

The first funnel fall

Author : Philippe Chevalier
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Article translated from French with DeepL.

History

The fall of the first funnel is a fact since 1912. However, no film, until James Cameron's (*Titanic*, 1997), shows this event. In a dramatic scene, Roy Baker's film (*A Night to Remember*, 1958) shows the fourth funnel collapsing as the ship plunges into the depths. For aesthetic purposes, Jerry Jameson's film (*Raise the Titanic*, 1980), which imagines the refloating of the wreck, shows that it is the second funnel that broke during the sinking.

Reconstitution vs. testimonies

Typically, in reconstructions of the sinking, the forward funnel is shown as falling to port. Indeed, as the *Titanic* was listing heavily to port, while the last boats were launched, it becomes logical to think that the funnel fell on that side.

However, there are several indications that the funnel fall occurred on the starboard side.

In his autobiography, *Titanic and Other Ship*, Second Officer Lightoller reports that the funnel fell to starboard:

The terrific strain of bringing the after end of that huge hull clear out of the water, caused the expansion joint abaft No. 1 funnel to open up. (These expansion joints were found necessary in big ships to allow the ship to "work" in a seaway.) The fact that the two wire stays to this funnel, on the after part led over and abaft the expansion joint, threw on them an extraordinary strain, eventually carrying away the port wire guy, to be followed almost immediately by the starboard one. Instantly the port one parted, the funnel started to fall, but the fact that the starboard one held a moment or two longer, gave this huge structure a pull over to that side of the ship, causing it to fall, with its scores of tons, right amongst the struggling mass of humanity already in the water. It struck the water between the Engleheart and the ship, actually missing me by inches. [...] One effect of the funnel crashing down on the sea, was to pick up the Engleheart in the wash so created, and fling it well clear of the sinking ship.

Lightoller's account indicates that initially stowed to port at the foot of the first funnel, raft B somehow began to drift to starboard, passing the first funnel.

It is believed that the second funnel fell to starboard. This information was provided by Jack Thayer in his book *The Sinking of the S. S. Titanic*¹. This one was on the starboard side when she jumped into the water:

The water was now reaching the base of the first chimney. The mass of people was flowing backwards, further and further towards the stern. The rumbling and roaring continued with an increasingly distinct din of boilers and machinery being torn from their bases and thrown against the sides. Suddenly, the entire structure of the ship, from bow to mid-ship, seemed to split in two and explode, or twist as it rose. The second chimney, so large in diameter that two cars could have driven through it, rose up in a cloud of sparks. I thought it was going to crash into me. It fell on the water, missing me by six or nine meters. The eddies caused by its fall dragged me down, far, farther. I struggled as best I could, almost at the end of my strength. I surfaced with my arms over my head to protect myself from anything that might hurt me. My fingers felt something soft and firm, a rounded shape. I looked up and saw that they had encountered a cork lining that was no different from the one on the bottom of folding boats. This one was floating on the water, turned upside down.

Thayer's account confirms that somehow raft B ended up on the starboard side of the *Titanic*. The drift was such that it ended up almost at the level of the second funnel.

Tilt of the ship to starboard

The fall of the second funnel to starboard goes against the version tilting the ship to port.

The foremast, on the other hand, fell backwards to port, as if it had encountered an opposing force, which seems to be explained by the fact that when the mast bent (assuming the mast bent during the descent into the depths), the forward part was leaning by the bow, to starboard. The opposite force that bent the mast made it lean backwards, to port.

In the documentary *Titanic : Anatomie d'un Naufrage* (directed by Sylvain Pascaud), David Livingstone explains that the front part of the wreck has touched the bottom of the sea by being slightly tilted to starboard, taking as evidence the fact that the mound of mud at the level of the anchors is higher on the starboard side than on the port side. We can see this detail on the mosaics made in 2010.

It is conceivable that for some reason (perhaps the flooding of a compartment), the famous port list was stopped. In his book *The Truth About the Titanic*, Colonel Gracie transcribes an excerpt from a letter written by Jack Thayer to Judge Charles L. Long, of Springfield, Massachusetts, the father of Milton Long whom he met on the evening of April 14:

There was such a big list to port that it seemed as if the ship would turn on her side. About this time the people began jumping from the stern. I thought of jumping myself, but was afraid of being stunned on hitting the water. Three times I made up my mind to jump out and slide down the davit reposes and try to swim to the boats that were lying off from the ship, but each time Long got hold of me and told me to wait a while. I got a sight on a rope between the davits and a star and noticed that the ship was gradually sinking. About this time she straightened up on an even keel again, and started to go down fairly fast at an angle of about thirty degrees.

We have the hypothesis that the foremast was bent backwards and to port when it encountered an opposing force created by the water, because the forward part had a tilt to starboard during the descent into the depths.

We have the fact that the second funnel fell on starboard.

1 The text is reproduced here from a French translation.

We have Jack Thayer's testimony that the tilt to port has stopped. Moreover, with this testimony, nothing forces the first funnel to fall to port.

Evidence

The fall of the first funnel on the port side meets difficulties that we take into account the movements of the raft B. For example, Lightoller explains that the raft was thrown away from the *Titanic* by the wave caused by the funnel hitting the water.

One effect of the funnel crashing down on the sea, was to pick up the Engleheart in the wash so created, and fling it well clear of the sinking ship.

We also know from Jack Thayer that raft B ended up on the starboard side at about the level of the second funnel. It is doubtful that if the first funnel fell on the port side, it would have caused a wave that propelled the raft so far back to starboard. On the other hand, this possibility becomes possible if the first funnel fell on the starboard side before.



Figure 1: This reconstruction illustrates the problem of raft B being propelled aft and to starboard, if the first funnel fell to port. In contrast, the position of raft B aft and to starboard, close to Jack Thayer, is explained if the first funnel fell on the port side forward.

Some of the details in this photograph make me think that the funnel fell to starboard. We see elements of the funnel folded up, as if they were pointing backwards and to port (1).

First of all, we can argue that the grates are twisted (2), as if this was the result of the fall of the funnel. But, in this case, how can we explain that the port side of the big fan (3) is still standing? Its conservation was better in 1986, as we can see in the documentary *Secrets of the Titanic* (Robert Ballard and Graham Hurley, 1986).

The folded elements (1), which suggest a pinch, seem to find an explanation in the fact that the funnel collapsed on its base.

As the funnel collapsed on its base, this bent the steel inward

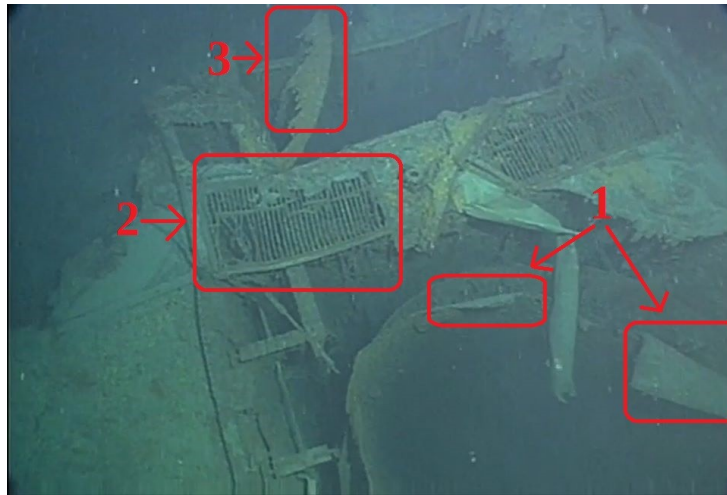


Figure 2: The location of the first funnel.
 Storied Treasures, Titanic Archive Project and NOAA. Thanks to
 Spencer Littrel.

An experiment accessible to everyone (but which has, in my opinion, no scientific value): fold a cardboard tube. You will see that at the fold, the cardboard will follow the direction of the fold. The back part, the one opposite to the direction of the fold, will follow the tube. The front part, the one in the direction of the fold, will be folded back. But, I repeat, I doubt the scientific value of such a test. At the fold, the tube takes an oval shape perpendicular to the fold. I do not know if such a detail can be verified on the wreck.

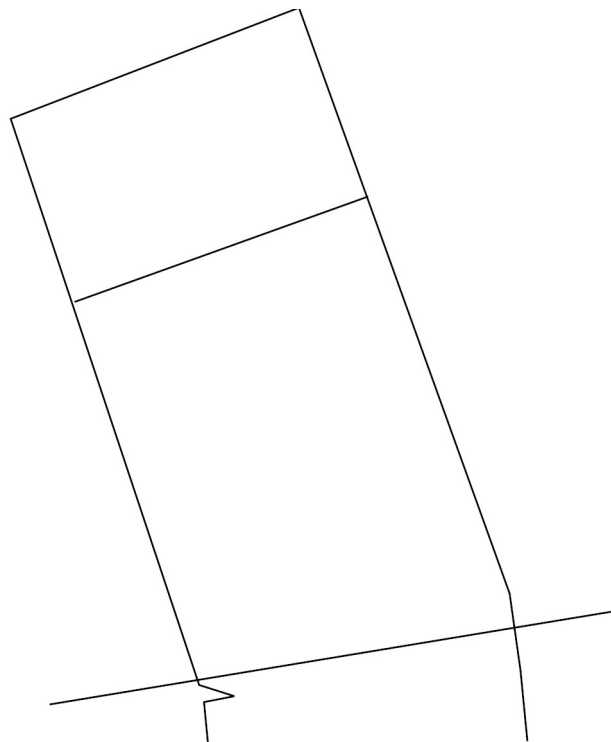


Figure 3: Diagram showing that at the fold, a pinch is made in the direction of the fall, as in the photo.

The fall of the first funnel on starboard is a seriously conceivable hypothesis which is in adequacy with various elements of the wreck, but especially with the testimony of the officer Lightoller.

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