

Chapter V

SHE HAD BEAUTIFUL LIGHTS

Soon after *Titanic* collided with the iceberg at 11:40pm, Fourth Officer Joseph Boxhall went out onto the starboard bridge wing along with Captain Smith and First Officer Murdoch to look at the iceberg that *Titanic* had struck. The iceberg was then off *Titanic*'s starboard quarter as the vessel was slowing down while under hard-a-port helm (right full rudder). Since Boxhall had recently come out from the officer's quarters, his eyes were not night adapted, and he was not too sure about seeing the iceberg at all.

“I was not very sure of seeing it. It seemed to me to be just a small black mass not rising very high out of the water, just a little on the starboard quarter... I left the bridge then... I went right down below, in the lowest steerage, as far as I could possibly get without going into the cargo portion of the ship, and inspected all the decks as I came up, in the vicinity of where I thought she had struck... I found no damage. I found no indications to show that the ship had damaged herself... Then I went on the bridge and reported to the captain that I could not see any damage.”

Just after Boxhall left the bridge to go down and look for damage, Captain Smith ordered standby Quartermaster Alfred Olliver to go and find the carpenter and instruct him to “take the draft of the water.”¹ Olliver found the carpenter in the forward part of the working alley down on E deck already engaged in that activity, and so Olliver returned to the bridge to report back. Upon arriving back on the bridge, Olliver was handed a written note from Captain Smith to take down to the engine room and hand to Chief Engineer Joseph Bell. As Olliver was making his way toward the engine room along the working alley down on E deck he noticed firemen and trimmers coming up from the stokehold escapes out into the alleyway. The time was about 10 to 15 minutes after the ship struck ice.²

When the ship struck the iceberg, the ship's off-duty officers were all in their cabins in the officer's quarters trying to get some sleep. As we have seen before, Second Officer Charles Lightoller was lying down in his bunk when he felt the collision. After the engines came to a stop, he got up and went on deck for a quick look around. Finding nothing out of the ordinary except that the ship was slowing down, Lightoller went back to his room expecting that he would be called if he was needed.

Third Officer Herbert Pitman, who was awakened by a sound that seemed like “the chain running out over the windlass,” got up a few minutes after and also took a quick look around out on deck and soon went back to his room. On his way back he met Lightoller, and they both agreed that the ship had “evidently” struck something. Pitman then turned in again for about 5 minutes but soon decided that it was no use trying to sleep anymore. He then got up and lit his pipe, and after a few minutes, started to dress.³

Chief Officer Wilde apparently awoke and came out on deck soon after the ship struck. He was seen on the forecastle deck along with Boatswain's Mate Albert Haines, Lamp Trimmer Samuel Hemming and Storekeeper John Foley. Wilde soon learned that the forepeak tank was filling up with seawater, but the store area above it remained dry.

Fifth Officer Harold Lowe slept through the accident and did not recall being awakened by anyone.

Below decks, the collision woke up many passengers, and some appeared in the passageways to ask the night stewards what was going on. They were told that all was well, and that there was no cause for alarm. Others decided to dress and go up on deck. Those

who ventured onto the forward Well Deck soon discovered that ice had toppled onto the deck from an iceberg that slid past.

Meanwhile, after returning from his 10 minute inspection of the forward steerage quarters and reporting to Captain Smith and First Officer Murdoch that he had seen no damage, Joseph Boxhall was soon ordered by Captain Smith to go down and find the carpenter and have him sound the ship in the forward holds.⁴ As Boxhall headed off the bridge, he ran into the carpenter coming up the ladder from A deck. The carpenter, John Maxwell, then told Boxhall that *Titanic* was taking water in the forward cargo holds, and Boxhall immediately sent him up to the bridge to report directly to Captain Smith. Boxhall then headed farther down and met one of the mail clerks coming up, John Richard Smith, who told him “the mail hold is filling rapidly.” After sending him up to the bridge to report to the Captain, Boxhall headed down to the mailroom to see the situation for himself. When he got there he found the other mail clerks in the process of removing bags of mail, and saw water approaching within two feet of G deck, the deck that he was standing on.

“I stayed there just for a minute or two and had a look. I saw mailbags floating around on deck. I saw it was no use trying to get them out so I went back again to the bridge. I met the Second Steward, Mr. Dodd, on my way to the bridge - as a matter of fact in the saloon companionway - and he asked me about sending men down below for those mails. I said, ‘You had better wait till I go to the bridge and find what we can do.’ I went to the bridge and reported to the Captain.”

Upon returning to the bridge for the second time, Boxhall reported to Captain Smith what he saw. Smith never said a word to him. “He walked away and left me. He went off the bridge, as far as I remember.”⁵

When Quartermaster Alfred Olliver arrived down in the engine room with that note from Captain Smith, he found Chief Engineer Bell busy at work there. He went over to Bell, handed him the written message and then waited for a reply.

“I delivered the message, and I waited for an answer. I waited for two or three minutes. Then he saw me standing, and he asked me what I wanted. I said I was waiting for an answer to the message I took him. He told me to take back - to tell the captain that he would get it done as soon as possible.”

What was it that Captain Smith wanted his chief engineer to do at that time? Nobody really knows. Some people have speculated that it may have been a request to see if something could be done to correct a slight list to starboard that the vessel had taken on as result of the collision. Others suggest that it had something to do with abating the noise of steam that was blowing off as the ship by then had come to a stop. Despite all the dampers being closed on the boiler furnaces at the time the ship struck the iceberg, fires had not yet been drawn out of the furnaces in boiler rooms No. 2, 3, 4 and 5.⁶

While waiting for a reply from Chief Engineer Bell, QM Olliver noticed that the watertight door between the engine room and boiler room No. 1 had been lifted up, and that it “looked very black inside there.” We know from Leading Fireman Frederick Barrett that the lights had gone out in the stokeholds soon after the firemen and trimmers had been ordered up, and that he and several others had been sent up the escapes to go to the engine room to get lamps to put up by the boiler gauges in the stokeholds.

When Olliver returned to the bridge after delivering the note to Chief Engineer Bell, he was given additional instructions:

