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Enclosure No. 23  
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FILE No. ~~76183~~ ~~344~~  
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The Honourable Commissioners,  
Customs and Excise.

Honourable Sirs,

GILBERT HORNBY, Assistant Preventive Officer.  
Fatal accident on board the Liberian steamship  
Andros Champion, Bidston Dock, Birkenhead.

The Coroner, Mr. Joseph Roberts, resumed the inquest at 3 p.m.  
19th December, 1957, at Birkenhead Town Hall, Birkenhead.

PRESENT

Mr. Dunning, Solicitor for Messrs Linskey & Sons,  
81, Dale Street, Liverpool.  
representing the widow.

Mr. Vernon Gwyther, Solicitor of Messrs Hill, Dickinson & Co.,  
representing the Owners of the vessel,  
now amended to read:-  
Saint Rafael CIA. NAV. S.A. Panama City.

Mr. G. Krikorian, Senior Legal Assistant of the Solicitors  
Office representing the Customs and Excise.

At the outset Mr. Krikorian addressed the Coroner and read  
sections 19 and 20 of Customs and Excise Act, 1952.

Mr. Thomson, A.P.O. was then called and the Coroner took  
him through his statement to the Police on the day of the accident.  
Questions and answers follow:-

Coroner

Thomson

When Mr. Hornby collapsed and  
fell into the water, What did  
you do after that?

I went down into the space  
and Mr. Cooper went for help.

Did you get right down?

I got down to him. I was  
scared he would go into the  
water. I pulled him towards  
me and held on to him. The  
next thing I definitely remember was  
Greek voices. I then heard Mr.  
Thomas' voice and heard "rope"  
mentioned. I saw the rope and  
I took hold of it and attempted  
to tie it around Hornby. At  
this juncture I became totally  
incapable of physical  
co-ordination. I knew what I  
wanted to do but my hands just  
wouldn't let me.

How long were you in the  
space before you were "knocked  
out"?

I really do not know. Perhaps  
the fact that there was a  
crisis kept me going.

Did you smell anything?

No sir.

Dunning, then said that there were no questions he wished to ask but on behalf of Mr. Hornby's widow he wished to express her very best thanks for the gallant effort Mr. Thomson made to rescue the deceased

The Coroner then said that the Court appreciated the effort made and no doubt Mr. Krikorian will convey this to the Commissioners.

Mr. Krikorian asked Thomson

How was the cover taken off?

Were any bolts loose?

We released bolts, first, one here and one there. There was no pressure. The first nuts that Mr. Hornby tried were easy

Coroner

When you took the cover off the nuts were not very tight

The last four or six were tight.

The Home Office Pathologist, Dr. C.A. St Hill was then asked

Coroner

When we met last week the question arose as to how the carbon dioxide came to be present in this space

Dr. C.A. St Hill

Following enquiries the probable answer is that when iron rusts from the affect of sea water it would absorb every vestige of oxygen in an enclosed space

Coroner

This was a confined space so ~~xxx~~ as you reduce the oxygen you leave carbon dioxide

Yes sir. The pressure would not be changed

Mr. Dunning.

Would this account for the symptoms described by the last witness?

More likely that the symptoms were caused by lack of oxygen rather than carbon dioxide poisoning.

Mr. J. R. Thomas, Preventive Officer was then called.

The Coroner took him through the statement made to the Police on the 12th inst.

Coroner

You saw that Mr. Hornby and Mr. Thomson were in the space. What happened after that?

Thomas

I called for a rope and called to the people to shut up

I rather gather that the crew were making a lot of noise?

Yes sir.

I spoke to Thomson and asked him to pass the rope around Hornby.

Did you get a reply from him?

Yes. Thomson appeared to be unable to do anything with it. I then asked for another rope. When I got it I fastened it around myself and went down. I brought Thomson to the ladder.

How was the deceased brought up?

I can hardly remember the details. I took hold of Hornby's arm and was dragged up.

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Enclosure No. 249

The Coroner then said, I am quite sure the Commissioners will be informed of your actions in this matter.

Mr. Krikorian then said The Commissioners already know of the courage shown by the present witness (Thomas) and Mr. Thomson and your comments will be conveyed to them.

Thomas was further asked by Mr. Krikorian

Mr. Krikorian

Have you had any experience of these transom spaces?

Thomas

Yes sir, very many of them.

Are you aware that in the Port of Liverpool seizures have been made in these spaces

Yes sir.

Coroner

Can I take it, Mr. Thomas that you consider you would be failing in your duty if you did not look into such places and everywhere in the search for contraband

Yes sir.

Mr. Crichan (see Police Report "A") was then called.

The Coroner took him through his statement of the 12th inst and asked

Coroner

When you got in the space what happened

Crichan

As soon as I got in I was not exactly knowked out and I managed to get out. I then went to collect a gas mask from amidships.

Did you find a gas mask?

No sir.

Mr. Dimitriou was then called and confirmed the statement he had made to the Police (Police Report "B")

Sergeant Decker was taken through his report and the Coroner asked

If someone wanted to hide something from the Customs would this be a good place

Yes Sir, it would be an ideal place

No further witnesses were called and the Coroner gave his findings thus:-

In this case I find that death was caused by asphyxia due to drowning following a collapse caused by innoxia as a result of an accident in the course of his official duties.