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DREADFUL FIRE AT SEA - FIVE HUNDRED LIVES LOST

The U. S. Transport Steamer General Lyon Burned Off Cape Hatteras - Invalid Troops, Refugees, and Women and Children on Board.

The steamer Gen. Sedgwick, which arrived at this port at noon yesterday, brought as passengers 29 persons saved from the wreck of the transport steamer General Lyon, which took fire off Cape Hatteras on the morning of Friday last, and was totally destroyed.

The General Lyon had on board from 550 to 600 souls. The 29 who arrived here yesterday are believed to be all that was saved. It appears from the statements of these men that the General Lyon, a screw steamer which had formerly been used as a blockade-runner, sailed from Wilmington for Fortress Monroe, on the morning of Wednesday last, with nearly 600 persons on board, including the crew. Her passengers consisted of discharged and paroled soldiers, escaped prisoners and refugees, among whom were about 20 women and 25 small children. Two negroes were also among the refugees.

The weather was fair on leaving Wilmington, but the steamer put into the port of Smithfield for the night and resumed her voyage on the following morning. Soon after leaving Smithfield the wind, which was blowing from the southwest, increased in violence, and the vessel, which was a very slow one, made but little progress. At 10 o'clock on Friday morning she was off Cape Hatteras, the wind having increased to a hurricane and the sea running very high. It is believed that the vessel was about 60 miles from land when an alarm of fire was given, and in a few minutes afterward the flames broke out at the rear of the pilot-house and nearly in the centre of the vessel. Several of the crew were in the rigging, and there were very few persons on deck at the time, many of the passengers being confined to their berths by sickness.

The first mate, James Gibbs, and the other officers of the vessel immediately got the fire pumps to work with which, and the requisite quantity of hose, the vessel was well provided. But the flames steadily gained headway, and although the pumps were worked with unflinching perseverance, the fire soon spread over the centre portion of the deck, driving the crew and those who were assisting them to the stern and bow of the vessel. The hatches had been closed in consequence of the decks being so constantly under water, but those below, alarmed by the smoke which was spreading through the cabins, rushed on deck only to be driven back by the flames. The frightful shrieks of the women and children, and their piteous supplications for help were drowned by the roaring of the storm.

Several of the paroled soldiers were sick and confined to their berths. Some of them managed to crawl on deck, and clung there until washed overboard by the waves. About half an hour after the fire broke out, the engines partially stopped, and the vessel immediately swung round with her broadside to the wind, and the flames then spreading across the deck. It had now become quite evident that the ship could not be saved. The first officer acted with great courage, and only abandoned the vessel when all hopes of saving her were gone. The fire-pumps were still kept at work, and the flames were fought back with great determination. Many of those below were doubtless already suffocated. The shrieks and moans of the dying came up to those on deck, but they could do nothing to help them.

Just at this time a steamer, which proved to be the United States Transport General Sedgwick, Capt. Starkey, and a small schooner, hove in sight. But neither of them could render any assistance, owing to the violence of the storm and the fact that the burning steamer had drifted in toward the breakers. The flames were now spreading with fearful rapidity. The boats were launched, although there appeared to be little hope of their living in such a sea. Into the first boat 10 men lowered themselves, including the captain of the General Lyon. It is affirmed by several of those who escaped that the captain had lost all control of himself, and was evidently crazed with fear. Hardly had this boat been loosed from the vessel's side than she drifted under her stern, was struck by the screw, and almost instantly went down.

Irah Lewis, a private in the 89th NY Regiment, who was in the boat at the time, states that he saw the captain sink. Lewis and 2 others alone escaped. A second boat was launched, and in this 27 persons, including the First Mate, John Haydon, lowered themselves and succeeded in reaching the General Sedgwick, which was about a mile and a half distant. As the boat touched the steamer's side a wave dashed her violently against it, and she filled and went down. Of the 27 persons in the boat, only 7 were saved. Among these were the Mate, James Gibbs, Barney Losey, of the 5th VA Regiment, and John Fitzgerald, of the 56th IL. In the meantime, a number of the men had thrown themselves overboard, trusting to a spar for support. One man, Isaiah C. Colby, of the 5th OH Cavalry, after working at the fire pumps until he was almost exhausted, seized one of the doors of the galley and sprang overboard. He was in the water 3 hours before he was picked up. Others were also in the water for several hours, and many, doubtless, sank before assistance could be rendered.

It is supposed that the schooner did not succeed in rescuing any of them. So far as known, the following are the only persons saved out of a total of from 550 to 600: Barney Losey, Co. G. 5th VA; M. H. Arment, Co. E. 56th IL; John Kreusen, Co. F. 3rd PA H. A.; Irah Lewis, Co. A, 89th NY; Michael S. Brocket, Co. F, 56th IL; Robt. Simpson, corporal, Co. S, 54th OH; Thos. Farrar, refugee, Wilmington, NC; Jas. Edwards, sergeant, 99th NY; Silas Galloway, 56th NY; Clarence Dunn, refugee; Geo. Murphy, Co. A, 6th NY H. A.; Geo. Goole, Co. F. 144th NY; C. M. Dodson, 3rd PA H. A.; Jos. Fitzgerald, Co. K, 52nd IL; Jas. Dempsey, fireman, steamer General Lyon; Stephen Russell, refugee; Thomas Cooney and Nicholas Brown, sailors, steamer General Lyon; Geo. W. Williams, Co. G, 56th IL; Pat. Bryan, coal-passer, steamer General Lyon; Richard Clarke, Co. F, 2nd IL L. A.; John Peoples, oiler, steamer General Lyon; Isaiah Cleolly, Co. K, 5th OH Cav.; Cyrus P. Williams, Co. F, 3rd PA Art.; James Gibbs, first officer, steamer General Lyon; Wm. Cranston, chief engineer, Saml. Pressey, first cook (colored,) steamer General Lyon; Chas. A. Brady, refugee.

When the General Sedgwick left, being unable to render further assistance, the ill-fated steamer was drifting in toward the frightful breakers off Cape Hatteras. She was then burned down to the water's edge, and every soul on board had doubtless perished. In regard to the origin of the fire, it was stated by the First Mate, while on board the General Sedgwick, that there were several barrels of kerosene oil in the engine-room, and these being shaken down by the rolling of the vessel fell on the boiler, and of course were quickly ignited. A barrel of oil was also kept in the same room, and this served to feed the flames.

A list of the passengers has not yet come to hand, but the following officers of the 56th IL Regiment were known to be on board: Major Files, Lieut. Rankin, Co. A; Capt. Tanquery, Co.

B; Lieut. McKenzie, Co. B; Lieut. Lewis, Co. C; Capt. Weber, Co. E; Lieut. Joiner, Co. E; Lieut. Dunlap, Co. F; Lieut. Goudy, Co. G; Lieut. Holbeck, Co. H. There were also 200 men of this regiment on board, only 5 of whom are recorded as among the saved.

Of the soldiers saved 8 or 10 are at the New York State Soldier's Depot, Nos. 50 and 52 Howard Street, of which Col. Vincent Colyer is Superintendent. They had of course lost their all, and were supplied with the necessary clothing by the Superintendent. Several of them are sick and confined to their beds. They will remain at the depot, where every comfort is afforded them free of all cost until forwarded to their respective destinations.