

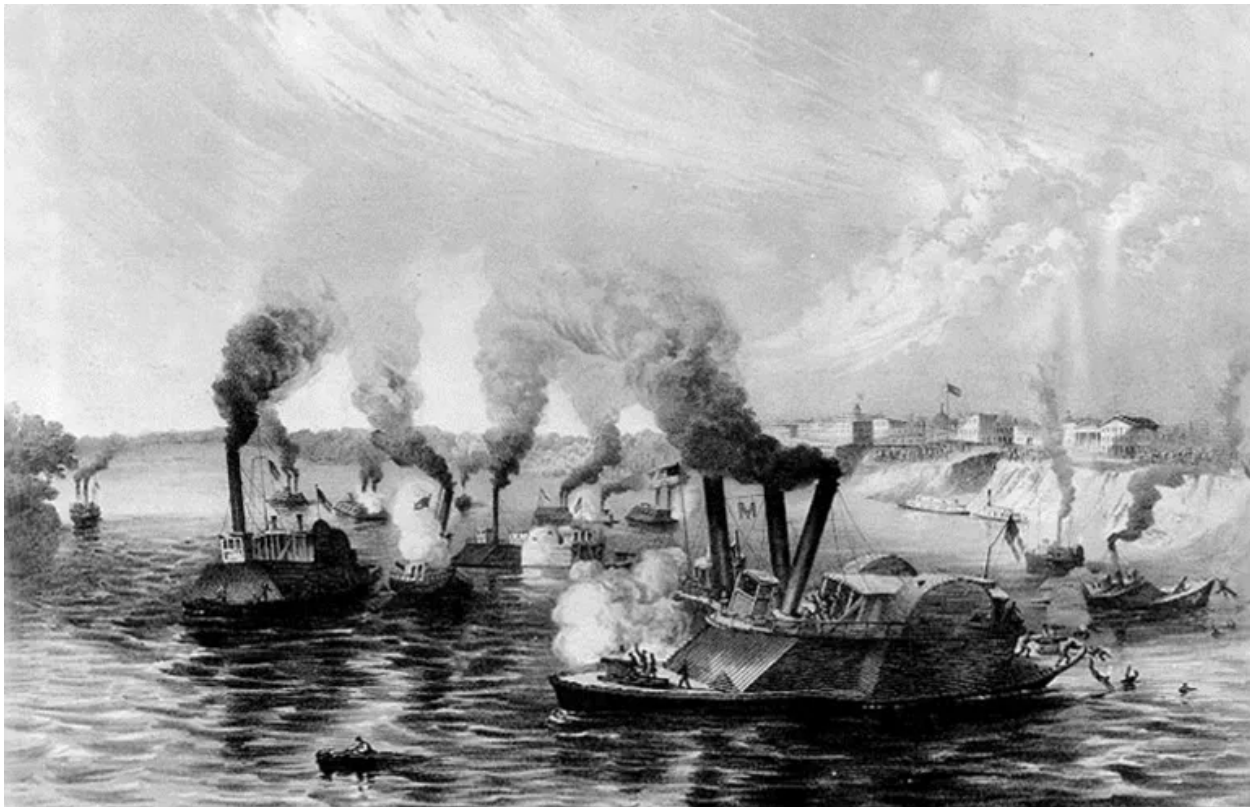
What's the Real History?  
*Trial of Strength*

A lot of research must take place in order for historical fiction to feel as real to the time period as possible. While the characters of Elizabeth Campion and Tom Murphy are fictional, the events they encountered were very real. Ladies and gentlemen, I present the real history behind *Trial of Strength*!

**The Battle of Memphis—June 6, 1863**

The Battle of Memphis began in the early morning hours of June 6, 1863. The Federal Army captured or sank seven of eight Confederate gunboats on the Mississippi River. The Federals sent a message to the mayor of the city; Memphis fell into Union hands in the span of only an hour and a half.

The people of Memphis were given provisions, but they were also kept under close watch. Some citizens protested and worked as spies and smugglers for the Confederacy. The Union army demanded that everyone sign an Oath of Allegiance to the United States; those who refused were severely punished. The sketch below is courtesy of Historic Memphis.



## Irving Block Prison

Irving Block Prison was established in an office building soon after Memphis was taken. It soon developed a reputation of being one of the worst Civil War prisons. Living conditions were so horrid that a year later, President Abraham Lincoln ordered that the prison be closed. Prisoners were not limited to men only; some women were imprisoned there, as well.

A woman whose name was Miss Talley was imprisoned in Irving Block for buying material to make a new uniform for her fiance and not telling who she purchased the material from. She was then transferred to a prison in Alton, Illinois, where she died, never revealing the merchant's name.

Irving Block was once again used as an office building until 1937, when it was torn down and turned into a parking garage. The parking garage was torn down in 2013. Today, there are no remains of this place of human suffering. The photo below is courtesy of Historic Memphis.



*Irving Block  
Memphis Tenn:  
May 27/64*

BISHOP & NEEDLES,  
PHOTOGRAPHERS,  
No. 262 Main Street,  
MEMPHIS, TENN.

*Irving Block,  
Memphis Tenn  
Used by the United States  
as a Military Prison*

## 31st Illinois Regiment

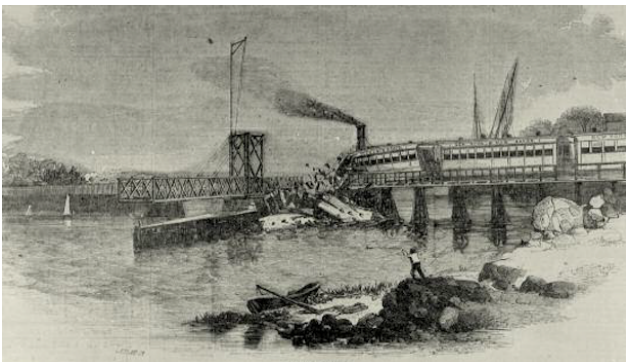


Organized in 1861 in Jacksonville, Illinois, the 31st Illinois Infantry Regiment became known as one of the toughest. It was led by General John “Black Jack” Logan and nicknamed the “Dirty First.” Its first battle was at Belmont, Missouri in November 1861 (you can read about Tom’s backstory in my previous publication [here](#) in *The Copperfield Review*, which includes information about joining the Federal Army and the Battle of Belmont).

The regiment was stationed in Memphis in 1863, departing on March 10 and heading for LaGrange, TN.

## Newark Train Wreck–1853

In *Trial of Strength*, we learn that Elizabeth’s parents were tragically killed in a train crash when she was a child. That train crash really did happen on the New York & New Haven Railroad just as it did in Elizabeth’s flashback in the novel. A drawbridge was left open, and the train sped into the water below. Nearly 40 people in the first two passenger cars drowned. The sketch to the left is from an 1853 newspaper and is owned by the Connecticut Historical Society.



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