

The **S.S. Golden Gate** was a mail and passenger steamer that operated between [San Francisco](#) and [Panama City](#) from 1851 to 1862. On its last voyage from San Francisco it caught fire and was destroyed with the loss of 204 lives off [Manzanillo, Colima](#), Mexico. The ship was carrying \$1,400,000 in gold coins for [Wells Fargo](#), as well as large amounts of gold and coins for the passengers. Much of this was retrieved, but amateurs continue to search for gold with metal detectors on what is now called the Playa de Oro (Gold Beach).

Last voyage

The fire that destroyed the *Golden Gate* occurred during the [American Civil War](#).^[2] The ship left San Francisco at 2:30 pm on Monday, 21 July 1862 under Captain W. H. Hudson, with Captain R. H. Pearson as a passenger. She had a crew of 96 and was carrying 242 passengers, on whom 95 were in cabin class. She carried US\$1,400,000 in \$50 gold coins for [Wells Fargo](#), a huge amount at the time. Many of the passengers were also carrying gold or had deposited gold with the purser.^[1]

The sea was calm and the ship was a few miles off the coast about 14 miles (23 km) from Manzanillo on the evening of Sunday 27 July 1862 when the fire broke out.^[3] It started about 4:45 pm in the floor between the kitchen and the engine room. Captain Hudson decided to run for shore while Pearson supervised firefighting. As the fire intensified the steerage passengers were trapped, and the wind and motion pushed the flames to the rear. Pearson broke down a bulkhead to rescue the chief engineer W. Waddell and crewmen from the engine room.^[1] Boats were launched when the *Golden Gate* was still around 2 miles (3.2 km) from shore.^[6] [The Daily Alta California](#) reported,

The first mate then ordered one of the boats to go back and taken the surplus boats in tow, and follow in the wake of the ship, which was headed for the shore, ... All the after part of the ship was now one sheet of flame, and her passengers were all crowded into the bow. By the time we had reached the ship, many were ashore. After rowing about the ship until we could find no more floating there, we then went back, still searching for those who had left the ship before she struck, and found some five or six who were floating upon boards and timbers, among whom were Ben Hollday and Mr. Storms.^[6]

Many passengers had to jump overboard, and many were unable to reach a boat or swim to shore.^[1] It was said that some of the passengers wore belts holding gold and silver coins, but had to discard them in the water so they would not be pulled down by the weight.^[3] The ship ran aground by 5:30 pm about 300 yards (270 m) from shore in heavy surf on the beach now called Playa de Oro (Gold Beach).^[1]

According to [The New York Times](#) of 9 August 1862, the ship carried 242 passengers and 95 officers and crew. 74 passengers survived, 21 from the first cabin, 22 from the second cabin and 31 from steerage. Of the officers and crew, survivors were W. H. Hudson, Captain; W. Waddell, Chief Engineer; Mathew Nolan, First Mate; H. McKinney, Second Mate; J. K. Wood, Purser; and 58 others.^[6] The survivors dug graves for the corpses that washed ashore, with wooden crosses to identify the victims.^[4] Most of the survivors were picked up on 29 July 1862 by the steamer *St Louis*, which took them back to San Francisco.^[1] Most survivors reached San Francisco in August. The *Daily Alta* published their reports and those of captains Hudson and Pearson.^[6]