

Titanic Sacrifices

If I could witness any day in the past, I would choose *Titanic's* sinking. It's a story that has always fascinated me because of its mysteriousness and sadness. But there's also another reason I appreciate it— it's the story of selfless individuals who died so others on *Titanic* could survive the tragedy.

Harland and Wolff, a shipbuilding company, began *Titanic's* construction in 1908. She was owned by a renowned shipping business called White Star Line, and was built in Belfast, Northern Ireland. *Titanic's* construction took three years, and her total cost was \$7.5 million.

Titanic began her maiden voyage in Southampton, England on April 10, 1912. She had left Belfast on April 2. *Titanic* stopped in Cherbourg, France and Queenstown, Ireland. By the time she headed to New York, there were 2,223 people on board, including Joseph Bruce Ismay, the head of White Star Line, and Thomas Andrews, Harland and Wolff's managing director. Few guessed that *Titanic's* first voyage would also be her last.

On April 14, at almost midnight, the lookout realized that *Titanic* was sailing toward an iceberg. He quickly alerted the officers on the bridge, who tried to steer away. *Titanic* seemed to just miss the iceberg; however, its submerged portion critically damaged her hull. Andrews found that the iceberg had torn several gashes in it, and five watertight compartments had been flooded. Unfortunately, *Titanic* couldn't have more than four compartments flooded to stay afloat. Andrews informed Ismay and Captain Smith that in several hours, she would sink to the bottom of the Atlantic.

Captain Smith ordered his crew to prepare the lifeboats. Stewards knocked on cabins and asked passengers to don lifejackets and report to deck. While the stewards were courteous and helpful to first- and second-class travelers, the third-class passengers were not allowed on the lifeboats until the last minute.

Women and children were placed in lifeboats first. *Titanic* only had sixteen wooden lifeboats and four collapsible lifeboats, which altogether could hold 1,178 people. Many were launched half full

because the officers feared that if they were filled, they might flip over. The 'women and children first' rule was strictly enforced. Although some men managed to jump into a lifeboat, many of them perished in the sinking.

The wireless operator desperately tried to call for help. *Californian* was only ten miles away, but her wireless transmitter was turned off. The crew tried firing distress rockets. Sailors on *Californian* saw them, but didn't understand what they meant. *Carpathia*, which was four hours away, was the nearest ship that heard *Titanic's* calls. Help was not coming anytime soon.

Wally Hartley, a bandmaster and violinist, played music on the deck with his fellow musicians to calm passengers. Father Thomas Byles was a Catholic priest who refused a place on a lifeboat. Instead, he prayed with those who remained on *Titanic*. When American tycoon Benjamin Guggenheim realized *Titanic* was sinking, he dressed in his finest clothes, then helped women and children into lifeboats. Guggenheim declared he was prepared to go down like a gentleman. *Titanic's* engineers were released some time before she sank; but they courageously stayed at their posts, keeping the ship's lights operating so people could find their way to the lifeboats. These heroic men all went down with the ship.

At 2:20 a.m., on April 15, *Titanic* sank. Those who hadn't gotten into a lifeboat fell into the icy water. Some lifeboat officers tried to help them, but most of them didn't want their lifeboat to tip over while trying to rescue those in the water. After nearly an hour, the sounds of struggling people ceased. The 706 survivors waited for rescue. At 3:30 a.m., they spotted rockets from a ship. *Carpathia* had finally come. The survivors signaled to her, and five hours later, they were all safely on board. Then they told *Carpathia's* captain the shocking news: the unsinkable *Titanic* had sunk and had dragged hundreds with her.

Hartley, Father Byles, Guggenheim and the engineers could have tried to escape a watery grave, but they were more concerned about the other passengers. Despite its grievous ending, *Titanic's* story has a valuable moral in it: think of others first.

Bibliography

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