

# ESCAPING THE TITANIC

By Washington Dodge



- 1 It was four days into our voyage aboard the largest and safest ship ever to cross the Atlantic Ocean. I fell asleep at 10:30 p.m. after a long and indulgent ten-course meal. I was woken up a short time later by a violent shake. It felt like the ship had been struck by something. I quickly threw on a long overcoat and left my cabin to find a number of people in the hallway. “What happened?” I asked.
- 2 An officer in the group told us that something had gone wrong with one of the propellers. “But it’s nothing to worry about,” he said in a calm voice. One of the passengers provided a few more details. “Just before the crash, I saw an iceberg pass the stern of the vessel,” he said. “It was about 70 feet above the water.”
- 3 I went out onto the deck and saw a shower of ice on the floor. Still, the officers reassured me that there was no danger, so I went back to my cabin and told my wife and four-year-old son that there was nothing to worry about.
- 4 Several minutes later, I heard a commotion on deck. I popped out and asked our steward what was happening. He told me that the order had just come for all passengers to put on life preservers. I hurried back to my cabin, got my wife and son, and rushed them up to the boat deck.
- 5 A few people had gathered there, and the first boat was already being loaded. The officers were loading women and children into the boats first. I fumbled as I put life preservers on my wife and son. My son was quiet, but other children around us were crying as the ship crew rushed about. The officers began loading the next boat, so I pushed my wife and son through the crowd and settled them on board. As I watched this boat being safely lowered to the water 70 or 80 feet below, I wondered if I would ever see them again.
- 6 When boat number 13 was lowered, I went to meet it at the deck below. By this time, there were no more women or children left, so a number of men started climbing over the rail into the boat. Someone pushed me from behind and shouted, “Get in!” I hesitated but then climbed in, and in a few moments the boat was filled.

- 7 The orders were given to lower the boat. As we neared the water, we saw that we were being lowered into a stream of water that was pouring out of the ship's side from a pump. The water would have instantly swamped our boat. To make matters worse, the boat above us suddenly swung directly over our heads as it was being lowered toward the water. If we didn't drown, then we would be crushed. My heart was thumping. "Stop!" I cried in a hoarse voice and, to my relief, they stopped lowering both boats.
- 8 We safely reached the water and were swept away from the ship by the current. We had no officer in our boat to direct us. I tried to stay calm and not alarm the others.
- 9 In contrast to the noise and turmoil on the ship's deck, it was quiet and calm on the open ocean. We rowed for about a quarter of a mile until we found ourselves close to five other boats. We watched as the front of the great ship gradually submerged. We saw the lights go out and then the final downward plunge. I closed my eyes and tried not to picture the people still trapped on the ship.
- 10 My overcoat did not protect me from the extreme cold, but as I pulled the oar over and over, I began to sweat. We rowed in the darkness until we saw what we thought was a ship. To our disappointment, it was an iceberg.
- 11 Around dawn, we observed two lights, and we realized that a ship was approaching. We began to row harder and reached the ship in 45 minutes. Three of the other boats had reached her ahead of us and were now being taken on board.
- 12 Once on board, I immediately began to look for my wife and son. Did they make it? I finally spotted them in a crowd and ran over to them. My wife hugged me and started to cry, telling me she thought she would never see me again. My son introduced me to a ten-year-old boy he'd become friends with. The boy told me that the officers made him wait with the men while his mother was loaded onto a lifeboat. His father lifted him up and said to the officer, "This is my daughter, and she needs to be with her mother." The boy was then let through.
- 13 There must have been at least 50 women waiting for their husbands, fathers, sons,

and brothers. Our boat had brought a few of these families back together, but most of the men had gone down with the *Titanic*.



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## Test Questions

*Circle the correct answer.*

1) This question has two parts. First answer Part A, then answer Part B.

**Part A: From reading the passage “Escaping the *Titanic*,” what do you think is the main idea of the firsthand account?**

- a) Washington Dodge listened to orders about boarding the lifeboats.
- b) The largest and safest ship crossed the Atlantic Ocean.
- c) Washington Dodge and his family survived the sinking of the *Titanic*.
- d) Some boys and men disobeyed orders and snuck into lifeboats.

**Part B: How does the information in the firsthand account support the main idea?**

- a) By recounting what happened to the family after the *Titanic* hit the iceberg.
- b) By giving details about what time the ship hit the iceberg.
- c) By explaining the procedures for boarding a lifeboat.
- d) By describing how many women and children were put in a lifeboat.

2) Why did the group officer calmly tell Washington Dodge there was nothing to worry about and ask him to return to his room?

- a) The officer knew there wasn't any damage to the ship, and he didn't want the passengers to panic.
- b) The *Titanic* was the safest ship ever built to cross the Atlantic Ocean, and it couldn't be harmed by an iceberg.
- c) The officer didn't feel the violent shake, so he wasn't worried about the safety of the passengers.
- d) The officer didn't want to worry the passengers until he was certain the ship had been damaged.

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## Test Questions (continued)

3) What is the meaning of the word *commotion* as it is used in the following paragraph?

Several minutes later, I heard a **commotion** on deck. I popped out and asked our steward what was happening. He told me that the order had just come for all passengers to put on life preservers. I hurried back to my cabin, got my wife and son, and rushed them up to the boat deck.

- a) uproar
- b) peace
- c) unceasing
- d) compliant

4) How do William Dodge's feelings about the *Titanic* change from the beginning to the end of his story?

- a) William Dodge wonders what it will be like to be on the safest ship, realizes it's safe when the crew says there is nothing to worry about, and in the end, is sad about losing his family.
- b) William Dodge is content at first, becomes panicked after the *Titanic* hits an iceberg, and ends up relieved when he is reunited with his family.
- c) William Dodge is worried about being on the *Titanic*, becomes disturbed when the crew asks him to remain calm, and in the end, is happy to see his family.
- d) William Dodge was not looking forward to being on the *Titanic*, becomes worried when he puts his family on the lifeboat, and ends up wondering where his family is.

5) Which sentence from "Escaping the *Titanic*" contains the best evidence that the passage is written in the first person?

- a) "A few people had gathered there, and the first boat was already being loaded."
- b) "Get in!" I hesitated but then climbed in, and in a few moments the boat was filled.
- c) "An officer in the group told us that something had gone wrong with one of the propellers."
- d) "There must have been at least 50 women waiting for their husbands, fathers, and brothers."