

# FORTY HOURS IN A LIFE BOAT

Thrilling Experience of the Passengers and Crew of the Steam Collier *Titani*, in Abandoning the Sinking Ship and Finally Being Picked Up—Stories of the Survivors—

(San Francisco Chronicle Nov. 10.)  
Captain Thomas Gunderson, twenty-four men and nine passengers arrived on the Norwegian collier *Titani* yesterday morning and told of the thrilling disabling and abandoning of the steam schooner *Charles Nelson* off Clatsop, on the Oregon coast, and of the experience of forty hours in two life-boats, through all of which hardships every person from the unfortunate schooner passed with no serious injury and no loss but personal effects. The men and the single woman who was aboard speak in most cordial terms of Captain Gunderson, to whose bravery and coolness they attribute their deliverance from death.

The courageous spirit of the skipper so far imbued his crew and passengers that they profess not to have felt great fear for their lives, and say that in the midst of the dangers they were able to appreciate the ludicrous situations, which appear to have arisen with frequency.

The most trying hours were during the whole of Thursday night, when the two life-boats, each loaded to its full with seventeen persons, rocked in the lee of the abandoned ship, fearful of pushing off into the raging seas and the sweeping gale. In the midst of it a portly Englishman, Philip Bradley, insisted upon trying to reboard the ship for dry clothes and fell into the ocean. His life preservers buoyed him up, and the spectacle of four sailors laboring with ropes to hoist the burly passenger into the lifeboat again caused peals of laughter from the wretched and wet refugees, who had no assurance that all might not speedily go swirling down to Davy Jones.

After forty hours of drifting in a lashing sea, the captain was standing on a seat and straining his eyes at what seemed to be a lighthouse on a rock. Bradley clutched Captain Gunderson's coat and jerked him down into the boat.

"Tell me quick—I never thought of it before—what in the name of heaven do they do with lighthouses in the daytime?" cried the Englishman.

"Oa, they fold them up and tuck them into a canvas bag," replied Mr. Gunderson coolly. The captain had lost the direction, and when he looked again there was not even the suggestion of a lighthouse to guide or give them hope.

### Most Trying Time.

The meager provisions in the boats consisted of canned goods, mainly canned clams. Bernard Dougherty, a fireman, seemed so near famished that he was given a whole tin of the precious food. He swallowed the clams greedily, lost them through nausea, and growl so weak that another can had to be administered, before Dougherty's stomach could be regulated. It seemed that the others must be left without any provisions whatever, so continuous was his cry for food and so prompt its rejection. On the second night in the open boats several men became delirious, and one was barely restrained from leaping overboard. Mrs. George Cox, the wife and assistant of the cook, soothed the strain finely and talked intelligently of the details of the never-to-be-forgotten experience. The men generously gave up their own wet garments to aid in keeping the cold from her.

### Her statements of Captain Gunderson.

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son, Mate Karl Kjellin, Second Officer John Baragwanath, Chief engineer Al Sweeny, Steward F. W. Stafford, Seaman Gus Anderson and a number of passengers, who were interviewed as to the cause of the accident, agree perfectly. The *Charles Nelson* crossed the bar from Astoria at noon last Tuesday, and that evening ran into a gale. By Wednesday night she was in distress, and soon after midnight she was leaking badly. She carried 705,000 feet of lumber, and the very heavy deckload caused the samson post to snap off short, leaving it free to work about. Water poured into the hole thus made in the deck and through the openings of seams in the side. The cutting away of the deckload did not help matters, and the vessel settled at the stern, with the weight of the machinery, the 300,000 feet of lumber in the hold, keeping her bow afloat. The ship was abandoned Thursday evening, though the captain remained aboard all night. With the others in the two lifeboats, which had hovered in the lee of the ship all night, he pushed away from the *Nelson* early Friday morning. Once they sighted land, but fearing to attempt a landing through the surf, were finally picked up by the tug *Sea Rover*, bound north, Saturday morning, and in half an hour were transferred to the *Titani*, which brought them to this port. When last seen the half-sunken *Nelson* was being towed toward this port by the steam schooner *Aurelia*, which was having a hard time with her prize. Captain Gunderson believes the *Nelson* will be towed in here.

### Had to Leave the Ship.

Captain Gunderson said that he did his best under the circumstances, and that had not both of the lifeboats been required to convey the passengers and crew from the unsafe ship he would have kept a boat for emergency and taken his chances in remaining with his ship.

"My men acted very well and we all did our best," said Gunderson. "The *Nelson* was five years old and has plied up and down the coast and been across the ocean." He believed the ship was about 25 miles from land when she was abandoned.

Second officer John Baragwanath, who got both legs badly bruised in launching a lifeboat, praised his captain and said: "When we lay all of Thursday night in the lee of the ship in the lifeboats the wind must have been blowing 50 miles an hour, and I have never seen a heavier sea in all the years I have been along the coast."

Upon their arrival the officers, crew and passengers reported to the office of the *Charles Nelson* company and made their statements. Ellis Sandvig, a passenger from Astoria for San Francisco, had written out the following detailed description of the accident, the abandonment and the rescue, as soon as he had been made snug upon the *Titani*:

### Sandvig's Statement.

"The rough weather had sprung a leak in the port bunkers, but it was the breaking of the samson post which made a great hole in the deck and allowed the water to rush in. The working of the lumber quickly made seams open. The captain ordered the deck load cut adrift, but this did not help much, and the water was soon so deep in the engine rooms that the engineers and firemen were swimming rather than walking. It was daylight Thursday when the captain ordered them all to the deck the coal being so wet that the fire went out and the ship was helpless. An attempt was made to get a fire in the donkey boiler to work the bilge pumps but this failed, and the water rose higher and higher in the hold and the vessel sank lower. At 9 o'clock a vessel was sighted and a knotted flag of distress was run up. The flag was either not seen or disregarded and we were left alone.

"At 1:30 the ship was kept up only by the lumber forward in her hold, and the captain ordered the lifeboats lowered. As the port boat was being launched an unusually heavy sea swept it away. The captain would not order any one to go after it, but Nels Alexanderson and Oscar Nelson, seamen, launched a small life raft, took after the boat and succeeded in fetching it back. We stood by ready to embark until dark. Red lights

were set in the rigging, but they were drenched out every few minutes. When the ship began to settle at the stern and the deckhouse commenced to give way the captain ordered all into the boats. He was last to leave the ship and almost immediately returned and spent the night upon her. Sailors and passengers struggled with the cars all through the night to keep the lifeboats from being carried out of the lee of the ship to destruction. All were drenched with spray, and the awful wind was bitter cold. When, near morning, a rain began to fall it was a welcome relief, for it was warmer than the spray.

"By daylight the gale was decreasing and several managed to get aboard and find more clothes. In his endeavor to do this Philip Bradley, an Englishman from Chicago, fell into the sea. His life preservers kept him up while ropes were got about him and he was hauled into the boat. His rage and his helplessness caused shouts of merriment. When we got into the boats the night before there had no life preservers, and Captain Gunderson crawled forward over the shifting lumber and procured belts for them.

### Drifting in the Rain.

"At 7:30 o'clock all were in the lifeboats again and the captain gave the command to shove off. The officers had held a consultation and agreed to abandon the wreck, which was lost from sight in half an hour. Captain Gunderson commanded one boat in which were 16 others, and Mate Karl Kjellin had the second boat with the same number. The mate led, he having the only compass.

"The boats took what seemed an easterly course. All day Friday there was a continual mist of rain. The sea was steady. After 3 o'clock we sighted a high point of land supposed to be near Coos bay, and sails were run up and cars set to work. In our haste to get closer to the land those in the mate's boat failed to watch the captain's boat, and when we did look for him he was two miles away and tacking on another course. We went after him, abandoning the effort to reach the shore, as the captain had ordered that the two boats should remain together. As soon as we came together the captain explained that he preferred staying in the path of steamers to attempting a landing in the surf. The point we had sighted we after learned was Hackett Head.

"By 7:30 o'clock the weather was calm and full moon shown. We had canned goods to eat, and all kept up hope and spirits. Saturday morning we sighted a vessel headed south, supposed to be the *Queen*. We pulled in her direction, the passengers as well as the crew taking a turn at the oars, and when we were close to her Captain Gunderson tried to light an oil torch which he had prepared, but it would not burn. All we could do was to sit still and watch the vessel pass out of sight.

"Up to this time early all had stood the exposure and strain very well, but now lamentations commenced. In the captain's boat the second steward, one of the cooks and a fireman became delirious, and it was feared that they might soon succumb. Once the fireman got to his feet, and was barely restrained from stepping overboard. In the mate's boat two became delirious, and the first assistant engineer moaned piteously. One man begged to be thrown overboard, but when told that he would be hauled to a seat he became passive.

"The night seemed long and full of agony. At last came the dawn and the glorious sight of three vessels in our vicinity. We cheered up and took fresh heart. We set out toward one, but she was too far off. Presently two vessels hove nearer, until we had one on our bow and another on the stern. The one at the stern soon overtook us, and turned out to be the tug *Sea Rover*. They saw us and took us aboard without difficulty. The tug transferred us at once to the *Titani*, the Norwegian collier, which brought us to San Francisco this morning.

### All Are Interested.

Judge Septimus Hanna, who lectures here Friday evening, is a member of the Board of Lectureship, sent out by the Christian Science Board of Education, at Boston. They are sent all over the civilized world for the purpose of teaching the people what Christian Science really is. Judge Hanna is an able lawyer and judge, and left his profession to take up lecturing on Christian Science, Friday night, at the opera house. Admission free. All are invited. 31

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money drawn was a record breaker even for that theatre which is a house noted for its enormous receipts. The play conceded to be one of the best stories of Southern life given to the stage in recent years. Each character is drawn with a master hand, and the plot of the play unfolds a deeply interesting and probable story. The company which is headed by Esther Williams is a most excellent one and contains many names of well known merit. Manager Alston has engaged the "American Four" Quartette as an extra and special feature for the season. This quartette which is composed of Wm. Sullivan, Herbert Noble, Owen McCormick and Harry L. Wilson has been a recognized vaudeville headliner for the past few seasons, and Manager Alston was so impressed with their ability that he has signed a five years' contract with them. James M. Brophy, the celebrated romantic actor and one of the highest salaried leading men has been re-engaged for the part of Doc Kerr. Seats on sale at box office, Monday, November 15th at 9 a. m.

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