

HANS PETER HANSEN

was sworn and examined as under:-

Superintendent -

- Q. What is your name, please? A. Hans Peter Hansen
- Q. And your address? A. 75 Windmill St. Dawes Pt.
- Q. I understand you were an A.B. aboard the 'Fitzroy' at the time she was lost? A. Yes, Sir.
- Q. How long have you held that position? A. Five months.
- Q. What was your opinion of the ship, was she a good vessel?  
A. Yes, one of the best.
- Q. Did you ever find her cranky in any way? A. No.
- Q. I might tell you that I have received a rough sketch from the Harfinger Coffs Harbour showing the distribution of the cargo, and from it I am sure that there was no chance of anything shifting in the hold, are you of that opinion? A. I am of opinion that nothing could shift in either of the holds.
- Q. There were sleepers in the after hold? A. Yes, that is where I was working. There were about 80.
- Q. Some of them were placed on each side of the tunnel? A. Yes.
- Q. Did they reach above the tunnel? A. Up to the height of the tunnel, then there were a lot of butter boxes taken in.
- Q. Were they stowed right across the ship? A. On each side on top of the sleepers.
- Q. So that they could not shift? A. When she took the big list they possibly could.
- Q. Do you think that they contributed to the cause of the vessel foundering? A. No.
- Q. So that I can take it that in regard to both holds you consider the cargo had nothing to do with her falling over on her side? A. No.
- Q. You remember leaving Coffs Harbour? A. Yes.
- Q. What was the weather like at the time of leaving? A. The wind was to the S.W.
- Q. The sea moderately smooth? A. Yes.
- Q. What watch did you have on deck that night? A. 8 to 12 o'clock.
- Q. Were you at the helm? A. Yes from 8 to 10 o'clock.
- Q. The weather continued all right up to that time or was it freshening up? A. The wind was practically the same but the rain was coming down in torrents.
- Q. Then you went below? A. Yes..
- Q. What was the first you knew that there was trouble about?  
A. Everything was all right when I went below. It must have

Hansen, H.P. A.B. 'Pitzroy'

been 4 o'clock because it was when we changed watches, + heard someone saying what is the wind, and a man replied to the Eastward. I just thought the ship must have turned since I went below.

Q. Was the vessel knocking about much at that time? A. Yes. The vessel was knocking about a bit after 12 o'clock. I did not sleep much between 12 and 4 o'clock. The previous two or three months we had the finest weather possible and then the change made the ship come at a different action.

Q. I suppose you tried to go to sleep after 4 o'clock? A. Yes.

Q. What was the next thing? A. At a quarter past 5 the man sleeping underneath my bunk called me out. He said you had better get out of your bunk while I fix my bunk. His bunk fell out on the floor and also the bottom bunk ahead of me again fell out, and the man was busy getting his bunk fixed so, so I had to get out of it while he fixed his bunk, and I gave him a hand, and then I went back to my own bunk again.

Q. What was the first alarm you got that there was something wrong. That time were you called on deck and how did you find things then? A. I was notified that the ship was in bad trim having a heavy list and we had better get out. The man sleeping in the bunk beneath mine called everybody out and then the man on the lookout called everybody to get up.

Q. Which way do you reckon the ship was listing? A. To port.

Q. You were all out and getting dressed when you were called by the lookout? A. Yes. There was a lot of water in the fore-castle, our boots and seats were floating to the port side.

Q. How did the water get there? A. I cannot account for it. All our boots mixed up together were floating there. Johansen came along and said to go out on deck.

Q. How did you find things when you got out? A. The ship had a list to the port side and then we were immediately told to get the logs over the side. Johansen went to the windlass and tried to get it going and then Jansen, who is the winch-driver, went and tried to get the winch going, but he only just moved it sufficiently for it to slacken a couple of feet, and we could not get any more movement from the windlass.

Q. You tried to get steam to use to heave the logs over and could not get it, is that correct? A. Yes.

Q. What did you do then? A. There was one log on top of the others which we thought by using a couple of levers, we might be able to haul over the side, which we did. The next tier was two or three lying alongside one another and we had no hope of getting them out.

Q. Did the Captain or the Officer on the bridge give you any directions about this? A. I did not hear them give any directions.

Q. Did you look upon Johansen as a loading man? A. Yes.

Q. A kind of boatswain? A. Yes.

Q. If there were any work about he would take the lead? A. Q.

Q. Did the mate go down and lend a hand? A. No.

The mate was below and the 2nd mate was most likely on the bridge. We attempted to set the logs out. The mate was below and the 2nd mate was most likely on the bridge. We attempted to set the logs out. The mate was below and the 2nd mate was most likely on the bridge. We attempted to set the logs out.

Q. What did you do after attempting to set the logs out? A. There was a sling of hardwood It was a wire sling and Jansen hatch on the starboard side. It was a wire sling and Jansen hatch on the starboard side. It was a wire sling and Jansen hatch on the starboard side. It was a wire sling and Jansen hatch on the starboard side.

Q. Did you up to that time consider that water was getting into the ship. What did you think was giving her the list. A. The enormous lot of water on the port side and also the logs and a lot of the cattle had washed there.

Q. It did not strike you that there was water entering the ships hold at that time, did it? A. No.

Q. Did it afterwards? A. No, I never thought of water being in the hold.

Q. Did you assist to put the main hatches on? A. Yes.

Q. Did you put the after hatches on? A. Yes.

Q. Were tarpaulins put on the after hatch? A. Yes.

Q. Were they wedged down? A. No. The deck is very high up and no water could by any possible chance get on the deck.

Q. Why not, have you any idea? A. The deck is very high up and no water could by any possible chance get on the deck.

Q. Higher than the fore hatch? A. I should say it would be about 8 ft.

Q. And the coamings of the after hatch were they as tall as the No. 1? A. No.

Q. So that you did not take any steps to try to ascertain how the water was entering the ship? A. No.

Q. So that you did not take any steps to try to ascertain how the water was entering the ship? A. No.

Q. When you found that you failed to get any of the logs you hear the Master give the order to call the passengers and get the boats ready? A. No. I might have been on the forward deck at that particular time.

Q. What did you do after you failed to get any of the logs over. Were any orders given? A. We got one log over. We did not do it, we could not shift this sling of timber. We did not do it, we could not shift this sling of timber. We did not do it, we could not shift this sling of timber.

Q. What did you do then? A. The skipper was saying to not lift it clear. We then went aft and the covers.

Q. Had the Captain left the bridge then? A. No. I think he sang out from the bridge. We then take off the covers.

Q. You eventually got the boats clear? A. Yes.

Q. Was the ship still listing to port at that time? A. Yes.

Q. And was the low side the weather side at that time? A. Yes.

Q. She had her port to the wind and sea still? A. Yes.

Q. Supposing you were asked to describe the weather when you were getting the boats ready to leave? A. I would say it was a strong wind.

Q. Not a strong gale? A. No.

Q. What would you describe the sea as? A. Heavy.

Q. Johansen was in the water for 12-hours, and although I cannot but understand that anyone being there thinking it was terrible, still it is hard to understand how he could be in a very heavy sea all that time and survive it. Anyhow you say it was a heavy sea? A. Yes.

Q. Or a moderately heavy sea? A. Moderately heavy.

Q. And that if your ship had not taken this list she would have been in no danger whatever? A. I do not think she would, it was such a sea that if I had seen that the deck of the ship was all right I would not have thought anything of it.

Q. When you got on deck - I have been informed that previous to that time she had shipped a heavy sea and washed the cattle back on the deck. A. I did not take particular notice of the cattle until we started to shift the timber because the timber was to be shifted to the side where the cattle was.

Q. I thought you were trying to throw it overboard? A. No, we were told to put it on the fore deck to give her a list. It was the logs we were throwing overboard. We could not get the wire adrift and consequently we could not get it out.

Q. When you commenced that work did you look around to see whether there was room to place the timber on account of the cattle? A. Yes.

Q. And was there room enough? A. Hardly enough room to get it on the deck, we would have had to stack it on top of these wooden boxes.

Q. How did you find things when you got up in regard to the cattle? A. There was an empty beer barrel rolling backwards and forwards before I was called out. There was a hurdle across there (as indicated) seven with the fore part of the hatch. There was also a hurdle about here (as indicated). The sling of timber was along here (as indicated) so we were going to sling the boards out here. A lot of dead cattle was lying on the boxes in which bricks had been carried. And this first rail (as indicated) was not washed away but was knocked down by one of those wooden boxes, and one of the boxes was lying on top of the rail.

Q. How many head of cattle were left, do you think half of them were knocked to leeward? A. I would say eight might have been left.

Q. Where were the rest, down here (as indicated)? A. I did not notice many.

Q. Where were they then? A. They must have gone over the side. I saw some pigs and cattle swimming in the water which was level with the rail.

Q. Could you give an approximate idea of the weight of the logs? A. No.

Q. You have told me that when you were called your boots were washing about in the fore-castle? A. Yes.

Q.

Q. And this hatch only had two tarpaulins spread over, but not battened down? A. I could not say about them being battened down.

Q. If there was water sluicing about in the fo'castle so that you had to be groping around for your boots, don't you think water could have got down that hatch on a well deck? A. To a certain extent. I noticed on one occasion that a corner of the tarpaulin was back.

Q. I am strongly of opinion that if the water was around that ship as has been stated, and big seas coming aboard, and the tarpaulins are on hatches and there is a well deck, and they are not battened down, water would get into that hatch. Do you remember whether the logs were the full length of the hatch? A. I think it myself that they were a good half way past.

Q. Would they be two-thirds of the way? A. Yes.

Q. But they were not right level with the after part of the coamings? A. No.

Q. Was there any other deck cargo aft of the logs? A. There was a hurdle abaft the logs. A. No, not to my knowledge. There was no barricade between the logs and the cattle because the logs would serve as a barricade themselves.

Q. Do you think it possible that water could get through this ash shoot? A. When I went from the wheel at 10 o'clock in the evening I went into the paint locker. To get out of the paint locker I went across this way (as indicated) and across the stokehold and out through this door (as indicated) and at that particular time I noticed it was closed and there was water standing in here (as indicated).

Q. So that between 10 and 12 o'clock you are sure that that ash shoot was closed with an iron plate? A. Yes. The wind at that time was from the S.W. It made me think of them closing the shoot when the wind was from the other side.

Q. You went to go from the starboard to the port side, which ash shoot was closed? A. The port one.

Q. Did you notice whether the starboard one was closed? A. It was always closed, never used.

Q. The paint locker and these berths, do you know whether there were ports in them? A. There was one port.

Q. Did you ever see that open? A. No, it was always closed.

Q. What is this space used for (as indicated)? A. Deck cargo.

Q. Was any cargo stowed there on this occasion?

Q. The general traffic was over the hatch up a ladder and on to the top deck. A plank led from the coamings on to the ladder? A. Yes.

Q. So as to make a clear gangway right along here on to the fo'castle and up? A. Yes. You know a box of timber came about two-thirds along.

Q. On leaving Coffs Harbour there was a hurdle across on the fore part out to the side, and that was put on to stop anything from washing down into this corner (as indicated)? A. Yes.

Hansen, H.P. A.B. 'Fitzroy'

Note: At this stage Mr. Sullivan requested that the witness be asked to describe the space on the after part of the No. 1 hold, coamings leading to the bulkhead and what cargo was carried in that space.

The witness explained that from the plan it showed that there was a doorway into the bulkhead leading from that space and that since the plans of the vessel had been drawn a mess-room had been erected under the bridge ladder shown on the plan, and reaching from that to the bulkhead, and that he considered the width of same was about 14' the mess-room slightly encroaching on the space referred to.

Q. You stated a short while ago that in the early morning when the vessel foundered the bunk above yours fell out. Were you on the port side? A. No, on the starboard side.

Q. On the high side? A. Yes.

Q. What was the height of the door step into the fo'castle? A. 20" about.

Q. Were all the tarpaulins good on the ship? A. Middling.

Q. One good and one indifferent perhaps? A. There was one good one to go next to the hatch. There were three tarpaulins altogether used for the hatch and I cannot say which two were on.

Q. How would you describe the three tarpaulins belonging to the ship? A. One was very good, one good, and one not much good.

Q. The outside tarpaulin was really used as a chafer to keep the chafing off the good tarpaulin? A. Yes.

Q. Do you say the direction of the sea was from the S.E. A. Yes.

Q. One of the other witnesses said he saw bedding and blankets coming out of the Chief Engineers room or the 2nd Engineers room. It seems to me that a port was left open. A. The ports might have been broken with a heavy sea. They might not have been left open. I have seen that occur.

Q. I have questioned you as fully in regard to this serious casualty as I can. Is there anything at all in connection with the whole matter that you would like to draw my attention to, especially as regards the vessel and her condition. Do you think there was anything that might have been done that was not done? A. I do not think myself that the for'ard deck was in good condition.

Q. In which way? A. I think it was perished.

Q. What part of it? A. The fore part of the hatch and the after part of the hatch.

Q. Do you mean the wooden deck or the coamings? A. I mean the iron deck.

Q. Do you mean it was rusted, or was there a hole in it? A. There was a thick layer of rust on one occasion and I was handed a top mawl to chip it off, and by giving it a knock with this hammer on the plate, it shook the plate. Not only where the hammer fell but also all around, and it would lift a thick layer of rust off, flakes as big as that book.

Hansen, H.P. A.B. 'Fitzroy'

Q. What was the weight of the hammer? A. Three or four lbs. I should think.

Q. Was there a hole in the deck? A. Under one of those rust scales that came off I noticed a little hole just enough to put a needle through. Then afterwards it was painted and that covered everything up again. That was just after we came out of dock.

Q. How long after you joined her did the vessel go into dock? A. I think it was the trip after.

Q. Do you mean to tell me that if you thought the deck was weak or worn out you would go in a ship with heavy deck cargoes on? A. Everybody thought getting a new foredeck was a certainty. I was on board five months and there were about eight patches put on the foredeck on the after part of the hatch.

Q. Is that through the knocking about it got with the timber? A. We always take coal in, in Newcastle and that was always dumped between the hatch and ladder, and the deck all around here (as indicated) was nothing but patches. In fact the trip before last there were two patches put on. The deck was all tiny holes and to patch it up a bolt was put through it and a washer on top and it was screwed down.

Q. You are of opinion that the foredeck was in a weak condition and required renewing? A. Yes.

Q. Were the lifesaving appliances all right? A. When we left the boats were in 1st class condition. Before we went into dock, the boats were not.

Q. Was the Master, the Officers and crew all that they should have been? A. Yes.

Q. The life-saving appliances at the time of the casualty were all right? A. Yes.

Q. Is there anything else that you have to say.

Note: The witness here pointed out that in his opinion the cattle were equally distributed about the deck on both sides and the pigs in the middle, which is slightly different to the Wharfingers rough sketch of the distribution of the cargo.

Q. When the ship left Coffs Harbour, was she upright? A. She had a very slight list to port.

Q. What would you call a slight list to port, a list that any ship would leave port with, without hesitation. Almost unnoticeable, was it? A. Yes.

Q. So that I can take it generally that the cargo was equally distributed about the deck? A. Yes.

Q. I suppose the slight list could have been taken off by the Engineers burning the coal? A. Yes, it could.

Q. Was that done? A. I do not remember. I think she must have been a bit down by the nose because after letting the lines go, Capt. Colvin sang out to the Agent, Capt. Cockle, how is her draught, 13' or 14' for'ard? Capt. Cockle was not in a position to see the draught, and he said 8' some inches, and that set me thinking.

Q. Were there two Mates on the ship? A. Yes. I thought that Capt. Colvin meant what he said, and I thought the shore Skipper answered in a joke.

Q. What was her usual draught? A. I do not know.

Q. What would lead you to think she was down by the head? A. When the conversation was going on I was standing on the fo'castle head, and that made me look aft.

Q. Why did not you look down at the figures and see what she was? A. I looked aft and I thought she was rather down fo'ard.

Q. Did you discuss this with the other members of the crew? A. Yes.

Q. What did they say? A. Jansen said he had seen it loaded heavier before.

Q. Generally I take it by what you are inferring that you thought the vessel was rather improperly loaded? A. I would not call her improperly loaded.

Q. She was, if she was by the head. Is there anything else.

Q. Why do you suggest that Capt. Cackle could not see the draught? A. His position on the wharf was opposite the fore part of the bridge, roughly 8 or 10 ft. back on the wharf.

Q. Consequently you think the figures were too far away from him, for him to see them? A. Yes.

Q. Have you stated everything now? A. Yes. I have said everything I could possibly think of.

Q. Are you raising this question as a possible explanation of the loss of the vessel? A. No.

Q. It is merely supposition on your part, and when Capt. Colvin asked the question you were looking aft and you thought to yourself, she is not 8 ft. I think she is by the head? A. Yes, it made me look and I thought she looked high up by the stern and low in the head.

Q. But you do not put that forward as a probable cause of the loss of the vessel? A. No.

(Witness retired).