

Span Debris Lifted

By John Willard

MUSCATINE, Iowa — The task of clearing the Mississippi River main channel of the nearly 200 tons of steel that once formed the center span of the old bridge here got off to a good start Thursday.

Garland Decker, superintendent of the razing project, said he expected his crews to have the channel cleared today.

"I'VE GOT two sections of the bridge in the barge now and

I'm sure we'll be finished by morning if not sooner," Decker said Thursday.

Earlier in the day, more than 100 explosive charges neatly cut seven sections of the 400-foot center span which fell into the river as hundreds of spectators lined the shore.

Three other sections of the 92-year-old bridge remain standing and two of the spans will be dropped by explosives next week. The third span will be dismantled by crane.

DEMOLITION fans can ex-

pect to get a "two-night double-header" of bridge blasting, according to Decker.

He said a span near the Iowa shore is scheduled to be exploded during hours of daylight Wednesday, while a portion near the Illinois side will be destroyed at night to get maximum visual affect from the shaped charges.

The night blast probably will be either Friday, April 13, or the following Monday, said Decker.

Spectators, many weighted down with photographic equipment, began assembling on the Muscatine levee shortly after 7 a.m. Thursday to bid farewell to the old bridge.

A LOCAL Jaycee representative added to the festivities by selling commemorative keychains featuring engraved pictures of the old bridge. He said proceeds from the sale would go toward various environmental projects for the city.

River traffic had been halted 48 hours prior to the blast and the new bridge was closed to vehicular traffic shortly before the countdown to the detonation.

"It's another old landmark gone," sighed Walter Wittkoff, Muscatine, moments before a towboat's whistle signaled the countdown to the blast. It was

fitting dirge for the venerable old structure that has been part of Muscatine's landscape since 1881.

C. A. Snyder came all the way from his Washington, Iowa, home to observe the blast through a pair of high-powered military binoculars.

"I FORGOT my camera today and the one I have in my car doesn't have film," said Snyder, who made the trip to Muscatine for a second time this week. The explosions had to be postponed a day because of poor weather.

Watching the razing with Snyder and Wittkoff was Muscatine Mayor E. S. Burns.

"We hate to see the bridge go, but it was built for horses and carriages and the new bridge was badly needed," said Burns. The mayor said he hoped the bridge piling closest to the Muscatine shore would be preserved as a historical marker.

Dismantling of the bridge, which was replaced by a newer and wider structure up river, has been under way since January. First the outermost spans were removed by crane. The main central span was removed by controlled demolition in order to quickly clear the main channel of the river for navigation.