

Wrangell History Unlocked Presents:

Rise & Fall of the Star of Bengal, III: Survival

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Introduction

Cut the Hawser

ERWIN FARRER: Cut the hawser! Cut the hawser! Cut the hawser!

As the hawser line slipped into the sea, the steamships Hattie Gage and Kayak fled for their lives from the rocky coast of Coronation Island.

Behind them, the Star of Bengal sat at anchor, dangerously close to the rocks.

Aboard the steamship Kayak, Captain Patrick Hamilton could not even see the Star of Bengal.

Aboard the Hattie Gage, Captain Erwin Farrer looked over his shoulder. He had been watching the Star of Bengal all night. Now, all he saw was a faint blue light through the rain and mist.

Everyone knew what the blue light meant. But there was no time for rescue. For the steamships raced to save themselves from destruction.

In his heart, Erwin Farrer believed the Star of Bengal was already wrecked.

If there was any hope for the 138 men aboard the Star of Bengal, it rested with these two, little steamships. But first, the steamships would have to save themselves.

I'm your host, Ronan Rooney. You're listening to The Rise and Fall of the Star of Bengal, presented by Wrangell History Unlocked. In today's episode, it's survival, at any cost. This is their story, in their own words.

Fleeing

Closest to the rocks, the steamship *Kayak*, under Captain Patrick Hamilton, bobbed in the water, like a toy in the waves. As the nose of the *Kayak* plunged into the waves, sweeping water across the deck, the ship's propeller and rudder popped out of the water, due to the ship's light and high stern. This left the *Kayak* unable to steer and caused the machinery inside to spin out dangerously, threatening the engine.

In order to survive, Captain Patrick Hamilton pointed the *Kayak* southeast, into the wind and waves, and set the engine to the slowest possible speed to avoid spinning out.¹

PATRICK HAMILTON: Just as she swung off shore a roller come along and she picked a good part of it up and flooded the deck pretty well; I jumped into the pilot house and slowed down...²

Meanwhile, aboard the steamship *Hattie Gage*, Captain Erwin Farrer watched his smokestack rock dangerously in the waves. Below deck, the smokestack began to work the engine from side to side.³ Captain Erwin Farrer:

ERWIN FARRER: *Hattie Gage* being so badly wrecked that she had to be kept head on until the guys were put on the masts and the smoke stacks, which took about an hour; but as the repairs were only temporary, and knowing that I could not assist the *Bengal* any further, I ran for shelter.⁴

Daylight

By daylight, Captain Patrick Hamilton could finally make out his position. The *Kayak* was no more than 3 miles⁵ from the *Star of Bengal* and shipping considerable water.⁶

Captain Patrick Hamilton:

¹ Whitney Newhall 47.

² Whitney Newhall p. 34.

³ Whitney Newhall p. 27.

⁴ 1908.10.08 *Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-08_2.pdf*

⁵ Whitney Newhall 47.

⁶ Whitney Newhall p. 34.

PATRICK HAMILTON: At six o'clock we had good daylight and sea was too heavy to go near the ship. I simply would not do it.⁷

ERWIN FARRER: The nearest shelter was under the lee of Warren Island, about twelve miles away, where I came to anchor and commenced such repairs as were needed to make a return trip to the vessel. About an hour after I anchored, the steamer Kayak came in and anchored near by. The wind at this time was blowing a hurricane.⁸

The Kayak's deckhand, Frank Uberwimer:

FRANK UBERWIMER: About eight o'clock... it was blowing something fierce, the sea was just white and the rain up in the air was just like foggy.⁹

PATRICK HAMILTON: At 11:25 we went adrift, picked up our anchor and found a fluke gone; we picked up our anchor and the Hattie Gage picked up her anchor and wanted to know what was the matter, and I says, "We will have to go to Shipley Bay for shelter, my best anchor is gone."¹⁰

Shipley Bay

ERWIN FARRER: The nearest place for shelter from there was Shipley Bay, where we came to an anchor to wait for the weather to moderate, expecting to return to the wrecked Bengal as soon as there was a possible chance. The wind continued to blow the balance of the day and during the night.¹¹

⁷ Whitney Newhall 49.

⁸ 1908.10.08 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-08_2.pdf

⁹ Whitney Newhall 142.

¹⁰ Whitney Newhall p. 34.

¹¹ 1908.10.08 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-08_2.pdf

PATRICK HAMILTON: But at midnight the beginning of morning the sky broke, cleared up over head, could see the stars out, thought it was a change in the wind.¹²

PATRICK HAMILTON: I called the mate and got the starboard anchor... got it on the rail and hove short on the other anchor; at this time the Hattie Gage picked up her anchor and wanted to know what I was going to do; that was about three o'clock.¹³

In the morning twilight of Monday, September 21, Erwin Farrer and Patrick Hamilton made a plan. Ship's mate W.E. Bruce, aboard the Hattie Gage, recalled the conversation between the captains:

ERWIN FARRER: I don't think we can make that place in a heavy southwester. I will give you a choice, I will go to Wrangell, or you can go, and I will try to get down to the wreck.

PATRICK HAMILTON: You better go to Wrangell and I will try to go to the wreck.

ERWIN FARRER: All right, I will meet you tonight.¹⁴

¹² Whitney Newhall p. 34.

¹³ Whitney Newhall p. 34.

¹⁴ Whitney Newhall 55.

Split Up

Burnside

The Hattie Gage beat a hasty path back to Wrangell. As the mouth of the Stikine River came into view, Erwin Farrer spotted the U.S. Army cables ship Burnside along the Stikine River flats. At 276 feet long, the Burnside was longer than the Star of Bengal, with more than enough space to offload all the passengers.

Erwin Farrer hailed the Burnside, and came alongside.

ERWIN FARRER: I notified the Burnside of the wreck at 11:30 o'clock, September 21, the Bengal having been cut loose the previous morning.

One month before, the Burnside rescued a fisherman, and earned the praise of the Tacoma Daily Ledger as “not only a cable ship but also a life-saving ship.”¹⁵

This time, things were different. The quartermaster captain—who could overrule the ship’s captain—said the OK to rescue the Star of Bengal must come from Washington. Hattie Gage captain Erwin Farrer:

ERWIN FARRER: The quartermaster captain said he could not go without communicating with Washington, so I took him to Wrangell, about twelve miles distant.¹⁶

This decision, to delay rescue in order to seek approval from Washington, would go down as one of the most criticized decisions in this entire story.

In Wrangell, the first sign something was terribly wrong, was the site of the Hattie Gage, alone, steaming full speed, to the Wrangell dock — not the cannery. By the time the Hattie Gage arrived, it was 2pm¹⁷, and Mr. Babler was there. Erwin Farrer broke the bad news:

ERWIN FARRER: I met the Superintendent when I landed and made my report to him.¹⁸

¹⁵ 1908.08.26 Tacoma Daily Ledger.pdf

¹⁶ 1908.10.15 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-15_4.pdf

¹⁷ 1908.10.15 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-15_4.pdf

¹⁸ Seattle Testimony.

Erwin Farrer believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Star of Bengal wrecked night he his cut his hawser. He saw the coastline up close, and imagined no way the Star of Bengal could survive. He told everyone in Wrangell the Star of Bengal wrecked – and yet, he had not seen it happen with his own eyes.

Telegrams

Wrangell lit up the telegraph wires. Mr. Babler set aside his worry about his brother-in-law, Norman Hawkins, and sent a telegram to APA headquarters in San Francisco:

Steamer Hattie Gage reports bark Star of Bengal wrecked on Coronation Island, Steamer Kayak standing by waiting for weather to moderate. Trying to get steamer Burnside here to go to assistance.¹⁹

The assistance of the Burnside would have to wait for approval from Washington. While he waited, Erwin Farrer restocked his supply of coal. After hours passed, the Burnside received a telegram from Washington, authorizing it to come to the rescue of the Star of Bengal.²⁰

With the good news in hand, the Hattie Gage steamed away from Wrangell, with two less people: Assistant Engineer William Taylor and his son, Bill, who recalled:

BILL TAYLOR: And we got to town here everything's all right, so we... Dad was comin' to shore, he walks up to the ladder all right, and he got about two steps, two rungs on the ladder, and he couldn't get, go any higher or any lower, he just grabbed a hold. So I was kinda' husky. I went up and behind him and got alongside of him, got his arm around my neck, I went up on top of the dock and I let Dad down on the, on the, uh, guard rail and he hung on. And oh, was he sick. His face was green. Yellow-green! And I thought, wonder how am I gonna' get him home? Over there, there was a wheelbarrow and there's, uh, iron dump wheelbarrow. So I went over and got that and brought it over and I picked Dad up and I set him in the, set him in this wheelbarrow and he just fit! And then when he sit down in there he, he relaxed. And I wheeled him home. When I

¹⁹ 1908.09.23 SF_Examiner p5.pdf

²⁰ Seattle Testimony.

got home, I took him in the front room. Mother, of course, trying to beat the bandit, pulled the blinds all down and laid him on, on the couch and, you know, and he put his face toward the wall. By gosh, and was he groaning and sick and then he tried to vomit, couldn't vomit; nothing on his stomach! He'd already vomited. He was sick for two months after that. That is, uh, he could get up, move around after a while for a week or so but he was all end. That broke him down. Hahaha. That was a terrible ordeal, I tell ya'.

Hattie Leaves

By the time the Hattie Gage made it back to the Burnside, it was late,²¹ and Erwin Farrer was in for another surprise.

ERWIN FARRER: They told me they would not be able to leave till high water that night or the next morning somewhere around two o'clock, but they would follow as soon as they got the crew from the flats up there; so I told them I would go right down to the wreck and meet them at the wreck.²²

For Erwin Farrer, all the time spent Monday on the Burnside was wasted. He appealed to the Burnside to rescue the Star of Bengal, and was met with delay every step of the way. He left the Burnside at the mouth of the Stikine River, just as he had found it, and set course to regroup with the steamship Kayak.

Intro Kayak

But the steamship Kayak spent Monday on the grim task, of going back to the last place any of them had seen the Star of Bengal, over a day before.

The rolling waves continued, but visibility improved. The Kayak could at least pass by Coronation to see if the Star of Bengal was still afloat, or if it had truly wrecked as they all feared.

The Kayak would not have to go far to get its answer.

²¹ 1908.10.15 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-15_4.pdf

²² Seattle Testimony

Floating Boxes

It was the morning of Monday, September 21. Fred Wilkie wrote in the Kayak's logbook:

FRED WILKIE: Wind and sea moderating, still squally, wind southwest. At 5:20 a.m. left anchorage for ship.

Captain Patrick Hamilton had no idea what he would find. He expected the worst.

As the steamship chugged down Sumner Strait, there was no indication that anything was wrong. But they saw something floating in the water, floating and bobbing, turning the waves.

It was a salmon box. And then another. And another. As they steamed toward the south end of Coronation Island, the Kayak passed salmon boxes on every side, bearing the unmistakable stamp of the APA. These were the disgorged remains of the entrails of the Star of Bengal, an ominous sign of the discovery the Kayak was about to make.

PATRICK HAMILTON: I went down to the southward and west of Bluff Island, I seen a good deal of kelp and salmon cases drifting around and I thought something was seriously wrong; when I got down around Coronation Island I seen smoke and eventually seen the men.

PATRICK HAMILTON: I seen part of [the Star of Bengal] sticking up out of the water, some of her spars. I could not say what position she was laying in.²³

Mate Fred Wilkie noted in the logbook:

FRED WILKIE: Arrived [at ship] at 10:20, high surf on beach ship had gone to the bottom on the rocks on S E. End of Coronation Island; notice smoke on beach.²⁴

The first assistant engineer aboard the Kayak, Walter Neil:

²³ Whitney Newhall 47.

²⁴ Kayak logbook.

WALTER NEIL: I noticed rocks, big rocks sticking out in the bight, about, maybe a quarter of a mile from the beach, perhaps farther.²⁵

First Contact

On the beach, ship's cook Patrick Loftus recalled seeing the Hattie Gage:

PATRICK LOFTUS: I thought the Hattie Gage had gone down, when I saw the Kayak coming back the next day alone.²⁶

Captain of the Kayak, Patrick Hamilton:

PATRICK HAMILTON: Very heavy swells going down the straits. The mate and I talked about getting the men off; we thought it was not possible but we lowered a boat any how and the mate and one of the men went as close as they could and spoke to them...

Ship's mate Fred Wilkie went in the lifeboat:

FRED WILKIE: ...Lowered starboard boat, myself and one fireman pulled for shore. I spoke to the men on beach but could not land the beach in the breakers...²⁷

Gustaf Johnson recalled years later:

GUSTAF JOHNSON: We sung out it was 27 saved, but told them to go away and come later. It was high water and they could not see the reefs.²⁸

Aboard the steamship Kayak, Captain Patrick Hamilton:

PATRICK HAMILTON: [they] come back and told me it was impossible to get the men off, they said they were satisfied to stay til it moderated as they had a fire and plenty to eat.

²⁵ Whitney Newhall, p. 145.

²⁶ Whitney Newhall p. 134.

²⁷ Kayak logbook.

²⁸ Gustaf A. Johnson letter, Harold Huycke Collection.

PATRICK HAMILTON: We come back to Shipley Bay and lay there all night...

Rescue

By the morning of Tuesday, September 22nd, the survivors of the wreck had been on the beach almost 48 hours. Thoralf Anderson recalled:

TORLEF ANDERSON: On the morning of the fourth day the sea was calm again. The sun was shining brightly but not a sign of the once proud ship Star of Bengal.²⁹

What they couldn't know, from the beach, was that they were front page news:³⁰

“Star of Bengal” is Wrecked!³¹

Star Wrecked in Sumner Straits³²

Ship Bengal Total Loss³³

American Bark With 136 on Board Wrecked Off Alaska³⁴

The Hattie Gage and Kayak reunited in Shipley Bay, and set course for Coronation Island, to rescue the survivors. They arrived as the tide neared its peak.

Erwin Farrer was stunned to discover a bight where the Star of Bengal had been towed:

ERWIN FARRER: I had no idea of this bight till I returned when the weather was smooth; I sounded around inside this reef and found out there was ample water for a boat of our size to get in with moderate weather.³⁵

Hattie Gage's Mate, W.E. Bruce:

²⁹ Edward F. Anderson, collected by grand-daughter Janet H. Elmore, nee Cramer. Transcript from the Clausen Museum in Petersburg, Alaska.

³⁰ 1908.09.21 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-21_1.pdf

³¹ 1908.09.22 The Seattle Star 22 September 1908 — Washington Digital Newspapers

³² 1908.09.22 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-21_1.pdf

³³ 1908-09-22 1 1 image 681x648 from 2034x3293 to 2893x4111.jpg

³⁴ 1908.09.22 The_World__Bengal_story.pdf

³⁵ Seattle Testimony

W.E. BRUCE: We took an extra man aboard at the cannery, he went down with us, he went shore in the boat, Captain Farrer wouldn't let two men go in the boat because he could bring more men off the beach with one man in the boat than two.

Survivor Gustaf Johnson:

GUSTAF JOHNSON: When the small life boats from the tugs could only take four men at a time we agreed to let the Asian men go first, but directly the boats struck the shore, they all Japanese and Chinese men slung themselves in the bottom of the boats so it took us all that we could to tear them away.³⁶

ERWIN FARRER: We were about two hours taking the survivors off. When we got every body off and aboard we started back for Wrangell.³⁷

Aboard the Hattie Gage, Alf Olsen noticed something.

ALF OLSEN: When I went aboard the Hattie Gage, I saw a double turn around the mainmast, and the line had been cut about two feet from this.³⁸

Thoralf Anderson was blunt about it:

THORALF ANDERSON: On our way back to Fort Wrangel I asked the fireman why they cut us adrift. His answer was that the boilers of the old tug were leaking so badly they couldn't keep up enough steam to hold us. If they did they would have drifted ashore with us.³⁹

³⁶ Gustaf A. Johnson letter, Harold Huycke Collection.

³⁷ Seattle Testimony.

³⁸ 1908.10.03 Star_of_Bengal_story.pdf

³⁹ Edward F. Anderson, collected by grand-daughter Janet H. Elmore, nee Cramer. Transcript from the Clausen Museum in Petersburg, Alaska.

Nicholas Wagner was one of the last to leave the beach, and boarded the Kayak.⁴⁰ According to one of the earliest news reports, the Daily Alaska Dispatch described Captain Nicholas Wagner as “raving mad when they left the beach.”⁴¹

For the journey back to Wrangell, the steamships retraced the route they had taken just days before.

ERWIN FARRER: After we started back from the wreck about 8 miles, we met the Burnside coming down. We spoke to her and I told her that we had all the survivors on board... We arrived at Wrangell at 8:30PM the 22nd of September.⁴²

The Kayak, carrying Captain Nicholas Wagner, arrived about an hour later.⁴³

And he had a story to tell.

⁴⁰ 1908.09.23 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_23_1908__p1.pdf

⁴¹ 1908.09.23 Daily_Alaska_Dispatch_1908-09-23_[1].pdf

⁴² Seattle Testimony

⁴³ 1908.09.23 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_23_1908__p1.pdf

Story of Wreck

This is the survivors' story, reconstructed from their own words. It begins at 4 in the morning, on Sunday, September 20th, after the Star of Bengal dropped anchors, and pulled the hawser lines, only to discover they'd been cut loose.

Captain Nicholas Wagner:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: We were abandoned without a word of warning.⁴⁴ I immediately set off blue lights, which lit up the whole scene, showing high steep cliffs and bold rock shore line.⁴⁵

Crew member Harry Lewald:

HARRY LEWALD: Before things got so bad the men, many of whom like myself, knew the fellows on the tugs personally, paced up and down the decks while the captain burned blue fire... Later, as the danger grew and the men realized how they were caught like rats in a trap, some of them strode here and there like mad men.⁴⁶

NICHOLAS WAGNER: ...Having strained and taxed every vocal organ I possessed in calling and beseeching those miserable and cowardly curs of tug captains to come and save our lives... Gabriel with his trumpets might have made them hear us, but it would have done no good.⁴⁷

At 4:28am the earliest glimpses of sunlight came from the east. By 6:37am, the sunrise of Sunday, September 20th was complete.

⁴⁴ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁴⁵ 1908.11.14 The_Morning_Call.pdf

⁴⁶ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁴⁷ 1908.09.27 SF_Examiner.pdf

NICHOLAS WAGNER: When daylight came no tug was in sight, and the wind was increasing.⁴⁸

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Between daylight and 8 o'clock the tugs could have come alongside of the ship and rescued all but two, who would have had to remain with the ship and cargo.⁴⁹

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Immediately set about clearing away the lifeboats on the after gallows. Hung same on davits and lowered them level to the rail. Secured the main hatches more firmly and got forward boats off gallows.

FRANK MUIR: Two after lifeboats were swung out on the davits and one of the fishing boats was hoisted but she broke the fall and was swept away... Another boat lashed to the rail was torn away about 7 o'clock.⁵⁰

NICHOLAS WAGNER: First boat over rail broke painter and drifted out of reach and ashore. Second boat got swamped, fall carrying away and drifted ashore.⁵¹

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Ordered early breakfast. 7:10am wind freshening and squally. Ordered all hands into life-preservers and had men adjust same on Chinese.

FRANK MUIR: ...all donned life belts, some of us aiding the Chinese, who did not know how to manage them.⁵²

NICHOLAS WAGNER: By 8 a.m. wind had increased to gale, with no signs of either steamer in the offing. Concluded they had abandoned us, and that we must try and get ashore on the

⁴⁸ 1908.09.27 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-27_1.pdf

⁴⁹ 1908.09.23 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-23_1.pdf

⁵⁰ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁵¹ Last Days of Sail, p. 90-91.

⁵² 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

rock-bound shore. Knowing it was almost certain death to attempt to send boat, and having no other alternatives, I called for volunteers to take line ashore.⁵³

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Into what seemed certain death Henry Lewald, Olof Hansen and Fred Matson, sailors, and Frank Muir, a cannery cook, came forward... With their safe landing depended the safety of the 134 men who remained on the ship.⁵⁴

HARRY LEWALD: We had to do something. It was a time for action and some one had to go ashore in that boat and get out a lifeline.⁵⁵

FRANK MUIR: Then Fred Matson and I jumped into the port lifeboat, where Olaf Hanson and Harry Lewald were sitting and we took the oars while the others stood by to cut the falls as soon as she touched the water.⁵⁶

NICHOLAS WAGNER: The port lifeboat was lowered with greatest difficulty, and by cutting away the fails with axes at an opportune moment the frail vessel was soon driving onto the rocks with speed that no human skill could stay. Inside one line of breakers a huge swell caught the boat and hurled it onto the jagged line of rocks. The bow and forward of the boat's bottom were stove in, and appeared to be hopelessly wrecked from our point of view.⁵⁷

⁵³ Last Days of Sail, p. 91.

⁵⁴ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁵⁵ 1908.09.27 SF Examiner.pdf

⁵⁶ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁵⁷ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

FRANK MUIR: ...We jumped out, holding on to the boat to which the line was fast. We were swept out and in a couple of times, but finally I got the line and with the others we ran up the beach...⁵⁸

NICHOLAS WAGNER: ...The struggling men secured a foothold on the ground and with almost superhuman effort dragged their line to a tree 200 feet on shore and made fast for the first part of erecting a breeches buoy... I asked Norman Hawkins if he would try it, but he declined after getting out a few feet. Martin Carstensen thought the chance was one for life and slid with he breeches buoy away from the ship landward. Half way over he was thrown under water, and, losing his hold, was saved from drowning only by the ready assistance of the boat's party on shore, who divided into the surf and dragged him in as he was being buried beneath wreckage. Although the buoy was gotten back to the ship, none was willing to risk leaving the deck amid so great danger.⁵⁹

Olaf Hanson, on the beach:

OLAF HANSON: About half way over the ship careened to one side throwing the chair and man sixty feet in the air and dropping him down again to the breakers which roared beneath his feet. As he went up with another roll of the ship he clambered out of the chair and sailed high into the air, landing in the foaming waves.⁶⁰

Frank Muir, on the beach:

FRANK MUIR: He turned three somersaults in the air before he struck the breakers. We hauled him from the water and put him behind a big rock for shelter.⁶¹

⁵⁸ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁵⁹ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁶⁰ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁶¹ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

133 men remained on board the Star of Bengal. Captain Nicholas Wagner:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: ...As she struck every man aboard was thrown from his feet. It was an awful shock.⁶²

Asian Passengers

Only the earliest newspaper quotes described how the Asian passengers on deck responded. And it may explain why the death toll was so high.

NICHOLAS WAGNER: We struck the rocks with a crash that knocked every man from his feet. The Chinese, who were packed like salmon on board, were wild in an instant. The shriek of despair that went up from them I'll never forget to the day I die. It rang high and shrill above the roar of the storm. Then there came the wild scramble over the decks, into the rigging, frantic efforts to unlash the boats... Every time a wave struck us I expected we would all go, and when the decks were clear of water for an instant I would look and see an empty spot where before a crowd was hanging to the rigging.⁶³

Confirmed by Torlef Anderson, decades later:

THORALF ANDERSON: With a sickening grind after the first hit the cannery workers got panicky and started climbing up the port and main mast rigging. I noticed there were fifteen or twenty men in the rigging when she hit bottom the second time... she broke off the main top mast and shook loose most of the men clinging on to the rigging. With a sickening thud, they dropped onto the steel deck far below, but still more attempted to climb up but no one of the crew or officers paid any attention to them.

Harry Lewald:

HARRY LEWALD: The waves were running twenty feet high and the poor fellows deserted there by the tugs were clinging as best they could to the rail or in the rigging. One Japanese who went up the

⁶² San_Francisco_Examiner__Star_of_Bengal.pdf

⁶³ 1908.09.23 The Seattle Star.pdf

mizzen mast was torn from the rigging by the plunging of the ship and fell headlong to the ship where his brains spilled on the deck. Others were in the rigging when it was shaken out of the ship and carried overboard.⁶⁴

Captain Wagner frequently described the Japanese he witnessed fall from the rigging:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: One Japanese had taken a position in the rigging a few minutes before the breaking up. The swift snapping of the swinging vessel as she pounded on the rocks broke his hold and onto the deck he fell a mass of broken bones and bruised flesh.⁶⁵

THORALF ANDERSON: Then what we had been expecting to happen any moment happened, a large wave lifted her up sky high and smashed her down down a rock. Someone said, "It won't be long now."

OLAF HANSON: We could see the ship rolling and plunging through the rain and sleet. Soon her foremast went and she broke in two at that point. Then part of the main mast went over and the mizzen mast was carried away. The pitching of the vessel was horrible and sickened one to watch it, the little black dots, representing human figures, showing at the distance huddled like so many sheep near on the poop far astern. My brother was among that number, and it was plain to be seen that all could not survive.⁶⁶

CAPTAIN WAGNER: Just before the end came I spoke to Frank Healy and Norman Hawkins. Both expressed no hope of escape, but promised to their utmost endeavor to get to shore... The Star of Bengal appeared to heave up her entrails in three sections when the final shock came. As I was thrown into the

⁶⁴ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁶⁵ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁶⁶ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

water I saw the midships beams of solid iron come out in a tangled mass. The force necessary to produce this is scarcely conceivable.⁶⁷

FRANK MUIR: After the seas had broken over her for some time the mizzenmast disappeared and four or five men were seen clinging to the port rail. Over she went and a black mass of heads with a high wall of salmon cases behind and another in front began to come ashore.⁶⁸

OLAF HANSON: Like you would sweep flies off a table the black dots were swept from her deck.⁶⁹

THORALF ANDERSON: By now the little bay is full of wrecked salmon cases and empty oil and gasoline drums.⁷⁰

DAVID WILSON: We were nearly crushed... for every wave that rolled in looked like a sheer fall of salmon cases. It was those cases that crushed the life out of many a man...⁷¹

OLAF HANSON: Soon the bodies began to come ashore in the wreckage.⁷²

FRANK MUIR: After we had hauled many of them ashore we were so exhausted that we could hardly drag them over the wreckage that strewed the beach like a wall. The great danger

⁶⁷ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁶⁸ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁶⁹ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁷⁰ Edward F. Anderson recollection

⁷¹ 1908.09.24 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-24_5.pdf

⁷² 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

was that the cases would dash their brains out before we could reach them.⁷³

DAVID WILSON: Four men were surging back and forth in the surf near by but I could do nothing. The men could not swim and they were in what appeared to be a wall of salmon cases. The boxes killed them.⁷⁴

FRANK MUIR: Peter Peterson shouted, 'Grab me, Harry, grab me,' but the wreckage prevented and by the time we got near him an awful breaker full of cases and drums, broke right on top of him and we saw him no more.⁷⁵

OLAF HANSON: After the first despair of seeing Andrew go to this death... I moved as one in a dream and when his body was washed to shore, I was unmoved. I know my brother died as a strong, brave man should, therefore, I am more willing to bear the loss.⁷⁶

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Picture to yourself 133 people all being thrown amid such a mass of wreckage in a boiling sea! When I bobbed up, I was surrounded by a howling lot of Chinese, some of whom grabbed at me, but another great sea sent me spinning shoreward, over and over and over, til I thought I would never come to the surface again. I had just turned my head when I saw a great big one coming filled with salmon boxes and Chinese. So I just clasped my arms over my head for protection and the whole thing seemed to land on my head and hold it under water. Something was bumping me, and it seemed as if I was standing on my head. Finally I could hold my breath no longer and open my mouth. Of course I got my lungs full. I

⁷³ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁷⁴ 1908.09.23 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-23_1.pdf

⁷⁵ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁷⁶ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

felt my legs drag over some rocks and my hands touch the shore. I tried to rise but could not.⁷⁷

FRANK MUIR: He was underneath a mass of salmon cases and nothing but his eyes and a small portion of the face could be seen.⁷⁸

DAVID WILSON: We rescued the captain himself from among them. He was pinned down by them and so far gone that he could not speak to us...⁷⁹

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Personally, I know nothing of what actually happened. I was practically unconscious when the beach was reached, and bear more than a dozen bruises and cuts about the head and shoulders as a result of being cast upon the rocks.⁸⁰

Captain Wagner survived — barely. Of 138 men aboard the Star of Bengal, only 27 made it to the beach.

DAVID WILSON: Our next thought was to start a fire for we were nearly all dead with cold and exposure. By good fortune, one man had matches in a tight tobacco box.⁸¹

FRANK MUIR: We found axes, and made kindling from dry boxes, which we saturated with kerosene and lighted a fire... The naked men were soon able to get clothes from the corpses washed ashore.⁸²

⁷⁷ 1908.11.14 Morning Call

⁷⁸ 1908.09.23 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-23_1.pdf

⁷⁹ 1908.09.24 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-24_5.pdf

⁸⁰ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

⁸¹ 1908.09.25 Daily Colonist.pdf

⁸² 1908.09.24 Alaska Sentinel.pdf

FRANK MUIR: We had food a-plenty, as the little beach was piled high with cases of salmon and other provisions that drifted ashore.⁸³

NICHOLAS WAGNER: The scenes on the beach were simply indescribable. We saw twenty-seven mangled corpses tangled in among the wreckage. Some of these were cursed and even disemboweled, and some were minus legs and arms.⁸⁴

FRANK MUIR: The next day we found nine white men and buried them. The bodies were strewn along the beach. It was a horrible sight.⁸⁵

CAPTAIN WAGNER: We had no shelter other than bits of canvas, found in the wreckage. This was used to cover the bodies of the 80 Asians whose burial was impossible because of the character of the ground, which prevented digging graves.⁸⁶

After two nights on the beach, the men were rescued Tuesday morning, almost exactly two days to the hour the Star of Bengal sunk.

NICHOLAS WAGNER: When we steamed away from the scene of the wreck forty-eight hours later, the frayed ends of three masts protruding from the water was the only remainder of the tragic end of a good ship and the marine burying place of 111 human beings.⁸⁷

⁸³ 1908.09.24 Alaska Sentinel.pdf

⁸⁴ 1908.09.24 Alaska Sentinel.pdf

⁸⁵ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁸⁶ 1908.09.28 Oregonian_1908-09-28_9.pdf

⁸⁷ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.__September_27_1908__p1.pdf

Accusations

Wrangell

Back in Wrangell, Bill Taylor remembered it like this:

BILL TAYLOR: Oh, the skipper on the ship, he was gonna' shoot all the crew on the tugs after they came in. They went up to the bar at the Wrangell Hotel and he was telling about it, and he blamed the skippers on the tugs.

Captain Wagner could barely speak, but he forced the words out. Once in Wrangell, he accosted Erwin Farrer:⁸⁸

ERWIN FARRER: He abused me in every way at the cable office in Wrangell, calling me all manner of names. At that time I made no answer, thinking him slightly deranged from the language he used. The next day I told him he was going far without knowing the circumstances our tugs were in, and he said he would see that I was sent to San Quentin.⁸⁹

ERWIN FARRER: ...the Superintendent was present when he was calling me and the captain of the other boat, those vile names, in the cable office in Wrangell.⁹⁰

Though Captain Wagner wheezed and strained to speak, there was no mistaking his seriousness. The Daily Alaskan described Nicholas Wagner as “a raving maniac.”⁹¹

In the first days after rescue, the survivors told dramatic, harrowing stories about the final moments of the Asian passengers. The September 23rd, Daily Alaska Dispatch:

The Chinese were wild with fright and nothing could be done with them as they would not pay attention to orders and would not go into the boats.⁹²

⁸⁸ Seattle Testimony.

⁸⁹ 1908.10.15 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-10-15_4.pdf

⁹⁰ Erwin Farrer, Seattle Testimony, p. 18 of PDF.

⁹¹ 1908.09.23 Daily_Alaskan_1908-09-23_2.pdf

⁹² 1908.09.23 Daily_Alaska_Dispatch_1908-09-23_[1].pdf

September 23rd, San Francisco Examiner:

A panic seized the Asiatics composing the crew and interfered with the work of rescue. The Chinese and Japanese sailor men lost all semblance of discipline on the reefs of the island and fought with one another in demoniacal fury to gain possession of the small boats.⁹³

September 23rd, Seattle Star:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: The white men who sank went to their deaths like men, fighting to the last, but the poor devils of Chinese, penned up, horror-stricken, some stark, raving mad, others waiting for the end with... stoicism.⁹⁴

September 24th, The San Francisco Examiner:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Mingled with the noises of the creaking and breaking ship were the wild and pitiful cries of the Chinese. My men tried to restore order and get the Chinese to assist in lowering the boats, but with the Chinese it was anything to save themselves. My men clubbed them and fought them to try to get some order on board so that we could lower what boats that remained, but it was impossible.⁹⁵

The Alaska Packer's Association arranged travel for the 27 survivors, splitting them up by race.

According to the Wrangell Sentinel, the seven Japanese survivors were on the Kayak's return voyage to Loring.⁹⁶

The two Chinese survivors were reportedly supposed to board the Kayak, as well, but refused. They joined the remaining survivors aboard the steamship Humboldt, bound for Seattle. There is no record of what happened to the sole Filipino survivor.

⁹³ 1908.09.23 SF_Examiner p1.pdf

⁹⁴ 1908.09.23 The Seattle Star.pdf

⁹⁵ 1908.09.24 San_Francisco_Examiner__Star_of_Bengal.pdf

⁹⁶ 1908.10.01 Alaska Sentinel clipping

The Star of Bengal's cook Patrick Loftus, a local Wrangell man, was injured in the wreck and stayed behind in Wrangell. He would not rejoin the group again.⁹⁷

Ketchikan Layover

The Humboldt left Wrangell, and steamed south. The ship made a brief layover in Ketchikan. Captain Wagner was visited by J.R. Heckman, superintendent of the APA cannery in Loring. Heckman recalled:

J.R. HECKMAN: I thought the man was a little bit off at the time, the way he talked about it. I had him give me a report of the condition of things after the anchors were down, and he kept jumping on the Captains all the time and I didn't want him to tell me anything about what the Captains did, not to tell me anything about anybody, but to tell me what kind of a time he had so I could give it to the papers here.⁹⁸

J.R. Heckman was one of the brightest stars of the Alaska Packers Association. He was only 42 years old, but had accomplished a great deal. He immigrated from Nova Scotia as a child. At 21, he began assisting in canneries around Alaska, working his way up. In 1900, he founded J.R. Heckman & Company in Ketchikan as a general merchandising store. In 1907, he received a patent on his invention, one that would push the salmon industry to new heights, and make Ketchikan the salmon capital of the world: the floating fish trip. Years later, he went on to become a member of the territorial legislature of Alaska.

Decades later, in his obituary, the Ketchikan Chronicle wrote:

Few men know him as Jim or even as Mr. Heckman... They know him rather as Bob or J.R. He has been characteristically friendly, characteristically aggressive, characteristically successful. Even today after nearly 55 years in Alaska, Senator Heckman still was prominently identified with northern progress.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

⁹⁸ Whitney-Newhall testimony.

⁹⁹ http://www.sitnews.us/Kiffer/Earthquake/041806_sf_earthquake.html

As the superintendent of the Loring cannery, J.R. Heckman personally knew the Kayak, its captain and crew. And he simply could not believe Nicholas Wagner's charges of cowardice.

What Heckman may not have revealed to Nicholas Wagner, was that the Kayak beat the Humboldt south, arriving at Loring the night before.¹⁰⁰ By the time Heckman saw Wagner, he had already heard the story firsthand from Patrick Hamilton and the members of the Kayak crew. Heckman shrewdly asked for the first written statement from Nicholas Wagner, and it contains no mention of cowardice or accusations of any kind.

Wagner's statement does reference the treatment of the Asian cannery workers. Wagner said they were all fitted with lifejackets. First Mate Victor Johansen told the newspaper:

VICTOR JOHANSEN: The Chinese men were not batted down, but life preservers were placed on each one.¹⁰¹

This may be the earliest written acknowledgment of a major legend about the Star of Bengal wreck: were the Asian cannery workers locked below deck as the ship sunk? The death toll among the Asian workers is simply staggering. It is a question that would reappear again and again.

J.R. Heckman arranged transportation home for the Japanese survivors of the Star of Bengal in true Alaska Packers Association fashion: by putting the survivors inside the hold of the Star of England on its return voyage south. Just as they had four weeks before, these Japanese men crowded beneath the weather deck of an APA ship, and prepared for the long ride home. Once again, the Kayak towed them out to sea. Once again, they encountered a terrible storm. The Tacoma News Tribune:

Rendered helpless by the fright of her Chinese seamen, the Star of England, a salmon packer, rolled for 24 hours in the trough of the sea during a gale that ripped her sails from the masts several days out of Loring, Alaska. So great was the fright among the Chinese that one of them died from fear.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ September 26, 1908 Ketchikan Miner

¹⁰¹ 1908.09.26 Ketchikan Miner.pdf

¹⁰² 1908.10.21 News Tribune.pdf

According to other reports, the dead man's remains were thrown overboard.¹⁰³ This was a common practice in the APA, even if it went against the wishes of the dead person. Ships arriving at port with a dead passenger might be kept quarantined for days, so throwing the body overboard simply saved time.

Seattle

Meanwhile, Captain Wagner, the surviving crew members, and the two Chinese men who refused to board the Kayak steamed their way down the coast to Seattle. When they arrived at the dock, the press was there to capture it all.

Captain Nicholas Wagner, who commanded the lost ship, was in charge of this little remnant of survivors, and when he stepped ashore at Pier B almost his first words were...

REPORTER: Captain, captain! Is Fortmann going to prosecute?

NICHOLAS WAGNER: I do not know, but if he doesn't, I will.¹⁰⁴

When Henry Fortmann was first asked about the charges of cowardice, he told the reporter he simply could not believe it. But days later, Fortmann flipped. He backed Nicholas Wagner, and demanded charges for Erwin Farrer and Patrick Hamilton.¹⁰⁵ An editorial in Wrangell's Alaska Sentinel swung back on Henry Fortmann.

[Henry Fortmann] had better hide somewhere, lest the hand of justice may strike where it rightfully should. A pot should never call a kettle black.¹⁰⁶

Only one newspaper, the Seattle Times, interviewed the Chinese survivors of the Star of Bengal. It wrote:

Dong Wah and Dong Hing, are brothers, well known in this city, being related to members of the firm of Quong Tuck on Washington Street.¹⁰⁷

In the only quotation from an Asian survivor of the wreck, Dong Wah said:

¹⁰³ 1908.10.21 San_Francisco_Call_Bulletin.pdf

¹⁰⁴ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_1.pdf

¹⁰⁵ 1908.09.25 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-25_1.pdf

¹⁰⁶ 1908.10.01 Alaska_Sentinel.pdf

¹⁰⁷ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

DONG WAH: One minute all men crowd together. Two minutes, maybe five minutes, no can see. All gone.¹⁰⁸

He reportedly illustrated his words with a sweep of the hand.

The Seattle papers elevated the Star of Bengal to front-page news, leading with the charges of cowardice. The Seattle Post Intelligencer gave a descriptive story:

"The scars of the survivors who reached Seattle yesterday and their weakened condition bear mute witness of all the horrifying details of exposure, injury, and nerve-wracking encounter with the dangers of the sea."¹⁰⁹

...The casualty was not due to any ordinary dangers of the coast, but to the incapacity of the masters of the tugboats which were towing the vessel, followed by an exhibition of cowardice on their part, the most disgraceful which has ever been recorded of American seamen. There is no sound reason why the vessel should have been towed so close to Coronation Island... This is a shocking story, and if it is substantiated before the investigating officers, the loss of their licenses would seem an inadequate penalty for the delinquent tugboat masters.¹¹⁰

In Seattle, the descriptions of the Asian passengers became noticeably softer. Nicholas Wagner to the Seattle Post Intelligencer:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Among our passengers were seventy-four Chinese. Huddled together their appearance was pitiable. Not one was willing to make the least effort at attempting his own rescue, and when lifebelts were ordered donned, but few were able to put them on and tie the strap lashings. Throughout all the distress there was not a jarring word against discipline, and particularly attentive to orders were the [Asian men]. The overpowering

¹⁰⁸ 1908.09.27 Seattle_Daily_Times_1908-09-27_8-2.pdf

¹⁰⁹ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p1.pdf

¹¹⁰ 1908.09.29 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-09-29_2.pdf

fear of the Chinese accounts for the fact, of seventy-four aboard but two were saved.¹¹¹

Olaf Hansen, on the same day:

OLAF HANSEN: The Chinese were objects of pity in their helplessness. Many were drowned outright; others were crippled or killed in the falling wreckage and floating piles of salmon cases.¹¹²

The white survivors boarded a train south. Gus Johnson recalled Portland:

GUSTAV JOHNSON: We all got one dollar each from the Captain, that had to last all day as we could not leave Portland, Oregon for San Francisco before 10:00PM.¹¹³

In Portland, Captain Wagner shared a detail with The Oregonian newspaper:

Captain Wagner, aside from his grief at the loss of his men and ship, is also bemoaning the loss of a violin which was said to be 250 years old. It had been his constant companion for years during his career and on the sea, and its loss, though all his personal possessions were also lost, is most keenly felt.¹¹⁴

Size of the Storm

It turned out, the Star of Bengal wasn't the only ship affected by the enormous storm of September 20th. Newspapers reported that ships across Alaska fled from the incredible gale.

The steam freighter Seward was leaving Cordova, but pulled into Cape Hinchinbrook, where the Seward dragged anchor, and had to relocate to Montague Island.

The gunboat Yorktown anchored off Cape St. Elias for 36 hours and lost a lifeboat as the ship was washed from stem to stern.

¹¹¹ 1908.09.27 News_Article__Seattle_Post-Intelligencer_published_as_The_Seattle_post-intelligencer.___September_27_1908__p2.pdf

¹¹² 1908.09.27 SF Examiner.pdf

¹¹³ Gustaf Johnson letter, Harold Huycke Collection.

¹¹⁴ 1908.09.28 Oregonian_1908-09-28_9.pdf

To the east, the passenger liner Princess Beatrice was carrying 100 passengers and 8,000 cases of salmon. The Princess Beatrice felt the incredible storm, and raced for safe harbor inside the Gastineau Channel at Juneau. The ship reported the storm blew all night long.¹¹⁵

Out in the center of the Gulf of Alaska, miles away from the coast, the Star of France sailing bark was making the voyage from Cook Inlet back to San Francisco when the storm struck. The San Francisco Examiner wrote:

As a result of the terrible storm the cannery hands and members of the crew were compelled to subsist on part rations during the remainder of the trip from the North... Many sails were whipped out of the gaskets, scores of waves swept the ship from end to end, and for days it was necessary to keep the fifty or sixty Chinese and Japanese employees locked in their quarters below deck to prevent them from becoming panic-stricken and jumping overboard. The cabin and galley were continually flooded, and considerable damage was done on deck.¹¹⁶

Despite the size of the storm, the only ship to wreck was the Star of Bengal.

San Francisco

Finally, on September 30, the train pulled into San Francisco. They were home.

While they eagerly fed stories to newspapers down the west coast, they were noticeably tight-lipped in San Francisco.¹¹⁷ They were saving it, for two days later, they appeared before Inspectors Bulger and Bolles, of Boilers and Hulls, of the Steamship Inspection Agency.

NICHOLAS WAGNER: We hereby charge Patrick Hamilton, of the steamer Kayak... and Erwin Farrer, of the steamer Hattie Gage... with cowardice and neglect.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ 1908.09.26 Daily Colonist

¹¹⁶ 1908.10.11_SF_Examiner Star of France.pdf

¹¹⁷ 1908.09.30 Daily_Alaska_Dispatch_1908-09-30_[1].pdf

¹¹⁸ 1908.10.07 SF Call

NICHOLAS WAGNER: There were two hours or more when the tugs could have stood by safely under steam and saved every man on the Star of Bengal by breeches buoy or life lines...¹¹⁹

The other survivors testified, including Mate Victor Johansen, Torlef Anderson, Alf Olsen, Gus Johnson, Andrew Olsen, Olaf Hansen, Frank Muir, George Johnson, Lars Kaup, Martin Carstensen, David Wilson, Fred Matson, Hans Frederickson and Harry Lewald.¹²⁰ According to the San Francisco Examiner:

All agree there were no breakers, only heavy swells, to the leeward of the bark during the time her anchors held, and that the tugs could have stood by without danger.¹²¹

As for the treatment of the Asian passengers aboard the ship, the San Francisco Call was positively effusive:

...That at all times not only the officers and crew, but the Chinese and Japanese on board behaved with remarkable courage, there being no excitement or confusion up until the last minute.¹²²

In his report to the APA, Nicholas Wagner wrote:

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Ordered all hands into life preservers and had men adjust same on Chinese, absolutely no confusion...

The survivors' story about the Asian passengers' final moments evolved. In Wrangell, the survivors described violence and panic. In Seattle, they described pity. In San Francisco, they hardly spoke about Asian passengers, if only to offer praise. The subsequent investigation would gloss over the condition of the Asian passengers at the end entirely.

The Alaska Packers' Association attempted to derail the survivors' accusations, by sending J.F. Moser, general superintendent of the APA, to the hearings. According to the San Francisco Chronicle:

J.F. Moser... made an effort... yesterday... to have introduced two excerpts of letters from J.R. Heckman... After a desultory

¹¹⁹ 1908.10.03 Star_of_Bengal_story.pdf

¹²⁰ 1908.10.03 SF_Examiner.pdf

¹²¹ 1908.10.03 SF_Examiner.pdf

¹²² 1908.10.03 SF_Call.pdf

discussion in which Inspector Bulger thought the matter should be introduced and Inspector Bolles thought it should not, the excerpts were returned to Moser.¹²³

If Bulger and Bolles had allowed J.R. Heckman's letters, they would have heard information that directly contradicted what the survivors were saying before them. On September 24, J.R. Heckman wrote:

J.R. Heckman: The Kayak is at Loring, and her captain says there are two sides to the story, and that he can clear himself before the investigation. Will send one report from him on next mail. He claims he could do nothing.¹²⁴

Two days later, he wrote:

J.R. Heckman: Regarding the wreck of the Star of Bengal, I believe upon investigation it will be found that the officers of the Kayak are in no way to blame for the loss of life. Mr. Wilkie, who is master of our ship, was a mate on the Kayak at the time, and he is a seaman and a level-headed man of ability, and he says it was impossible for them to do anything. Captain Farrer of the tug Hattie Gage had charge of the tow; this was understood. Rumor has it that the two captains were working against each other, but this is not true.¹²⁵

Both letters wound up in newspapers, but not in the official record.

An unexpected moment broke the serious hearings. The San Francisco Chronicle:

[Olaf] Hansen caused a ripple of laughter upon the conclusion of his story by saying he did not care to affix his signature to the shorthand notes of his testimony.¹²⁶

¹²³ 1908.10.04 SF Chronicle

¹²⁴ 1908.10.13 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-10-13_1 no coroners jury

¹²⁵ 1908.10.13 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-10-13_1 no coroners jury

¹²⁶ 1908.10.04 SF_Chronicle_Wagner_trial.pdf

Erwin Farrer and Patrick Hamilton faced up to \$10,000 in fines, up to 10 years of hard labor, or both.¹²⁷ They could be convicted of felony manslaughter.¹²⁸

A key moment from the hearing stood out:

BULGER: If you swear to your charges, then the two captains you name will be tried for their licenses.

NICHOLAS WAGNER: Aye, and for their lives, too!¹²⁹

¹²⁷ 1908.10.03 Star_of_Bengal_story.pdf

¹²⁸ 1908.10.03 Daily_Record-Miner_1908-10-03_1.pdf

¹²⁹ 1908.10.03 SF_Examiner.pdf

Next Time

Next time, on the Rise and Fall of the Star of Bengal: The ship may have sunk, but accusation fly. When the investigation returns to Alaska, a shocking, new story comes to light. All that, next time on Rise and Fall of the Star of Bengal.

Credits

Rise and Fall of the Star of Bengal is a Wrangell History Unlocked production.

Music from today's episode:

- Rite of Spring from archive.org
- Pictures at an Exhibition and Claire de Lune performed by Simone Renzi from Museopen
- Remaining songs from the Wikipedia Commons:
 - Symphony no. 9 in e minor 'from the new world'
 - Arabian Dances by Ballet Francaise Symphony Orchestra
 - Reflections of the Moon on Erquan performed by Zhang Peijian
 - Night on Bald Mountain performed by the Skidmore College Orchestra

Sound effects from epidemicsound.com.

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Thanks to the eternal spirit of William Taylor. And thanks to Alice Rooney for capturing his voice, and sharing so much more.

You can learn more about the Star of Bengal at wrangellhistoryunlocked.com/star. You can read a transcript of today's episode, along with photos, maps, a timeline, and more. Browse around and check out some of our other features from Wrangell's rich past.

Think you have a piece of the story, that you'd like to share? I'd love to hear it. There are many mysteries about the Star of Bengal just waiting to be solved. You can email us at wrangellpod@gmail.com.

Tune in next week for our fourth episode, Accusations.

I'm your host, Ronan Rooney. Thanks for listening.