

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Steamboat-Inspection Service

In reply refer to
File No. 5115

Office of Local Inspectors
San Francisco, Calif.

March 8, 1928.

.....
Testimony taken at the investigation relative :
to the loss of Steamer CHUKY 200 miles off the :
Coast of Japan, February 15, 1928. :
.....

PRESENT, Frank H. Turner, Local Inspector of Hulls.
Joseph P. Dolan, Local Inspector of Boilers.
Mr. J. McKeon, representing ship owners.
Mr. H. E. Pickering, representing W. A. Wickersham, Agent.

Jeremiah C. Sheehan, 735 O'Farrell St., San Francisco, Cal.,
being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

Captain Turner:

Q What license do you hold?
A Chief Engineer, unlimited.
Q This is your report, is it? (Indicating same.)
A Yes sir.
Q On February 15, 1928, you were chief engineer of the steamer CHUKY, were you?
A Yes sir.
Q Is this vessel of American registry?
A Yes
Q Where was she built?
A Blythwood Shipping Co., Glasgow, Scotland.
Q What year?
A '22.
Q Of what gross tonnage was she?
A 6920.
Q Who were her owners?
A Chile S.S. Co., 25 Broadway, New York.
Q When was she last inspected?
A June 22, 1927, at San Pedro.
Q According to your report the vessel left San Pedro, California, January 19, 1928
bound for Tsurimi, Japan.
A Yes sir.
Q What was she loaded with, Mr. Sheehan?
A With California light crude.
Q Can you tell us what her draft was?
A No sir; I can not.
Q Were any of the ship's logs saved?
A One; the engine room log was saved.
Q Where is that?
A (Witness produces log.)
Q What was the master's name?
A C. C. Hernes.
Q Where did you join the vessel, Chief?
A In San Pedro, June 12, 1927.



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How long had you been on the vessel since that date?

From that date I lost one trip; 40 days.

What trade was this vessel?

Carrying fuel oil. This one trip was to the Orient. Before that it was to the Philippines.

Does the log book give the ship's draft?

Have you ever been loaded with California crude oil before?

Sir.

What was her capacity?

1000 barrels.

Heavy or light?

Light.

Was she originally constructed as an oil tank vessel?

Sir.

How many tanks had she?

Five, plus her summer tanks; one or two summer tanks.

How was she constructed? A That I don't know.

What was she Isherwood or of the ordinary type. A I don't know.

Plan:

Do the frames run up and down?

The frames ran up and down.

What crew had you in the engine room?

Chief and 3 assistants, 3 oilers, 3 firemen, 2 wipers, 1 pumpman.

Mr. Turner:

Chief tell us the story briefly of what occurred from that time until the bad weather set in.

We had been in a very heavy sea for 5 days.

What was the wind?

I couldn't say. The force of the wind was from 8 to 10.

From what direction did the sea come?

From the starboard quarter. That would give us a northerly sea, a northerly swell, steering south-east. We had been steering south-east from half past five on the night of the 14th.

What course had you been steering?

That I don't know.

However, you had not been steering that south-east course prior to the 14th? We were hove to.

How long had you been hove to?

Starting in at half past 5 on the night of the 14th.

What were the conditions aboard the ship, that is, with regard to how the sea took the ship?

She was taking the seas over her after deck.

When you had the sea astern of you?

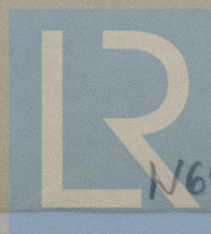
Sir.

When you hove to you headed up into it; that is, you probably brought the sea on about 4 points on the bow, whichever bow it was. Is that the way it was done?

I can't answer that question. I just had an order from the captain that we were going to heave to.



Q What was done with the engines then?
A The engines were slowed down to 40 revolutions.
Q How many revolution had you been making prior?
A 68 revolutions.
Q After the vessel was hove to how did she behave?
A Very badly. The sea had been pounding her and continued to pound her, the sea was very rough.
Q Did the sea break aboard of her after you were hove to.
A Only on the tank deck. That was awash at all times.
Q She was a well deck type, was she?
A Yes sir.
Q That is, a forecastle head?
A And then there was the well and the bridge deck and the after well deck and the after deck.
Q Was she taking the sea aboard the well deck?
A Yes sir.
Q Forward or aft.
A Aft.
Q After she was hove to.
A Yes sir.
Q Well she couldn't have been headed into it?
A She was headed into it.
Q If she was headed into the sea how could the sea come aboard the after deck?
A On the after well deck.
Q If you had the sea 4 points on the bow how could it break on the after deck?
A I don't know but we had sea there.
Q Could it have been that she yawed; that is; fell off into the trough?
A Yes.
Q So that was probably the reason that the sea came aboard aft.
A Yes sir.
Q Did the sea do any damage on deck?
A No sir.
Q What was the atmospheric conditions, Chief? Any lightning around?
A No.
Q Rain?
A Plenty of rain.
Q How far were you from the Japanese Coast at that time, do you know?
A On the morning of the 14th 226 miles from the Japanese Coast of Yokohama. On the morning of the 15th, 7:45 A.M. the ship buckled up.
Q You had been hove to from 5:30 on the night of the 14th. Didn't you say that she went set on a south-east course?
A She was hove to at that time, and I believe that was her course. I awakened at 6 o'clock and came on deck and looked around, and went back to my room and wrote part of my abstract. At 7 o'clock the morning of the 15th I returned upon the deck. It was impossible to go forward as it was shipping too many seas, so I had my breakfast in the galley.
Q Did she have a fore and aft bridge?
A Yes sir.
Q Why didn't you use that to walk forward?
A She was taking seas over that bridge.



(Con'td.) So after having breakfast I went to my room to smoke a cigarette. Outside of my room was a ventilator. The force of the wind was very strong and I went on deck to trim the ventilator. While on deck I had waved my hand at the Captain, who was on the bridge. Then I saw the bow of the vessel start up. About that time I had whistled down below to the first assistant to shut off the engines, turn out the fires, and come up, as the ship had broken in half.

Q When you saw her head come up, as you say, you realized that she had broken?

A Yes sir; I could see it.

Q What evidence did you see that she had broken?

A I could feel the grinding just abaft the bridge deck. Grinding like two pieces of steel together.

Q Was there any crack developed on deck in the bulwarks?

A No. Then when the first assistant came up I told him. He said, " I guess we are through." Then there was a fire.

Q Where did that start?

A On the port side.

Q Where do you suppose that came from?

A That came I think from a broken circuit.

Mr. Dolan:

Q How could there be any current in there if you shut everything down?

A It wasn't shut down. The dynamo was still running. All auxiliaries were still running.

Captain Turner:

Q In parting this wiring it would have probably occasioned it to spark, would it?

A Yes sir.

Q Then what did it set afire?

A It set the oil afire.

Q In the summer tank?

A No. Immediately upon breaking up the No. 5 tank top let go and blew that oil out of there.

Q So that the air was laden with the fumes and with fuel oil? And the sparks set fire to the oil, did it?

A That is my idea of it.

Q You say that you were loaded with light California crude. Well would that ignite ordinarily if a spark was dropped into it.

A Yes.

Q The light California crude is that something like a distillate?

A No; it averages about 38° gasoline.

Q So that it would ignite from a spark?

A Yes.

Q What flash point has it?

A I don't know.

Q When they load the ship don't they give you the flash point?

A I have nothing to do with the cargo when they're loading the ship.

Q Who was that given to?

A To the chief officer and the captain.

Q Wouldn't you hear about it ordinarily?

A I never did.

Q You are at the point now where you noticed that there was a fire on the port side?

A I think it occurred from a water light on a ring buoy.

Q Set us right in this matter. Upon the vessel breaking up you state there was an explosion?

A Yes sir.

Q Where.

A No. 5 tank.

Q In the hold or in the summer tank?

A No; in the oil that was in the atmosphere. After the tank let go immediately there was an explosion.

Q And then the oil burst into flames did it?

A Yes. Then there was another fire later, which I think had occurred from a life buoy.

Q That is, the water light on the life ring had become disengaged, and the chemical action when the water got on it started this second fire?

A Yes.

Q You think that the oil that was on the sea was ignited from this water light by the chemical action of the water light when it struck the water?

A Yes sir.

Q Now go ahead with your story. How did you get away, etc.

A After waiting a reasonable period of time so that there was no more danger of fire we put out the port lifeboat.

Q Was the fire put out by the crew or did it go out?

A It went out. It was raining. It was hailing.

Q What orders were given.

A I told the boatswain to launch the boat, which he did.

Q Where were the ship's officers and the deck crew?

A They were dead, every-body forward was killed.

Q When this explosion took place what action did it have on the ship. The master and the navigating officers were on the bridge presumably. What happened then?

A Nobody knows. I couldn't tell you that. Nobody knows what happened.

Q Was the bridge demolished?

A The bridge immediately after the crackup was just a mass of fuel oil followed by the explosion, and from that on we saw nobody from the bridge.

Q Well we have to account for those people in some way. Would the force of the explosion have blown them overboard?

A No, hardly.

Q Well what do you think became of them? It didn't blow you overboard, and you were on the after deck just where it was. What do you think happened to them?

A I don't know, Captain.

Q Did they jump overboard?

A I don't know.

Q Did you go on the bridge?

A Not forward; no.

Q Did you see anything of the officers on the bridge?

A I saw one man but I could not recognize him.

Q Where was he?

A On the well deck groping for a hand hold. Who he was I don't know.

Q How far was the bridge from where the explosion took place?

A Where the explosion took place was immediately under the bridge.

Q How far were you from that place?

A 150 feet approximately.



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Q I ask you again do you think the force of the explosion blew those people overboard that were on the bridge.

A I can't answer that question, Captain, because I don't know.

Q Where were the rest of the deck officers housed?

A The place where the deck officers were housed was forward.

Q Forward of the bridge.

A Immediately under the bridge.

Q Was that part of the ship demolished?

A No not demolished; just covered with fuel oil.

Q Wouldn't you think under the circumstances that the officers that were below in their rooms would have come out on deck to save themselves?

A I guess they would but I didn't see them.

Q Didn't you think that strange?

A I can't answer your question when you ask me if I think that explosion killed them, because I can't tell a lie. Perhaps they were suffocated. I didn't see any of them.

Q Why weren't you affected?

A I was too far away.

Q Where were the rest of the engineers?

A One was on watch; one was getting ready to go on watch; and one was in his bunk.

Q This man who was in his bunk, where was his room situated?

A On the starboard side aft.

Q That was how far then from the bridge deck where the deck officers were housed?

A 150 feet.

Q Did this engineer come out on deck?

A Yes.

Q What condition were you in? Were you covered with oil too?

A It was spotted all over my face. Part of the burning oil hit my shirt.

Q Why did you go to the boatswain to get the boat out rather than to some of the bridge officers.

A There wasn't any bridge officers?

Q You didn't know there wasn't any.

A There was none in sight.

Q But you didn't seek to find out whether there were any of the other deck officers in their rooms that might take charge?

A That was an utter impossibility because that part had torn adrift and was afloat.

Q This is the first you are telling me about it. I begin to realize now that the deck officers were non est, but you didn't tell me that before. Where was the boatswain when you had this conversation with him?

A He was aft in the smoke room.

Q Now tell us what transpired after you asked the boatswain to get the boat, and who went in it.

A We had to work for about half an hour to get the boat over the side. Due to the winch we got her down on the side on the rail. 21 of us went in the boat.

Q How many boats were left?

A One. The one we went into.

Q Where was that hanging? In the davits?

A Yes.

Q Where were the davits situated?

A On the port side.

Q On the bridge deck or aft?

A On the bridge deck.



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What became of the starboard boat?

The starboard boat had gone off the starboard side and had gone down into the deck. Somebody tried to launch it.

Who?

I don't know but it was down on the deck.

Did you see anyone trying to launch the boat?

I did not.

When was that boat dropped there? While you were getting the port boat out?

No; before that.

Did all the crew try to assist the boatswain and you in getting the port boat out?

Absolutely.

Then who was trying to launch the starboard boat?

I don't know. That was done before we tried.

You were on deck all this time, were you, Chief?

Not always: I went below.

What were you doing below?

Trying to get my papers. I couldn't get my drawer open.

Didn't you think the vessel was likely to flounder while you were below?

Well, we don't think of those things.

Then while you were below off the deck, - this starboard lifeboat, they might possibly have tried to launch it and something happened and they abandoned it deck; is that the idea?

As far as I know you have covered it all.

However, you got the port boat over and got into it; 21 of you?

21 of us.

What was the condition of the vessel before you abandoned her?

The condition of the vessel. The deck was an angle of 45° - after end down by the head.

Down by the stern you mean? You mean the head of the after portion remaining?

Yes sir.

Was the ship broken in two at that time?

Yes sir.

The ship, at the time you got the boat out, just prior to abandoning the ship, she was in two separate pieces. You haven't said so. Could you see any life on the forward part of it?

No sign of life.

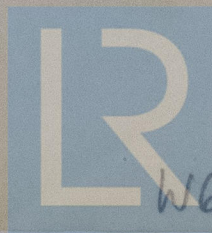
So the rest of you got into this boat and pushed off?

We got over and pulled out to sea and stayed close to the hull watching for life or any signs of life or anything that we could see, remaining there until the next morning.

You stayed close by all the time?

All the time, thinking perhaps that we would see some signs of life. There was no life.

The vessel must have drifted along at about the same rate of speed as you did? She drifted faster because we had a sea anchor out. In the morning we could not see either the forward or after end, and at 11:30 we were picked up by a fishing boat the following morning. That gave us 26 hours in the boat and we were taken into Misaki. Later on we went to Yokohama, and reported to the American Consul there.



Mr. Dolan:

- Q When you went down below did you notice the pressure on the boiler gauges?
A No, I did not.
Q You had the engines slowed down to 40 revolutions for how long?
A From 5:30 p.m. on the 14th. And during that time we had various bells and various speeds.
Q At the time she broke did you have a full head of steam on?
A We had a full head making half speed.
Q Was there any water in the engine room?
A No water in the engine room. Water in the fire room.
Q How much water in the fire room?
A Just covering the top floor plate when we abandoned it.
Q Was there any water in the fire room bilge?
A No.
Q Was there any water in the engine room bilge?
A No; perfectly dry.
Q When you shut down everything; that is, when you ordered the engines shut down, everything was intact, hey?
A Everything.
Q The fires out; and you let the dynamo run with the steam that was in the boilers to reduce the pressure?
A Yes sir.
Q Was there any oil or water in the engine room bilge then?
A No sir.
Q That portion was intact, hey?
A Yes; settling by the head rapidly.
Q Did you get forward far enough to see just exactly where she went?
A No; just from the position where I was in the after deck.
Q Would you know if it was along the line of a bulkhead that she went, or was it forward of a bulkhead?
A My opinion of it was that she went at No. 5 Tank.
Q Where is No. 5 Tank situated?
A About mid-length. The ship is 440 feet long.
Q What instructions did they have in regard to lights, etc?
A All lights to be covered with a vapor globe, which was done on the Vessel throughout, even in the passageways.
Q Where did you smoke?
A In the smoke room aft on the top side.
Q That room is set aside purposely for that, is it?
A Yes sir; that is the smoke room.
Q Now how many in your department were lost?
A One oiler, one fireman -- I will have to look up the list, Mr. Dolan, to tell you that. There was McDonald, Oiler, fireman, 2 wipers were saved, 2 oilers were saved.
Q There is eight men in your fire room outside of your engineers?
A I lost a boiler man and I lost McDonald.
Q Were all the assistant engineers saved?
A Yes.
Q Did you lose any of the 21 men in the boat?
A No sir.
Q When you launched this boat what difficulty did you meet with?
A Just a heavy sea. I saw that she didn't crack up against the side of the ship.

Q Now, up to the time that you left the ship how do you account for two of your men being gone?

A One of them went crazy.

Q Did you dump him?

A No; he dumped himself.

Q Where did the other man go?

A I don't know.

Q Did any of the rest of the officers see this man go overboard?

A McDonald, a couple of them saw him go. He just dove overboard.

Q You think he went crazy, do you?

A Yes sir.

Q How long have you been on the sea?

A 22 years, Mr. Dolan.

Q Were all of the men that stood by the boat that you got away in all saved?

A Yes sir.

Q And these other men would have been saved if they had stood by?

A Yes sir.

Q What is the capacity of the ship?

A 48 people.

Q Was she well found to go away from the ship?

A Yes sir.

Q Plenty of food and water?

A Yes sir; 15 gallons of water.

Captain Turner:

Q When you got away from the after half of the vessel you say there was no sign of life on the forward?

A No; because when we left the forward end was away about a mile from us. Later she turned over. She was just an inverted cup.

Q The two boats were on the after part?

A Yes sir.

Q Did she break in two immediately the two ends separating?

A No; not immediately. Having buckled up, then say within a period of about 10 minutes the bow started to go to one side as if she was tearing away.

Q Which side opened?

A The starboard side.

(Witness excused)

Fred H. Buckley, 1250 - 15th Ave., San Francisco, Cal.
being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

Captain Turner:

Q What license do you hold?

A Chief Engineer's, unlimited.

Q On February 15, 1928, what position did you hold on the tank steamer CHUKY?

A First assistant engineer.

Q And where were you when this accident happened?

A I was on watch.

Q Will you kindly tell us in your own words what happened on that occasion. When did you come on watch?

A. I came on watch at 4 a.m. that morning. The ship was running half speed and the telegraph was on half speed and she was hove to as there had been very heavy seas, and she went along doing a little racing every once in a while the engine would, and everything went along all right until about 7:40. I had various bells during the watch, and about 7:40 she was pounded by a sea and the engines started to close down as they do before they start to race when the stern dips, so I grabbed the throttle and as she was coming up I shoved in on it and I did that the second time and a few minutes later the chief engineer hollered down to shut her off, that the ship was gone.

Q Was there any indication in the engine room at that time that there was anything wrong?

A Yes; I could feel that bumping but I thought it was a big sea hit the ship, and when he hollered down I realized that something serious had happened.

Q Could you hear any rending of the plates?

A No; not from the engine room. So after stopping the engines and having the fires put out, left the pump running to work the steam down in the boilers, I went up, and as I looked down I could see the ship buckle at about No. 5 Tank. There was fire around there and fire on the water.

Q The fire was on the port side, was it?

A Port and starboard.

Q Both sides?

A I believe it was, but more on the starboard side account of the wind. We stood there in the after deck and pretty soon started to working, and the bow worked loose and floated around a little, settling by the bridge. She settled straight up.

Q The bow coming up and the other part of her going down?

A Yes; so the bow then finally turned over and a small portion remained above the water. The after part of the ship settled almost 45°.

Q That is, the stern was up in the air at that angle?

A Yes sir; so the fire didn't burn very long.

Q How do you think the fire started? Wires?

A The electric wires running midships, when the break came it tore them apart.

Q You didn't see anybody on the forward part of the vessel?

A No sir. Well finally we got this lifeboat out. It was a wooden boat, very heavy, and at that angle we couldn't get it around. So we went and put steam on the after winch.

Q Well you finally got away, and all hands that were on the after part of the vessel got into it and pulled away?

A Yes sir.

Q You never saw any of the others that were on the forward end?

A No; after we launched our ship and pulled away we looked for any possible survivors, of course. We took a sea anchor with us.

Q How did the boat behave after you got in the water?

A Fine.

Q Take any water aboard?

A Say about an inch of water every two hours. We used to bail about every hour or so.

Q Did you know what became of the starboard boat? There were two lifeboats were there not?

A One of them as it was being launched got away and went down on to the next deck.

Q The same crowd that got into the port boat had tried to launch the starboard boat?

A Yes sir.

Were some of the deck crew among this 21?

Yes; the boatswain and a couple of A.B.'s and I don't know how many ordinary seamen.

But the master and bridge officers were lost?

They were all lost.

Dolan:

How much steam do you carry on that boat?

About 200 lbs. 210 is all we ever carried at most.

What did he turn over when you came on watch in the morning?

He was on half speed.

Did you increase the revolutions on your watch?

No sir; I let them run at 45, as I had orders to.

You got several bells in between?

Yes sir; but they would go back to half again.

Any time from the time you came on watch to the accident was the engine on full speed?

While I was on watch; yes sir.

How long?

For a minute or so. That was all.

Was anybody injured in getting the lifeboat away?

No. There were two men lost but they jumped overboard before anybody could grab them. An oiler and a fireman.

Did you see them jump overboard?

I didn't, but some of them did.

When you left the engine room everything was intact, was it?

Yes sir.

The fires were out and you were working the steam down on the boilers?

Yes sir.

What cargo tanks were filled?

The mate looked after the cargo. I believe they were all filled but the No. 1. I am not quite certain.

Do you know what was in the No. 5?

I believe it was the same as the rest of the cargo; supposed to be California crude.

Where do you think she broke in two?

I think at the after end of the midship house in that tank. But of course coming up it was forward of the boiler room bulkhead. Our engine room was at the extreme after end.

So it was in the No. 5 Tank she broke, was it?

Yes sir.

How long have you been going to sea; how many years?

About 9 years.

How long were you in the CHUKY?

I joined about December 10, 1927. That's about 3 months.

Had you any reason to think that she was not a well founded or a well built ship?

No sir; I never did.

Never gave any indication before of anything having been wrong?

No sir.

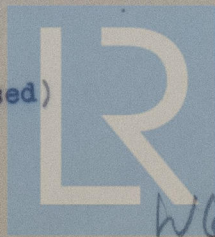
Did you ever find any water in any of the cargo tanks?

I don't know whether the mate ever did. I Don't think so.

Was she a good sea boat?

Yes sir.

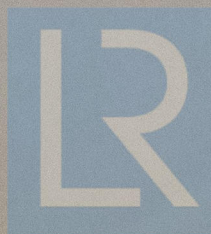
(Witness excused)



Christopher C. Herbert, Del Monte, Cal., c/o C. S. Herbert,
being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

Captain Turner:

- Q What license do you hold?
A First assistant of ocean.
Q Where was it issued?
A San Pedro.
Q How long have you been going to sea?
A Since 1916.
Q In what capacity were you employed on the Steamer "CHUKY"?
A Second assistant engineer.
Q How long have you been so employed?
A Since October 25th.
Q Did you join her in that capacity?
A Yes sir.
Q Where were you when the accident happened on February 15th, 1928?
A In my bunk asleep.
Q Tell us in your own way just what your experience was, please.
A I heard I believe it was the chief calling to the 1st to shut her down and come up, that she was gone; and the 3rd he came in about a minute afterwards to see that I was up; and I put on my pants and went up on deck and she was broken amidships. The sea was afire at the time. The next thing I did was went up to lifeboats to see about getting a lifeboat clear and at the moment it was impossible for us to move it because she started to get down at an angle so we used a working winch to swing the boat out.
Q You finally got her over the side and abandoned the vessel?
A Yes sir.
Q Did you see anything of the other members of the crew that were on the forward half of the vessel?
A I saw two men in the water for I judge 5 minutes and then they were gone. Who they were I do not know. They were all covered by oil.
Q Have you any theory to advance, Mr. Herbert, as to the reason for this vessel breaking in two?
A Bad weather.
Q Had you ever been in bad weather before in her?
A Yes sir; it was bad weather the week before. In fact the last week it would get good and moderate, and back and forth.
Q What were her qualities as a sea boat?
A She rode the sea pretty. One of the smoothest things I was ever in.
Q Do you know anything about the amount of cargo she had in her?
A I understand she had 72,000 barrels of 29⁰ gravity crude.
Q Were all the cargo tanks filled?
A No, not that I know of. I don't know that they were all filled.
Q The vessel was loaded under the direction of who?
A The mate. He does the loading.
Q Did she have the usual amount of cargo in her so far as you know?
A So far as I know she did.
Q Was she unduly low in the water or did she have plenty of freeboard?
A I didn't notice. She was about the same as any other.



Q You think then that she was in a seaworthy condition so far as the trim and loading were concerned?

A Yes sir.

Q What do you think occasioned the fire?

A Two things could have caused it; the breaking of the wires in the conduits or else the friction between the two breaks.

Q You think she was a well built ship?

A Yes sir; from what I see of her; as far as I know.

Q Do you know if she was classed in any of the classification systems?

A She was classed in Lloyd's Register as 100 A 1st, the highest class.

Q How long were you on the ship?

A Since October 25th.

Q Did you ever see this vessel make much water?

A No.

Q I mean down below?

A No.

Q Where were you at the time of the accident?

A In bed asleep.

Q Did the water annoy you?

A The water the night before had annoyed me and I hadn't got any sleep the night before, and I was dead asleep when it happened. The chief hollered to the first assistant and that woke me up.

Q Did you go below then?

A No, I went on deck.

Q Did you see anybody forward of where the break was?

A No sir; not on the ship.

Q You assisted in launching the lifeboat, did you?

A Yes sir.

Q Did you look around to see that there were no more survivors aboard her.

A Yes sir.

Q What watch did you stand?

A 12 to 4.

Q What revolutions were you making?

A About 38.

Q Were they increased at any time?

A About 12:30 the 2nd Mate came down and told me to turn her up to 44 so she would steer.

Q Did you see anybody injured around there?

A No sir.

Q Who got the lifeboat out?

A The boatswain was the man that always did the handling of the boat. Him and a little fellow by the name of Shulberg. We all helped but those were the two main men.

Q Do you want to add anything further to your statement?

A No sir.

Mr. Dolan:

Q Did you look down in the engine room when you got up?

A No sir.

Q And when you left the engine room the balance of the vessel was all intact as yet?

A Floating at 45° angle.

Q The explosion then couldn't have come from any contact with the boilers?

A No sir; there was no explosion.

Q Did you hear the break of the ship when she parted?

A No sir; I was asleep when it happened.

(WITNESS EXCUSED.)

Eugene F. Ritchley, 556 California St., San Francisco, Cal.,
being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

Captain Turner:

Q What license do you hold?

A First assistant.

Q Where issued?

A Los Angeles.

Q On February 15, 1928, you were Third Assistant of the Steamer CHUKY, were you?

A Yes sir.

Q How long had you been employed in that capacity?

A I joined her the day before she sailed.

Q How long had you been following the sea?

A About 20 years.

Q Where were you when this accident occurred?

A In my room.

Q Tell us please what you know of it.

A I had my breakfast that morning back aft. The pumpman came to my room and said I could eat in the officers' room. It was very heavy weather. She was shipping heavy seas and heavy sprays. I couldn't go forward due to the inclemency of the weather. I was in my room that morning and I was waiting for two bells to strike to go on watch. About a quarter to eight I felt the ship going down by the head. I paid no attention to it as I thought she shipped a very heavy sea. About a minute or so afterwards I heard the Chief Engineer, Mr. Sheehan, hollering for the first assistant to shut the engine down and come up. I then thought something had happened. I came out of my room and looked in the Second Assistant's room to see if he was up. He was sitting on his bunk. I told him I thought something happened, he had better hurry up and come up. I went up on deck and met the cook coming out of the galley; and I looked up forward and saw the bow in the air. Her stern was up in the air. She had about a 30° angle. She was covered with oil on her port and starboard side. A few seconds later fire started amidships. It shot right out amidships on port and starboard side. It was a large flame; very heavy black smoke, especially on the starboard side. I got down on my knees to avoid the smoke and to let it go over my head. Just then the First Assistant, Mr. Buckley, came up on deck and said it looked pretty bad for us. The fire lasted I should judge about 7 minutes, to the best of my recollection. I thought everything was all over and didn't pay any more attention, but one of them ring life buoys, I guess it was, broke. She kind of settled down then. I think that there life preserver got loose and it had a light. One of them carbide lights lit up and then we had another fire but not as large as the first. It didn't last quite so long. I went over on the port side and I looked to see if I could see anybody in the water. I thought maybe I could see somebody in the wreckage there. I looked over the side I should judge about 50 feet. It looked like the Third Mate I saw. His face was full of oil. He had an oilskin coat on. I couldn't throw him a rope or anything. He was too far away. After that I went down to the engine room and the fire room and I looked around to see if everything was all right down below. I brought up the log book and a flash light. Gave the log book to the Chief Engineer.

Q Can't you tell us something of what happened the ship?

A Well I stayed up there and I went in the smoke room and the Chief came in and he asked me to go down below again and have a look at the fire room and the engine room bilge and see if there was any water in the ship.

Had she broken in two at that time?

Yes sir.

Did you see anything of the people in the fore part of the vessel that had broken away.

Not after it broke. It was partly submerged under the water. Her bow was way up. The wind and the sea took her and she drifted up forward of us about 15 minutes or so.

Where was the crew in that vessel housed? Where did they live?

The Captain and officers were up in midships.

Was there anybody forward under the forecastle head?

No sir; all the crew lived aft with the exception of the deck officers.

They lived in the midship house, the master and 3 mates, the wireless and steward.

All the rest of the crew were aft?

Yes sir.

If they were the only ones on the fore part of the vessel where were the rest of the crew?

The rest of the crew were aft.

How many of a crew did it carry, all told?

36.

There is the Master and three Mates; that would be 4; the Steward 5; the Wireless 6; That would leave 30. Then there was somebody at the wheel?

Yes sir.

That would be 7. That would leave 29. There were 36 all together.

Now 21 were saved. Where were the other 8?

The other 8 were lost.

How?

When the ship broke in half.

They happened to be there at that particular time when the ship broke in two. They didn't live there. They just happened to be in that particular part of the vessel?

Yes sir; some jumped overboard. I don't know how many.

Have you any theory to advance as to how this accident occurred?

The only thing that I can say is the ship pounding the heavy seas.

Did the vessel appear to be well built?

Yes sir.

6 years old?

Not quite 6 years old.

She was built to withstand this very proposition?

Yes sir.

Had you noticed any indication of weakness in the previous bad weather after leaving San Pedro?

No sir.

Had no fear of anything wrong with the ship?

No sir; I thought she shipped a heavy sea.

Do you know what tanks had cargo in them.

I heard the Chief say that No. 5 was where she broke. I don't know what tanks did have cargo in them.

You think she was overloaded?

No sir; I don't think she was. I have seen heavier loads than her.

Had plenty of freeboard, did she?

Yes sir.

Mr. Dolan: No questions.

(WITNESSED EXCUSED)

