

United States Senate Inquiry

Day 13

Testimony of Norman C. Chambers

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(Testimony taken separately before Senator William Alden Smith, chairman of the subcommittee.)

(The witness was sworn by Senator Smith.)

Senator SMITH.

Please state your full name and residence.

Mr. CHAMBERS.

[Norman Campbell Chambers](#), 111 Broadway, New York.

Senator SMITH.

What is your business?

Mr. CHAMBERS.

Mechanical Engineer.

Senator SMITH.

You were on board the [Titanic](#) on this ill-fated voyage?

Mr. CHAMBERS.

Yes, sir.

Senator SMITH.

I wish you would tell the committee what you know about the collision, and any circumstances leading up to or subsequent to the impact, which may tend to throw light upon this unfortunate affair.

First, did you, after the impact, observe the condition of the watertight compartments?

Mr. CHAMBERS.

Our stateroom was [E-8](#), on the starboard side; that is the lowest berth deck, and as far as I know, we were as far forward as any of the first-cabin passengers on that deck.

At the time of the collision I was in bed, and I noticed no very great shock, the loudest noise by far being that of jangling chains whipping along the side of the ship. This passed so quickly that I assumed something had gone wrong with the engines on the starboard side.

Senator SMITH.

What did you do then?

Mr. CHAMBERS.

At the request of my wife I prepared to investigate what had happened, leaving her dressing. I threw on sufficient clothes, including my overcoat. I went up, in a leisurely manner, as far as the [A deck](#) on the starboard side. There I noted only an unusual coldness of the air. Looking over the side I was unable to see anything in any direction.

I returned below, where I was joined by my wife, and we came up again to investigate, still finding nothing. However, there was then a noticeable list to starboard, with probably a few degrees of pitch; and as the ship had a list to port nearly all afternoon, I decided to remain up, in spite of a feeling of perfect safety.

Upon returning to the stateroom for the purpose of completing dressing, I looked at the starboard end of our passage, where there was the companion leading to the quarters of the mail clerks and farther on to the baggage room and, I believe, the mail-sorting room, at the top of these stairs I found a couple of mail clerks wet to their knees, who had just come up from below, bringing their registered mail bags. As the door in the bulkhead in the next deck was open, I was able to look directly into the trunk room, which was then filled with water, and was within 18 inches or 2 feet of the deck above.

We were standing there joking about our baggage being completely soaked and about the correspondence which was seen floating about on the top of the water. I personally felt no sense of danger, as this water was forward of the bulkhead.

- 22 While we were standing there three of the ship's officers - I did not notice their rank or department - descended the first companion and looked into the baggage room, coming back up immediately, saying that we were not making any more water. This was not an announcement, but merely a remark passed from one to the other. Then my wife and myself returned in the direction of our stateroom, a matter of a few yards away only, and as we were going down our own alleyway to the stateroom door our steward came by and told us that we could go back to bed again; that there was no danger. In this I agreed with him, personally.
- 23 However, I finished dressing, my wife being already fully and warmly clothed, and she in the meanwhile having gone out into the passage to note any later developments, came rushing back to me, saying that she had seen another passenger who informed her that the call had been given out for lifebelts and on the [boat deck](#). I went out, myself, and found my room steward passing down the alleyway, and had the order verified.
- 24 As I was at the time fully dressed and wore my heavy overcoat, in the pockets of which I had already placed certain necessities, we started up. My wife had presence of mind enough to take a lifebelt. I opened my steamer trunk and took out a small pocket compass, and, sending my wife on ahead, opened my bag and removed my automatic pistol.
- 25 We then proceeded immediately upward, my wife being rather alarmed, as she had also been at the time of the collision. But for her I should have remained in bed, reading.
- 26 We kept on upward, passing, at the various landings, people who did not appear to be particularly frightened, until we arrived on the A deck, going out on the port side, where I shortly found the deck steward; joked with him about opening his little office room, and obtained our two steamer rugs.
- 27 We then proceeded up the port outside companion onto the boat deck. There did not at any time seem to be any particular group of passengers around the boats on the port side, although there were seamen there unlimbering the gear.
- 28 Owing to the list being to the starboard, I assumed that the boats which were lowered on the starboard side would be sure to clear the ship, while those on the port side might have some difficulty. This was only an assumption, as I have not heard of any such difficulty since.
- 29 We then proceeded over the raised deck caused by the unusual height of the ceiling in the lounge, and came down again onto the boat deck proper on the starboard side. Then I gave my wife a drink from my flask, filled my pipe, put on my lifebelt at her urgent request, she having hers already on, and we stood at the rail for a few moments.
- 30 I would like to call particular attention to the fact that from the moment the engines were stopped steam was of course blown out from the boilers. This, coming through one single steam pipe on the starboard side of the forward funnel, made a terrific loud noise; so loud, indeed, that persons on the boat deck could only communicate by getting as close as possible and speaking loudly. As a matter of fact, I shouted in my wife's ear.
- 31 All this time I considered that the lifeboats were merely a precaution and, upon my wife's suggestion, we moved up forward of the entry from the deck house.
- 32 There were still quite a number of passengers coming out, the stewards standing there directing them to the boats aft.
- 33 Instead of going aft, we stepped behind the projection of this entry, which was of the vestibule type and waited until people had apparently ceased coming and the steward was no longer there. Then we started forward again, and, as nearly as I can remember, stopped at the last one of the forward starboard group of lifeboats. This was already swung out level with the deck, and to my eyes, appeared sufficiently loaded.
- 34 However, my wife said that she was going in that [boat](#), and proceeded to jump in, calling me to come. As I knew she would get out again had I not come, I finally jumped into the boat, although I did not consider it, from the looks of things, safe to put very many more people in that boat.
- 35 As I remember it, there were two more men, both called by their wives, who jumped in after I did. One of them - a German, I believe - told me, as I recollect it, later on the [Carpathia](#) that he had looked around and had seen no one else and no one to ask whether he should go in or not, and he jumped in.
- 36 Senator SMITH.
How many people were in the boat at that time?
- 37 Mr. CHAMBERS.
That I cannot tell.

38 By the time we were settled and I began to take note of the things on the ship I noticed a tall young officer clad in a long overcoat, which may help identify him, giving orders to another officer to go into our boat and take charge of the boats on our side. As a parting injunction he gave our officer (whom I later found to be a [Mr. Pitman](#)) instructions to hold onto his painter and pull up alongside the gangway after the boat had reached the water.

39 Preliminary to this, and before lowering, all of which was done with absolute calm, I heard someone in authority say, "That is enough before lowering. We can get more in after she is in the water."

40 I remember these conversations particularly, as at the time I was wondering at the source of the order, being morally certain, myself that no doors in the ship's side had been opened.

41 We were then lowered away in a manner which I would consider very satisfactory, taking into account the apparent absolute lack of training of the rank and file of the crew.

42 Shortly before we reached the water our officer called and finally blew his whistle for them to stop lowering, that he might find out if the plug was in or not. The inquiry was called in a loud tone of voice, to which one of the crew in our boat replied that it was, that he himself had put it in. Meanwhile a voice from above called down, as nearly as I can recollect it, "It is your own blooming business to see that the plug is in, anyhow."

43 When we reached the water, we then had difficulty in casting off the falls. The little [quartermaster](#) had to crawl between our legs to the amidship portion of the boat in order to reach what was apparently called the "trigger," which is, I believe, a mechanism used to release both falls simultaneously.

44 We then put out our oars and crawled away slowly from the ship until we lay some three or four hundred yards off.

45 Senator SMITH.
Did you observe anything unusual regarding the watertight compartments?

46 Mr. CHAMBERS.
I was rather surprised at the time when she struck to hear no particular orders or signals for closing the watertight doors. By those I mean such as are usually closed by the stewards, and were, when I last traveled on the Cunarders, a number of years ago, always tested by being closed by the stewards themselves at noon or thereabouts.

47 Senator SMITH.
At noon of each day?

48 Mr. CHAMBERS.
At noon each day, yes; when the whistle blew at noon. That was on the old [Etruria](#) and [Umbria](#). I never traveled on the [Campania](#) and [Lucania](#).

49 While I did not make a careful examination of the mechanism of the doors, I, at the same time, had looked them over rather more than casually, on my way to and from the swimming pool in mornings.

50 I remember being somewhat surprised that these doors were not nowadays operated by electricity, this being only a landsman's point of view. As a matter of fact, they were operated from the deck above, the [E deck](#), by first removing a small boiler plate which fitted flush with the deck and was unscrewed by means of the two forked end of a pin spanner; that apparently giving access to the square or hexagon end of a shaft which, being rotated by another box wrench some 2 feet 6 inches in length, with a T handle, operated a double series of bevel gears, the last shaft having on it a pinion meshing in a door rack and closing the door.

51 The cover plates to the mechanism of the watertight doors, as far as I am able to state, were not removed before our final departure for the upper decks.

52 Senator SMITH.
Did you see any attempt being made to remove them?

53 Mr. CHAMBERS.
I did not. I saw no attempt being made to remove them.

54 Senator SMITH.
What else can you tell about that matter that will be helpful to the committee?

55 Mr. CHAMBERS.
I have no reason to believe that any attempt was made by the stewards, on whom I have always understood this duty devolved, to close these doors, particularly as a large percentage of the steward part of the crew

were new. Seeing these door plates undisturbed just before our final departure to the upper decks, I reached the conclusion that the doors had not been closed.

56

In connection with my statement that a large percentage of the steward part of the crew were new, I may say that my own room steward complained to me on the second day out that he did not know where anything was on the ship, and that no one would tell him.

57

(Witness Excused.)