

Trident History – 1915 S. S. EASTLAND Capsizing LT Bill Fitzgerald (MSC)

The *S.S. Eastland* was a passenger ship based in Chicago and used for tours. On 24 July 1915 the ship rolled over while tied to a dock in the Chicago River. A total of 844 passengers and crew were killed in what was to become the largest loss of life disaster from a single shipwreck on the Great Lakes.

The ship was built by the Jenks Ship Building Company and commissioned in 1902 by the Michigan Steamship Company. In 1915, the new federal *Seaman's Act* had been passed as a result of the RMS *Titanic* disaster, requiring retrofitting of lifeboats on the *Eastland* as on many other passenger vessels. This additional weight, ironically, probably made the *Eastland* more dangerous and it worsened the already severe problem of being top-heavy.

On the fateful morning, passengers began boarding the *Eastland* on the south bank of the Chicago River between Clark and LaSalle Streets around 6.30 a.m., and reached its capacity of 2752 passengers. The ship was packed, with many passengers standing on the open upper decks, and began to list slightly away from the wharf. The crew attempted to stabilize the ship by admitting water to its ballast tanks, but to little avail; and at 7:28, the *Eastland* lurched sharply to port and then rolled completely onto its side, coming to rest on the river bottom, 20 feet below the surface. Consequently, hundreds were trapped inside by the water and the sudden rollover. Although the ship was only 20 feet from the wharf, and in spite of the quick response by the crew of a nearby vessel, the *Kenosha*, which came alongside the hull to allow those stranded on the capsized vessel to leap to safety, a total of 844 passengers and four crew members died in the disaster. Many were young women and children.

A marker dedicated to the accident was dedicated on 4 June 1989. This marker was reported stolen on 26 April 2000 and a replacement marker was installed and rededicated on 24 July 2003.



