Titanic

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There was reputation at stake. What lay 10 minutes ahead was

everlasting shame. At 11:40 p.m., lookout Frederick Fleet in the crow's nest saw an iceberg in the calm sea directly ahead and sent a warning below. Thirty-seven seconds later, the submerged edge of a massive iceberg bashed against the steel-plate skin of the Titanic's starboard (right) side, near the bow. Shards of ice punched through portholes. More ice plopped onto the thirdclass recreation deck, where steerage passengers tossed pieces about in frolic.

A few decks below, 28-degree seawater poured into forward holds. Alarmed engineers shut electric-operated doors to seal the ship's 16 watertight compartments — a ballyhooed safety fea-ture and a big part of the myth of unsinkability. But the impact allowed water into six of the compartments, two too many to keep the ship afloat.

The Titanic was doomed. Capt. Smith knew the math within a few cold-sweat minutes.

He ordered the lifeboats uncovered at 12:05 a.m. and, a few minutes later, instructed Phillips to begin tapping distress calls. But his clicks went unheard on the Californian, then only 10 miles away. The Carpathia, an eastbound Cunard liner 58 miles away, heeded Phillips' plea and steamed hard to the rescue.

The Titanic fired numerous rockets. Lookouts on the Californian, still stopped by ice, never figured out what they were for.

On the Titanic, confused crew members began rousting passengers. The evacuation was disorganized, largely because White Star hadn't bothered much with practice. The gentlemanly call was for women and children first, specifically rich ones, but some first-class men got onto the lifeboats. Many of the boats were lowered with plenty of empty seats.

Steerage passengers, some of them unable to speak English, were kept below or largely left to fend for themselves as chaos took over. Second-class passengers had middling luck.

There were examples of great courage from society's finest. John Jacob Astor, one of America's richest men, escorted his pregnant wife to a boat and serenely walked away. Ida Straus refused to leave her husband, Isidor, co-owner of Macy's de-partment stores. "Where you go, l go," she said. Both died.

Capt. Smith also stayed with his ship. So did the eight-member band, which played the Anglican hymn, "Autumn." Some American survivors remembered



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The Titanic sank on April 15, 1912, after hitting an iceberg the night before. German artist Willy Stoewer visualized the sinking of the Titanic, as survivors struggled to get away.

vivors. Fear of being swamped by frantic swimmers kept the rest away. Mrs. J.J. Brown of Denver tried loudly to shame the seamen commanding No. 6 to row back, but they were unmoved. She is

known to history as "Unsinkable Molly.

When Carpathia arrived, its crew brought up the shivering and dumbstruck survivors and treated them with blankets,

brandy and coffee. Ismay, asking to be left alone, stayed in his room and was soothed by

opiates. Carpathia, delayed by fog, finally reached New York April 18. More than 30,000 people awaited her at Pier 54.

Members of Congress and the newspapers pounced on Ismay from the moment he landed. Senators convened a hearing at the

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York and quickly learned the essentials of the missteps that led to disaster. To America, Ismay was the devil.

Defensively, Ismay said: "I tell you that if I thought that in the slightest way I had done wrong, I would never have a happy moment." Indications are he never did.

There were the obvious sensible reforms, including requirements for sufficient lifeboats and 24-hour staffing in radio rooms. An International Ice Patrol was created

The Germans soon launched an even larger ship, the 909-foot Imperator, but it was top-heavy and swayed too much for comfort. Then came World War I and German submarines, which torpedoed both the Lusitania and the Carpathia. Passenger liners resumed their comfortable trade after that war and, for a time, after World War II. But reliable jet engines finally ended the trans-Atlantic liner business.

In 1985, deep-sea searchers working with the National Geographic Society found the wreck of the Titanic in two large sections 2.5 miles below the surface. There was no 300-foot gash on the starboard hull, just a series of rips. Bad riveting at the Belfast yard may have been a big factor. The night Titanic sank, 9-

month-old Millvina Dean had been lowered in a mail sack to a lifeboat. Her father, Bertram, was lost. They were steerage passengers.

Millvina Dean died May 31, 2009, at age 97 in Southampton, England, the Titanic's home port. She was the last survivor.



it as "Nearer, My God, to Thee.' Both are soft, moving melodies.

Then there was the conduct of J. Bruce Ismay, president of White Star, who stomped around in panic, barking foolish orders. He jumped onto the third-last lifeboat just before it was lowered at 1:40 a.m. Ismay was hounded for cowardice to his lonely death in 1937.

Phillips had been tapping "C-Q-D," the standard distress code. At 12:45 a.m., he made famous a newly published alternative, "S-O-S." Phillips and his mates thought it couldn't hurt to try. They kept it up until ordered away shortly before the Titanic broke in two and sank at 2:20 a.m.

The cost was at least 1,517 passengers and crew members lost. Only 705 survived the night in lifeboats, many of them drifting unfilled as the wails of the freezing unfortunates bobbing in life jackets quieted to silence.

The Carpathia arrived at 4 a.m. The Californian's bridge didn't get the word until 5:40 a.m., when wireless operator Evans was roused to investigate the odd goings-on near the horizon.

Even today, the numbers for the disaster are inexact. Most sources list 1,517 deaths, although totals for passengers and crew vary. The starker results are these: More than half of the 325 first-class passengers survived, one-third of the men and almost all of the women. Only one-fourth of 710 steerage passengers lived, including half of the women and one-third of the children. One-fifth of the crew of 899 survived. So did the Strauses' maid. Ismay's valet did not.

Phillips, the radio operator, was lost. (His assistant, Harold Bride, survived to tell his story a few days later to angry U.S. senators gathered in New York.)

Many of the victims jumped or were hurled into the freezing water during the ship's final plunge, after its stern rose high above the water. All sorts of things — from teacups to boilers — tumbled inside for a jarring death racket.

Of all the agonies, perhaps the most haunting is that only one of the lifeboats was rowed back to the scene to fish out more sur-



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