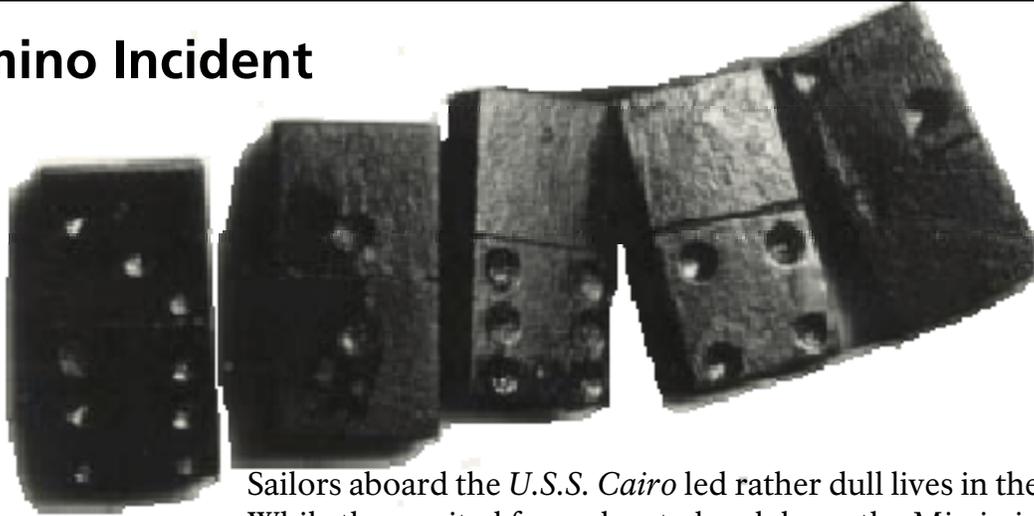




The Domino Incident



Sailors aboard the *U.S.S. Cairo* led rather dull lives in the fall of 1862. While they waited for orders to head down the Mississippi River, they spent long days preparing the gunboat and practicing for battle. Anxious to face Confederate forces near Vicksburg, they fought an unexpected enemy – boredom.

An “Explosive” Situation...



On the morning of November 17, Third Assistant Engineer George Aiken faced a long, hot shift, watching gauges in the engine room. His captain, Thomas O. Selfridge, wanted to run engine tests and needed a “*working power of steam at noon.*” Aiken saw that the fires were well-fueled, then he opened the dampers and steam began to build. The engineer was officially on-duty, but he grew restless. Sure that everything was in order, he decided to slip away and challenge another sailor to a game of dominos.

In the deserted engine room, steam pressure increased. As George Aiken played dominos, the temperature in the belly of the ship reached a new high.

Andrew Lusk was just a fireman aboard *Cairo*. He was officially off-duty that morning, and simply passing by when he noticed an unusual amount of heat in the boiler room. When he checked the steam gauge, he saw the needle passing 205 pounds of pressure! He knew if something wasn’t done right away the mounting steam pressure would cause an explosion – which could spell disaster within *Cairo*’s ironclad walls.



Lusk couldn’t locate Aiken, so he ran up on deck and found another engineer. That officer immediately made adjustments and lowered the steam pressure. Once the situation was under control, and a level of safety restored, the search went out for George Aiken. He was found intent over his dominos, unaware of the tragedy just averted. The game came to an abrupt end when officers burst in and dragged Aiken forward to face his furious captain.



No one knows if George Aiken won or lost at dominos that day. He did lose his job – Selfridge immediately suspended him from duty. Andrew Lusk was cited for his quick actions, and was eventually promoted – to Third Assistant Engineer.