

C. E. H. STENGEL TELLS IN DETAIL OF BATTLE FOR LIVES

Newark Star

Friday 19 April 1912

Escapes in Separate Boat from Wife, Not Realizing Danger

Lincoln Park Man Says Shock Was Slight, and That Supply of Lifeboats Was Inadequate; Denies That Captain Was Drinking, But Declares He Was Entertaining Ismay

BULLETS PREVENT OVERCROWDING, BUT MOST ARE BRAVE

All Agree That Not a Single Man Left the Sinking Steamship Until It Was Believed Certain Not a Woman Was Left Living on Board---Adrift for Four Hours Before Rescued

The sinking of the Titanic, the struggle of her passengers to save themselves from an awful death and the rescue by the Carpathia was graphically told by C. E. Henry Stengel, an eyewitness, who with his wife was picked up by the Carpathia, to a Star reporter on the way from the Cunard pier to the Lincoln Park home of Mr. and Mrs. Stengel last night.

The story begins with the time when the Titanic struck the huge iceberg until the time her passengers were taken aboard by the Carpathia.

There were not enough boats to care for the passengers. None but the captain was aware of the danger after striking the iceberg. Many men preferred to remain aboard the Titanic rather than chance it in the lifeboats.

The crew was inadequate, being composed of a strange set of men. Mr. Stengel declared that an officer of the Titanic told him on board the Carpathia that it had been figured out on the ill-fated vessel that it would encounter icebergs between 10 and 12 o'clock Sunday night. Mr. Stengel is willing to take an affidavit to this effect.

The Titanic struck the berg at 11:40 and sank at 2:20.

The water at this time was perfectly calm and as smooth as glass. It was so cold, however, that the ship's doctors declared that no one could live in it more than twenty minutes.

Of the passengers saved, according to Mr. Stengel, there were 210 first class passengers, 115 second, 136 third and 199 of the crew.

CENSORSHIP ON PRESS DISPATCHES

Mr. Stengel said that the reason there were so few press dispatches is because it was ruled by the authorities aboard the Carpathia that only twenty words of press could be sent each day. The wireless operators were told to send only the messages of those on board ship.

Mr. and Mrs. Stengel are one of three couples to be reunited after being separated on the ship. Mrs. Stengel was lowered in a lifeboat soon after the first crash and Mr. Stengel was permitted to take his seat in a lifeboat some time later. Mr. Stengel, however, was the first to reach the Carpathia.

Mrs. Stengel escaped wearing a kimono over her nightdress, and her husband was not fully dressed, either.

Although Mr. Stengel had wired his family that he would bring several survivors with him he did not do so when the Carpathia landed. Three of the party that were expected to come with him were taken care of by other friends and two others, the Misses Newell, of Massachusetts, could not be found on the pier after the boat docked.

Mr. Stengel, as well as his family, made every effort to locate these young women, but could not do so.

The lifeboat in which Mr. Stengel was saved was occupied by four persons besides himself. They were Sir and Lady Cosmo Duff Gordon, a Miss Francacelle and A. L. Sullivan, of New York.

HOISTED ABOARD BY ROPES

Mr. Stengel helped man the craft, which was afloat for more than four hours, and so numb did his hands become that he had to be lifted aboard the Carpathia by ropes.

That the law of the sea, "women and children first," prevailed was confirmed by Mr. Stengel. He declared that in order to prevent some of the men from jumping into the lifeboats the ship's officers, after due warnings, declared that they would shoot the first man who attempted to enter a lifeboat. This order was given after several men had dropped into the boats.

The story as told by Mr. Stengel follows:

"I hardly know where to begin. As I sit here now I can still hear the wailing and the moaning of the 1,500 or more persons who jumped into the sea after the four explosions that took place on the Titanic.

"The ship that we thought unsinkable, the ship that men stuck to rather than take a chance in the lifeboats, sank in less than three hours---to be exact, on two hours and forty minutes.

"At this time, I can but thank God that my wife and I are here, and that we can once more clasp our near and dear ones in our arms.

"Let me begin at the beginning.

CAPTAIN ENTERTAINING, BUT NOT DRINKING

"We retired about 10 o'clock. We had attended the concert and we knew that the captain was entertaining and dining his friends, among whom was Bruce Ismay, until 10 o'clock. Please say for me, in justice to Captain Smith, that he had not been drinking. He smoked cigarettes, but he did not drink.

"I had been sleeping but a short time and was having a terrible dream which I cannot fully remember when I felt a shock. This was no greater than one caused by the propeller coming above the surface of the water. I thought, nevertheless, that I would go on deck and ascertain if there was any trouble. There I found but few persons.

"No one seemed to fear danger.

"The first inkling I had of danger was when I saw the serious face of Captain Smith as he talked to George Widener, of Philadelphia.

"The first order was to put on the life preservers and to lower the boats---this merely as a precaution. Even then it was not thought that it would be necessary to use either.

"This was about midnight.

"I cannot repeat too often that we thought the ship absolutely unsinkable. When we struck the iceberg the portholes were open and some of the ice jammed through into the staterooms.

"One of the men picked up the ice and as he held it in his hand said smilingly, "We must have struck an iceberg." He had absolutely no thought of making any preparations to leave the ship.

"The Titanic struck on her starboard side and her sides were ripped open where the coal bunkers are located.

"On the starboard side there were about six boats lowered. I do not know much about the other side.

"The women were put immediately into the boats. The wives were separated from their husbands, daughters from their fathers.

MRS. STRAUS DIES WITH HUSBAND

"Mrs. Isidor Straus, rather than be separated from her husband, chose to die with him.

"After Mrs. Stengel had been lowered I walked up toward the bow and saw them preparing to lower the light boats on which I finally put out to sea.

"I saw Sir Cosmo Duff-Gordon and the rest of his party seated in the boat and saw there was room for one more. I asked the mate if I might get in. Even then I did not think that I was saving my life.

"The boat was a high one and it was difficult for me to enter it. I finally managed to climb up, but was not very graceful in doing so. In fact, I rolled in and the mate jokingly said: 'That is the funniest thing I have seen tonight.' I have not seen that mate since.

"The action of this officer proves to me conclusively that not even the crew was aware of the danger.

"I wish you to emphatically say that Colonel John Jacob Astor was not threatened by any of the officers. The last seen of him he was calmly walking the upper deck.

"It was only after five men jumped into one of the boats that was to hold only women that an officer threatened to shoot the next man who showed himself a coward.

"To prove that he meant what he said he fired one shot into the air. This was sufficient to convince the men that the officer was in earnest.

"The lifeboats were absolutely unprepared for any emergencies. In fact some of the so-called collapsible boats could not be opened. This caused the death of a number of persons.

NO PLUGS IN TWO OF THE BOATS

"Another indication of the negligence of the steamship company was that two of the boats had no plugs in them when they were lowered. These boats are believed to have been lost.

"There was no food, no light, no compass, and no water in any of the boats. We just trusted in God.

"My boat met with difficulty right at the start. Its painter was stuck fast and it was only after considerable time had been spent that she was finally loosened and lowered.

"Some of the men ordered to man the boats proved themselves cowards. One Armenian wrapped himself in a blanket and refused absolutely to pull an oar. This boat was manned by two girls."

[The balance of this article relates to other passengers and appears to have been drawn from press agency reports. It has therefore not been transcribed.]

Courtesy of Mark Baber

www.encyclopedia-titanica.org 1996-2011 and third parties (ref: #3055)

URL : <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/c-e-h-stengel-tells-detail-battle-for-lives.html>

PDF edition provided for personal reference only.

