

United States Senate Inquiry

Day 13

Testimony of George A. Harder

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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.

State your name and place of residence, please.

Mr. HARDER.

[George A. Harder](#); 117 Eighth Avenue, Brooklyn.

Senator SMITH.

How old are you?

Mr. HARDER.

Twenty-five.

Senator SMITH.

What is your business?

Mr. HARDER.

Manufacturer.

Senator SMITH.

Were you a passenger aboard the [Titanic](#)?

Mr. HARDER.

I was.

Senator SMITH.

From what point?

Mr. HARDER.

I sailed from Cherbourg.

Senator SMITH.

What stateroom did you have?

Mr. HARDER.

We had [E-50](#); that is on E deck.

Senator SMITH.

Did you notice anything unusual between Cherbourg and the place of this accident?

Mr. HARDER.

No, sir.

Senator SMITH.

You agree, do you, with all the other witnesses, that the weather was fine and clear the night of the accident?

Mr. HARDER.

Yes, sir.

Senator SMITH.

It was clear and fine?

Mr. HARDER.

Yes, sir.

Senator SMITH.



What occurred Sunday night between the hours of 11 and 12 o'clock?

26 Mr. HARDER.

About a quarter to 11 I went down to my stateroom with [Mrs. Harder](#) and retired for the night; and at 20 minutes to 12 we were not asleep yet, and I heard this thump. It was not a loud thump; just a dull thump. Then I could feel the boat quiver and could feel a sort of rumbling, scraping noise along the side of the boat.

27 When I went to the porthole I saw this iceberg go by. The porthole was closed. The iceberg was, I should say, about 50 to 100 feet away. I should say it was about as high as the top deck of the boat. I just got a glimpse of it, and it is hard to tell how high it was.

28 Senator SMITH.
What did you do then?

29 Mr. HARDER.
I thought we would go up on deck to see what had happened; what damage had been done. So we dressed fully and went up on deck, and there we saw quite a number of people talking; and nobody seemed to think anything serious had happened. There were such remarks as "Oh, it will only be a few hours before we will be on the way again."

30 I walked around the deck two or three times, when I noticed that the boat was listing quite a good deal on the starboard side; so Mrs. Harder and myself thought we would go inside and see if there was any news. We went in there and talked to a few people, and all of them seemed of the opinion that it was nothing serious.

31 Senator SMITH.
Who were these people with whom you talked? Do you know?

32 Mr. HARDER.
I do not know. I do not know the names.

33 Senator SMITH.
Were [Mr. and Mrs. Bishop](#) there?

34 Mr. HARDER.
Yes. I saw Mr. and Mrs. Bishop, and I saw [Colonel and Mrs. Astor](#), and they all seemed to be of the opinion that there was no danger. A little while after that an officer appeared at the foot of the stairs, and he announced that everybody should go to their staterooms and put on their lifebelts.

35 Senator SMITH.
How long was that after the collision?

36 Mr. HARDER.
That, I think, was a little after 12 - about 12 o'clock; that is, roughly.

37 So, we immediately went down to our stateroom and took our lifebelts and coats and started up the stairs and went to the top deck. There we saw the crew manning the lifeboats; getting them ready; swinging them out. So we waited around there, and we were finally told "Go over this way; go over this way." So we followed and went over toward the first lifeboat, where Mr. and Mrs. Bishop were. That boat was filled, and so they told us to move on to the next one.

38 Senator SMITH.
On which side?

39 Mr. HARDER.
The starboard side.

40 Senator SMITH.
So that the first boat was filled?



- 41 Mr. HARDER.
Yes. Somebody told us to move down toward the second one. We got to the second one, and we were told to go right in there. I have been told that [Mr. Ismay](#) took hold of my wife's arm - I do not know him, but I have been told that he did - and pushed her right in. Then I followed.
- 42 Senator SMITH.
How far did you have to step from the side of the ship into the lifeboat?
- 43 Mr. HARDER.
I should say it was about a foot and a half. Anyway, you had to jump. When I jumped in there, one foot went in between the oars, and I got in there and could not move until somebody pulled me over.
- 44 I forgot to say that when I went down into my stateroom in order to get the lifebelts, when we came out of the stateroom with the lifebelts I noticed about four or five men on this [E deck](#), and one of them had one of those T-handled wrenches, used to turn some kind of a nut or bolt, and two or three of the other men had wrenches with them - Stilson wrenches, or something like that. I did not take any particular notice, but I did notice this one man trying to turn this thing in the floor. There was a brass plate or something there.
- 45 Senator SMITH.
Was it marked "W. T."?
- 46 Mr. HARDER.
Yes; it was marked, "W. T.," and I do not know whether it was a "D" after that or something else. A few days before that, however, I noticed that brass plate, and, naturally, seeing the initials, "W. T.," I thought it meant watertight doors, or compartments.
- 47 Senator SMITH.
Was it in the floor?
- 48 Mr. HARDER.
Yes.
- 49 Senator SMITH.
On what deck?
- 50 Mr. HARDER.
On E deck. It was on the starboard side of the boat, in the alleyway. I think this brass plate was situated between the stairs and the elevators. The stairs were right in front of the elevators, and right in between there, I think, was this brass plate.
- 51 We heard one of these men with the wrenches say: "Well, it's no use. This one won't work. Let's try another one."
- 52 They did not seem to be nervous at all; so I thought at the time there was no danger; that they were just doing that for the sake of precaution.
- 53 Senator SMITH.
Did any of those men state, in your hearing, the importance of being able to turn that bolt or not?
- 54 Mr. HARDER.
No, sir; they did not.
- 55 Senator SMITH.
Did you gather from what you saw that it was connected directly with the watertight compartments?
- 56 Mr. HARDER.
Yes, sir, I thought it was. I related the incident to Mr. Bishop after the accident.
- 57 Senator SMITH.

- How large was this plate?
- 58 Mr. HARDER.
The plate was, I should say, about ten inches or a foot wide. It was about circular. I do not remember anything else about it, except that it had the initials, "W. T. C." or "W. T. D." or something like that. I know it had the initials "W. T." and something else.
- 59 Senator SMITH.
Proceed to tell us regarding the lifeboat.
- 60 Mr. HARDER.
We got into the lifeboat, which was either [No. 7](#) or [No. 5](#), I do not know which.
- 61 Senator SMITH.
Who was in charge of it?
- 62 Mr. HARDER.
[Mr. Pitman](#). That was the second boat to leave on the starboard side, as far as I could see.
- 63 As we were being lowered, they lowered one side quicker than the other, but we finally reached the water safely, after a few scares. When we got down into the water, somebody said the plug was not in; so they fished around to see if that was in, and I guess it was in. Then, they could not get the boat detached from the tackle, so they fussed around there for a while, and finally they asked if anybody had a knife, and nobody seemed to have a knife. Finally, one of the passengers had a knife in his possession, and they cut some rope; what it was I do not know.
- 64 Senator SMITH.
Do you know what passenger that was?
- 65 Mr. HARDER.
No, sir; I do not. I can not remember his name.
- 66 Senator SMITH.
Do you wish to be understood as saying that the tackle or gear by which this boat was lowered did not work properly?
- 67 Mr. HARDER.
You mean when we lowered down? No. That was on account of the crew up on the deck. They had two or three men on each side, letting out the rope, and they let out the rope on one side faster than the other. That caused the boat to assume this position going down (*indicating*) and we thought for a time that we were all going to be dumped out. We finally reached the water all right.
- 68 Then the next job was to get the ropes at each end of the boat, the bow and the stern of the lifeboat, detached. I understand there was some new patented lever on there, some device that you pull, and that would let loose the whole thing. Whether they did not know that was there or not, I do not know; I presume they did not, because they did not seem to get it to work, and they finally had to resort to this knife.
- 69 Senator SMITH.
You got away from the side of the boat?
- 70 Mr. HARDER.
Yes; and we started to pull away from the ship. We had, as I learned afterwards, about 42 people in the boat.
- 71 Senator SMITH.
How many women were in the boat?
- 72 Mr. HARDER.
I should say, roughly, about 30 women. That is just a guess.

- 73 Senator SMITH.
And who composed the remainder of the people in the boat?
- 74 Mr. HARDER.
There was this officer, and there was a sailor, and then there were about three men in the boat; as far as I could judge some kind of seamen. I do not know whether they were stewards or whether they were seamen; they were not dressed as sailors. There was only one man there with a regular sailor's hat and blouse.
- 75 Senator SMITH.
Did they know anything about handling the boat?
- 76 Mr. HARDER.
Yes; they seemed to be able to row as well as possible. Of course, those boats are very unwieldy sort of things, and have great big long oars.
- 77 Senator SMITH.
I want to call your attention specifically to a statement made by Mr. Pitman, officer in charge of that boat. He says that they rowed off some distance from the side of the ship. Is that correct?
- 78 Mr. HARDER.
Yes, sir.
- 79 Senator SMITH.
And that there were cries for help, and the passengers in that boat would not permit him, Pitman, to go to their relief.
- 80 Mr. HARDER.
This is the way it was, Senator: We rowed out there some distance from the ship. How far it was, I do not know. It may have been as far as a quarter of a mile, and it may have been one-eighth of a mile. At any rate, we were afraid of the suction. So the passengers said, "Let us row out a little farther." So they rowed out farther, perhaps about a half a mile; it may have been three-quarters of a mile. There we waited, and after waiting around a while, there was this other boat that came alongside, that Pitman hailed alongside; and that was either boat No. 7 or boat No. 5, I do not know which, in which Mr. and Mrs. Bishop were. We tied alongside of that, and they had 29 people in their boat, and we counted the number of people in our boat; and at that time we only counted, I think it was, 36. So we gave them four or five of our people in order to make it even, as we were kind of crowded.
- 81 Senator SMITH.
This was a large lifeboat that you were in?
- 82 Mr. HARDER.
Yes, sir, it was the regular size lifeboat.
- 83 They say those boats hold 60 people, but we had only the number of people I have mentioned; and, believe me, we did not have room to spare.
- 84 Then we waited out there until the ship went down. We were out there until the ship went down. After it went down, we heard a lot of these cries and yells. You could not hear any shouts for help, or anything like that. It was a sort of continuous yelling or moaning. You could not distinguish any sounds. It was more like - what I thought it was - the steerage on rafts, and that they were all hysterical. That is the way it sounded in the distance.
- 85 Then we stayed around there until daybreak, when we saw the [Carpathia](#), and we rowed the distance; I do not know how far it was; probably 2 miles; it might have been less.
- 86 Senator SMITH.
You agree with the others that in the morning the presence of these icebergs in large numbers was disclosed?

..Officers in charge

- 87 Mr. HARDER.
Yes; I counted about ten of them around.
- 88 Senator SMITH.
How large, in your judgment, was the largest one?
- 89 Mr. HARDER.
I should not like to make a statement in regard to that Senator, because I am very poor at distances and dimensions. They were of good size.
- 90 Senator SMITH.
Is there anything else you can say bearing on this matter that will be helpful to the committee in its endeavors to get all the facts and circumstances leading up to and subsequent to this accident?
- 91 Mr. HARDER.
No, sir, there is nothing else that I can think of.
- 92 Our boat was managed very well. It is true this officer did want to go back to the ship, but all the passengers held out and said: "Do not do that. Do not do that. It would only be foolish if we went back there. There will be so many around they will only swamp the boat." And, at the time, I do not think those people appreciated that there were not sufficient lifeboats to go around. I never paid any attention to how many lifeboats there were. I did not know.
- 93 Senator SMITH.
Did your lifeboat have a light in it?
- 94 Mr. HARDER.
No, sir; it did not have any light. There was a cask in the boat to contain water. I do not know whether there was any water in it or not. I would not say that there was or was not. There was also a box in there, about the size of an ordinary soapbox. It was all nailed up, but I do not know what was in it. But we had no light. They did not even have matches. I had a box of matches in my pocket. There did not seem to be any matches in the boat. We thought perhaps we might need them.
- 95 Senator SMITH.
That is all, Mr. Harder. We are very much obliged to you for coming.
- 96 Mr. HARDER.
There is just one other point I might mention, Senator. I have been told that all these watertight doors operate by electricity from the bridge - all the doors below the decks, in the hold - and that this one deck, F, below E deck, had doors that were worked by hand, and that this plate in the floor of E deck, to which I have referred, was the place where they were to be turned by hand.
- 97 (Witness Excused.)