

RELATING TO THE SINKING OF THE U. S. S. "NORMAN"

JUNE 2, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. GRAHAM, from the Committee on the Judiciary, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 2273]

The Committee on the Judiciary, to whom was referred the bill S. 2273, after consideration report the same favorably with the recommendation that the bill do pass.

The purpose of S. 2273 is to have conferred jurisdiction upon the Federal District Court of the Western Division of the Western District of Tennessee to hear and determine claims arising from the sinking of the vessel known as the *Norman*, which was owned and operated by the Mississippi River Commission.

The following facts gave rise to the proposed legislation, which was introduced into the Senate by the Senator from Tennessee: On May 8, 1925, the U. S. S. *Norman*, with 65 passengers, including the crew, capsized 16 miles below Memphis, Tenn., with a loss of 23 lives. The majority of those who lost their lives were delegates to a convention of Mid-South Engineers held in Memphis. Some of the most prominent members of the engineering profession were among those lost.

Two steamers, the *Norman* and *Choctaw*, were utilized to carry the party to see some revetment work done by the Army engineers. A large mat to protect the levee was being laid near Pinckney, Ark. After an hour at the revetment place, the *Choctaw* pulled out first. The *Norman* had previously 50 persons, including the crew, but on the return trip a number transferred from the *Choctaw* to the *Norman* so that the total was 65. After proceeding a considerable distance the *Norman* listed, but righted herself, but 25 minutes later she listed again and completely turned over; 65 persons were thrown into the river, fighting against the terrific current; most of them had secured life preservers.

Thirty-two of the persons owe their lives to a negro named Tom Lee, who was operating a motor boat for a contracting company. He witnessed the disaster and with a cool head, in the face of grave danger, proved himself a hero. The *Norman* sank in one of the worst places on the river. It is 55 feet deep and 300 yards from a caving bank.

An investigation of this sinking was made by the Engineer Corps of the Army, and it was discovered that the *Norman* was too heavily loaded with fuel oil, had too much water in the hold, and had something the matter with her rudder.

This Senate bill was taken up in the Senate on May 13 by unanimous consent and passed.

In this particular case the reason for asking for the jurisdiction to be conferred on the Federal district court of the western district of Tennessee was because the sinking of the U. S. S. *Norman* was in this district and the great majority of the members of the families of the drowned live in or near the district; also do nearly all the witnesses. To place the jurisdiction in the Court of Claims in Washington would bring about not only a great expense but inconvenience to the claimants.

It is urged that this legislation should have the immediate attention of the House and be passed favorably as soon as possible.

