiler explosions. Everyone in the center of the boat was killed by the explosions or by the high pressure steam. This destroyed the pilot house, killing Captain Mason.



There was a large fire being blown toward the stern. This caused the surviving passengers to rush toward the bow or jump into the icy water which, at this location, was three miles wide. The boat, now without power, had been turned due to high winds and the current had shifted so that the bow was now pointing down river. This made the fire move in the direction of the bow, trapping all who moved there and forcing them to jump into the water. Anything that would float was pulled loose from the boat and thrown into the water to be used as a flotation

device. Looking for something to use for flotation, a soldier thought about the boat's mascot, a 7 to 9 ft alligator that was kept aboard in a crate. He dispatched the gator with his bayonet, then he threw the crate into the water and jumped inside and drifted downstream. Many small boats tried to rescue people in the water; the current made this almost impossible and very dangerous. Little if any effort was put into trying to recover the bodies and most just drifted down stream. What was left of the Sultana drifted downstream, running aground on the Arkansas side of the river, where it was covered with 30 ft of mud. The river later changed course and the Sultana was buried in a field 30ft underground 4 miles from the river.

The Sultana disaster received very little publicity, due to the fact the war was over, President Lincoln had been assassinated, and John Wilkes Booth was killed at the same time the disaster happened.

No one was ever held responsible for anything involving the Sultana explosion. Some southerner claimed they had caused the Sultana explosion, this was not true! The cause was determined to be the faulty repair and improper water management in the boilers.

