

Catastrophe, Complacency or Courage?

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Introduction

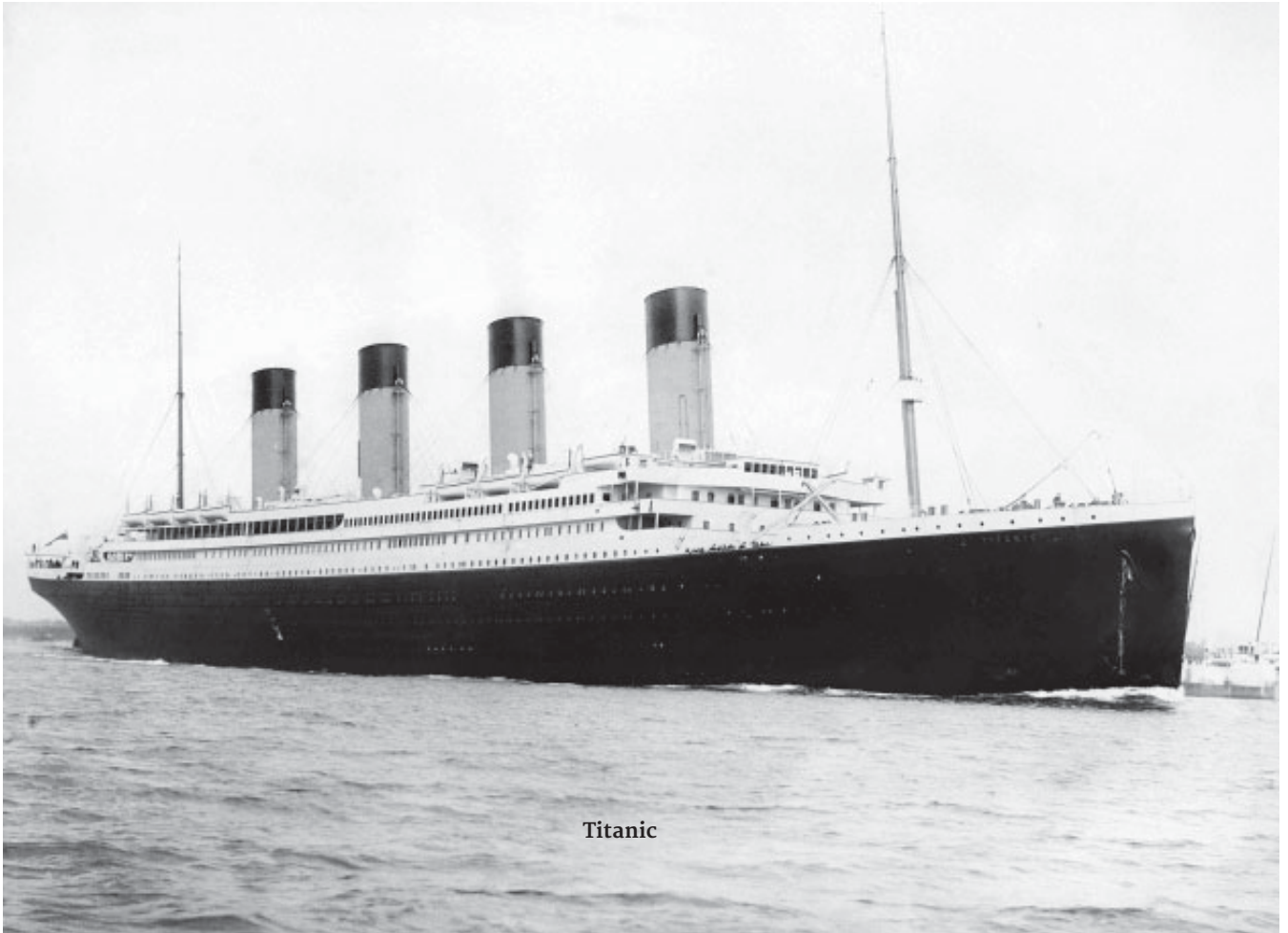
Three ships, three metaphors
and four lessons.

Catastrophe = RMS Titanic

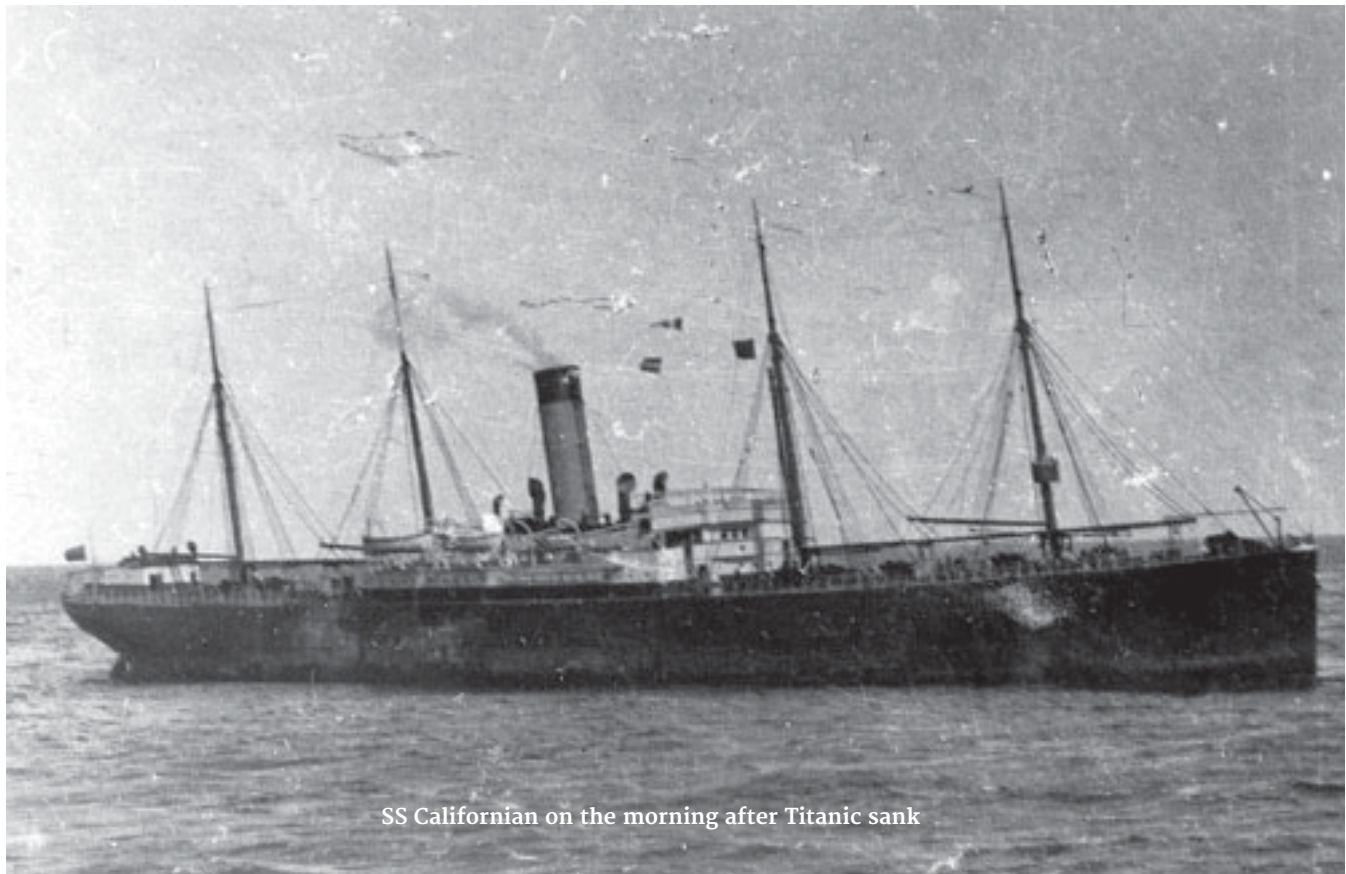
We are all familiar with the Titanic and remain fascinated with this remarkable ship and her tragic fate. Below are a few salient facts about the Titanic.

- She was the world's most luxurious ship
- Her passengers were the rich and famous; John Jacob Astor, one of the wealthiest men in the world with an estimated fortune of \$150 million; Benjamin Guggenheim, worth about \$95 million
- She was the largest ship, deemed unsinkable
- At 2:20, less than 3 hours later, on 15 April 1912, the Titanic sank.
- At 23:40 on 14 April 1912 the Titanic hit an iceberg

Two years ago, my husband and I were passengers on the Queen Mary II and as we crossed the Atlantic the captain announced that we were passing by the final resting place of the Titanic. A sombre mood fell over the entire cruise ship as her passengers stood still and contemplated the fate of the once proud Titanic.



Titanic



SS Californian on the morning after Titanic sank

Complacency = SS Californian

The second ship involved in the tragedy of that memorable night is not nearly as well known. Let me highlight a few relevant facts about the SS Californian.

- She was a British ship owned by the same company as the Titanic
- Smaller than the Titanic, she could only travel at 12 knots (13.8 mph)
- The captain of the Californian was Stanley Lord

On 14 April, at 19:00 the Californian's only wireless operator, Cyril Evans, reported 3 large icebergs and later in the evening large ice fields.

At 22:21, Captain Lord decided to stop the ship and wait until morning to proceed further.

At 23:00, Lord retired; about 15 minutes later he saw a ship nearby and went to the wireless room to ask Cyril about traffic in the vicinity. "Only the Titanic", Evans replied.

Multiple times, Evans tried to transmit his iceberg message to the Titanic, but was told by the Titanic's

wireless operator Phillips "Shut up, shut up! I am working Cape Race."

At 23:30, Evans turned off the wireless and went to bed.

At 23:40 the Titanic hit the iceberg;

At 23:50, the Titanic's lookout spotted a nearby ship; At 0:15, the Titanic sent its first distress call.

At 0:45, the Californian's Second Officer Herbert Stone saw

a white flash from the nearby steamer; then he saw 5 rockets *before* telling the captain.

Lord asked if the rockets had been a company signal; Stone said he did not know. Lord asked Stone to tell him if anything about the ship changed, and to keep signalling the ship with the Morse lamp, but he did not ask that the ship firing the rockets be contacted by wireless.

At 5:30, Evans turned on the wireless and to his shock found out that the Titanic had sunk.

As soon as Captain Lord heard of the catastrophe, he ordered his ship to head west, into the ice flow, away from the Titanic. While steaming in the opposite direction, the Californian passed another ship, the RMS Carpathia.

At 8:30, the Californian finally arrived at the place where the Titanic sank, but there was nothing left to do.

'As soon as Captain Lord heard of the catastrophe, he ordered his ship to head west, into the ice flow, away from the Titanic.'

Why would Captain Lord steer his ship away from the Titanic and then return many hours later? The only logical conclusion was: the route was intended to obscure the actual location of the Californian.

Both the American and the British inquiries found that the Californian had been a lot closer than the 19.5 miles claimed by Captain Lord, and that both ships were visible to each other. Both inquiries concluded that Captain Lord failed to provide proper

assistance to the Titanic. Careful studies indicated that, had the Californian properly responded, there would still have been great loss of life but at least another 300 people could have been saved.

The verdict for the captain was damning. In the words of historian David Allen Butler “The crime of Stanley Lord was not that he may have ignored the Titanic’s rockets, but that he unquestionably ignored someone’s cry for help.”

Whose cry for help are we ignoring? Do we feel safe and secure on our “ship”? In our home, our city, our country or on our continent?

I believe it is unacceptable that right now there are over 2.8 billion people, who live on less than \$2 per day; that over 547 million people in sub-

Saharan Africa alone have no access to electricity; that over 21 million adults and children are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labour and bonded labour (60% of these were trafficked for sexual exploitation, with women and girls making up 98% of the sexually trafficked group); that for the first time in US history, the Millennials expect to be economically

‘Whose cry for help are we ignoring? I believe it is unacceptable that right now there are over 2.8 billion people, who live on less than \$2 per day.’

worse off than their parents. In the UK, the forecast is similar to that of the US. A PwC report compares two men, one born in the UK 1963 the other in 1993, both study medicine and have similar career paths. At the end of their working lives, the baby boomer born in 1963 will be worth £1.63 million and the baby buster doctor will be worth £1.23 million, representing a 25% decrease in wealth for the latter.

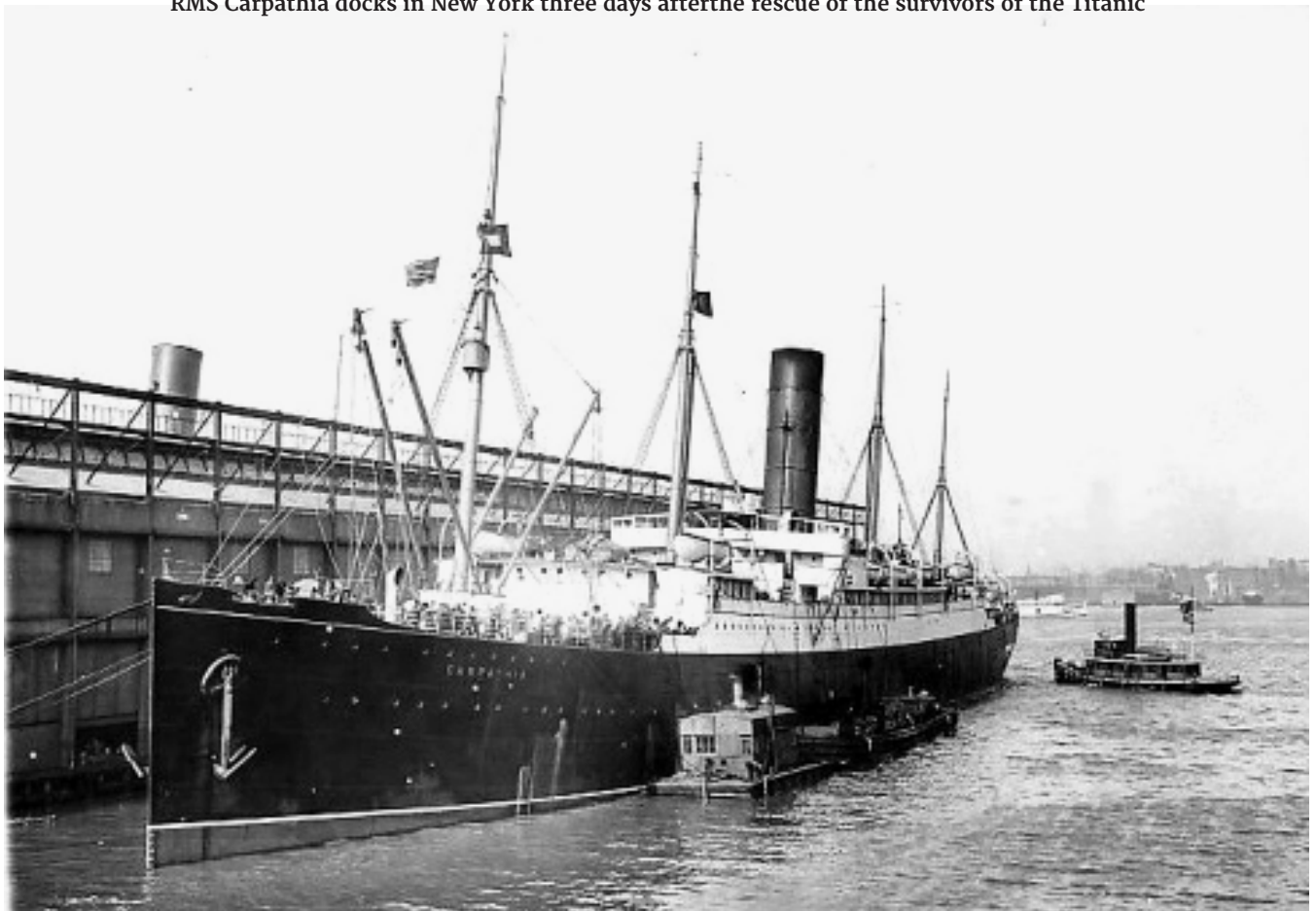
Courage = RMS Carpathia

The third ship was the RMS Carpathia. This ship, under the command of Arthur Rostron, had left New York for a cruise to the Mediterranean. They were over 58 miles away when they heard the Titanic’s distress call and yet arrived at the scene of the disaster by 4:00. Amazingly, the RMS Carpathia was owned by the rival Cunard line, so the Titanic was competition!

On the night of April 14th Captain Arthur Rostron was in his cabin sound asleep when the ship’s radio officer Harold Cottam received the distress call from the Titanic. Cottam dashed onto the bridge to find First Officer H. Dean. He told Dean about the Titanic’s call for help, and without taking the time to verify the story, they ran to Rostron’s cabin and burst in to wake him and give him the dreadful news.

Within minutes Rostron had summoned all his department heads to the bridge and told them

RMS Carpathia docks in New York three days after the rescue of the survivors of the Titanic





Collapsible lifeboat D
photographed from the
deck of Carpathia on the
morning of 15 April 1912

what had happened to the Titanic. He advised them that they had four hours to prepare for hundreds of ocean refugees.

While everyone made their way back to their posts, Rostron was seen, a solitary figure on the bridge, with his cap lifted a few inches above his head praying silently. The man they called the “Electric Spark” because of his high energy and ability for getting things done, was also a man of principles, of ruthless discipline and of prayer.

Captain Rostron then began to use the hours of travel time wisely and his planning reads like a manual for rescuing passengers at sea.

The To Do List he put together compiled from Walter Lord’s book on the Titanic “A Night to Remember”, includes the following items:

- Order all off-duty crew members to be summoned
- Chief Engineer to get as much speed as possible out of the ship.
- Turn off steam heating to free up all available steam for more speed
- Prepare and swing out all lifeboats
- Set up electric lights along the ship’s hull
- Collect all stimulants and medications

- Set up first aid stations in each respective dining room
- Allocate people to collect names of survivors as they come aboard
- Ensure passengers are sent to 1st, 2nd or 3rd class dining rooms for medical checks
- Allow every crewman to have hot coffees in the night ahead
- Have soup, coffee, tea, and brandy ready for survivors
- Convert larger public rooms into dormitories
- Blankets and pillows to be collected from every available place
- Group all the Carpathia steerage passengers together to make room for Titanic’s.

Looking at the timeline of the disaster is fascinating.

65 minutes after the Titanic struck the iceberg, at 12:45am, the first Titanic lifeboat (#7) was launched and the first distress rocket was fired. The passengers were reluctant to leave the ostensibly safe ship, which showed no outward signs of being in imminent danger, and board small lifeboats. As a result, most of them were launched partially empty. One boat, meant to hold 40 people, left the Titanic with only 12 people aboard.

At the same time that the Titanic’s passengers were dithering about whether or not to leave their warm beds, the passengers of the Carpathia began to realise something was amiss on their ship. Their rooms were cold because the steam heating had been turned off in order to make more steam available to the boilers to speed up the ship, and all the ship’s exterior lights

were shining as brightly as possible.

Rostron told his passengers what had happened; that their pleasure cruise was now a rescue mission.

The captain, crew, and even the passengers, of the Carpathia, knew of the plight of the

‘rescue was headed their way even before many of those to be rescued knew they were really in trouble!’

Titanic and *rescue was headed their way even before many of those to be rescued knew they were really in trouble!*

That April night, Captain Rostron’s primary interest was *how fast can the Carpathia go?*

According to the Cunard Line (who owned the ship) and Swan Hunter & Wigham Richardson (who built the ship) – its *maximum possible speed was 14 knots.*

Rostron had calculated that at this speed it would take four hours to reach the Titanic, but he determined to do better. He sent every available stoker and deckhand down to the engine room to shovel coal into the engine as fast as humanly possible.

Their efforts, combined with shutting off hot water and heating for the rest of the ship, meant all possible power was going to the engines. The Carpathia's passengers were now on a rescue ship, not a cruise ship! Gradually the ship's speed increased to *17 knots – 3 knots faster than her official top speed!*

The captain ordered extra lookouts in the crow's nest, the bow, and the bridge. Remember this was **decades** before the invention of radar and sonar; ships had to rely on people, often with binoculars, to spot dangers like icebergs. There they were steaming faster than full speed, in the middle of the night, into an

area full of icebergs to rescue a ship that had already struck one.

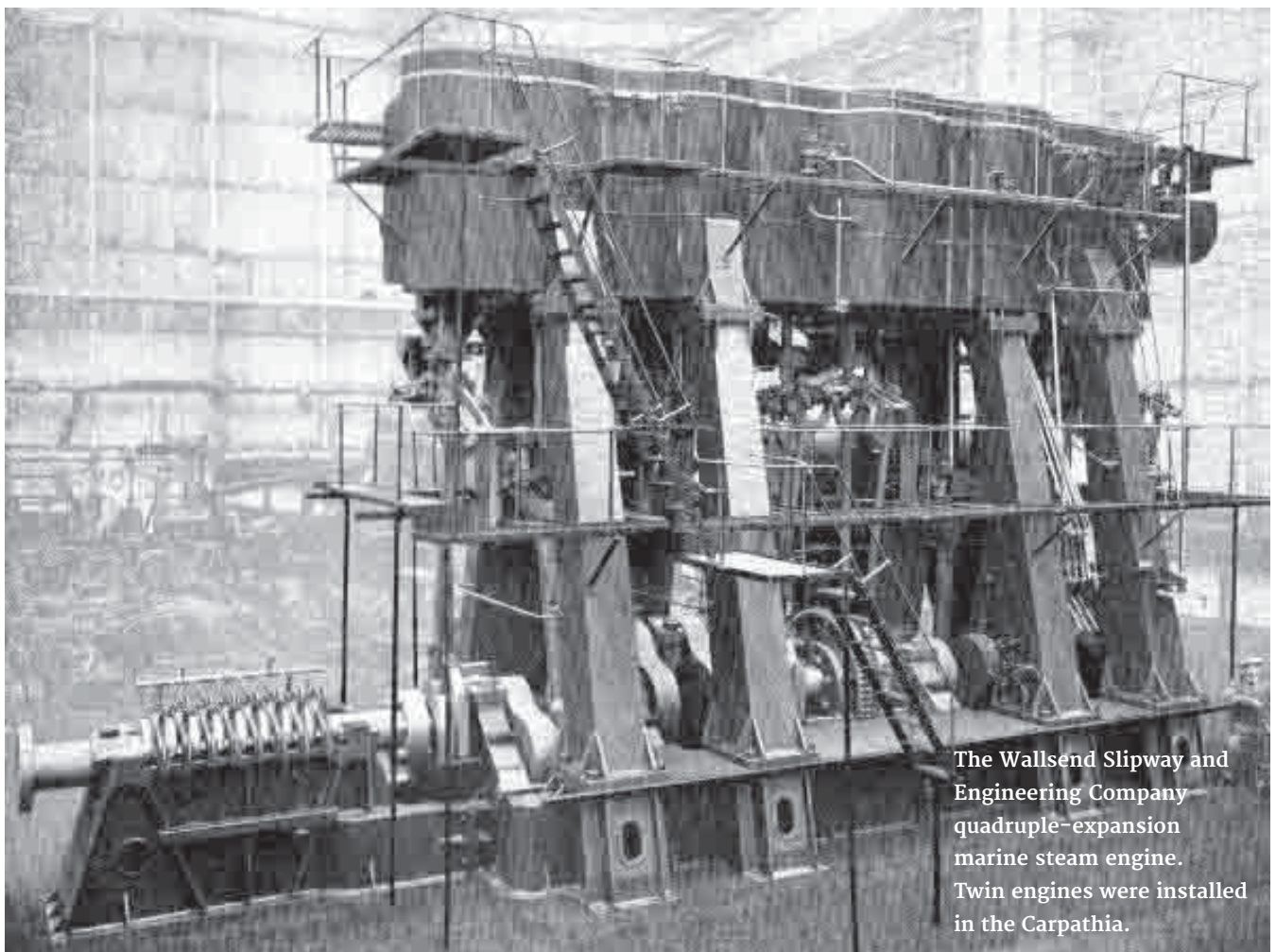
The captain called the stewards together. He explained the plight of the Titanic and the mission of the Carpathia. He looked each man in the eye and said, "Every man to his post and let him do his duty like a true Englishman."

Three knots may not sound like much; but this fantastic 21% increase in speed ensured that the Carpathia reached the people in trouble **a full 50 minutes earlier than planned**. And 50 minutes, when you are in a small boat adrift in the freezing ocean, is a **very long time!**

Aboard the Carpathia that night, and inspired by the events of the evening, was Philip Mauro, a prominent Bible student. Mauro wrote perhaps his most insightful work – *God's Pilgrims: Their Dangers, Their Resources, Their Rewards*.

Mauro wrote, in the introduction to his first edition, while he was aboard the Carpathia that fateful night:

It may be of interest to the reader to learn that the writing of this book was begun and finished on the memorable voyage of the Steamship Carpathia which was interrupted by the rescue of the survivors of the Titanic, and by the return with them to the port of New York. This is not the place to speak of the harrowing scenes and distressing incidents of the four days of that return trip. I believe the destruction of the Titanic is a foreshadowing of what is about to happen to the great "civilization" upon which man has expended his energies, and in which he puts his confidence. For those who do not really know God, the obvious lesson of this tragic event is to inquire concerning the lifeboat. But there are also solemn and important lessons in it for the saints of God.



The Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Company quadruple-expansion marine steam engine. Twin engines were installed in the Carpathia.



A stateroom in the Titanic

As we contemplate these three ships and three metaphors, let me leave you with four lessons from the Carpathia.

Lessons from the Carpathia

Invest in Yourself – Take Care of Your Own

Rostron made sure he was in a position to help; his crew was well looked after, physically and emotionally. He ordered hot drinks for his crew, gave clear directions and provided much needed encouragement.

You need to take care of yourself and your own, if you want to make a positive difference. The safety briefing on an airplane exemplifies this: “Make sure your mask is properly fitted, before helping anyone else.”

Love yourself, invest in yourself, become a better leader; so that you can respond to the distress calls around you.

I believe the financial crisis we experienced was a crisis of leadership, values and governance. More than ever, we need leaders with a strong moral compass, who can relate spiritually and humanely to their fellow human beings, who can overcome challenges and exhibit innovation, creativity, and the courage to tackle obstacles as they arise. Let me invite you to be one of those leaders!

Concentrate Your Energy – Focus on the Essentials

Where did the steam go on the Carpathia? Let’s contrast the situation on the Titanic with that on the Carpathia. The former had Turkish baths, comfortable staterooms, and heated swimming pools while the passengers on the Carpathia had to manage with cold water and no heat, because all the steam was channelled to the engines to move the ship forward more quickly!

How do you spend our energy? Do you spend it in furtherance of your calling? Do you move forward? Success is measured in the intelligent deployment of energy.

Ruthlessly Prepare and Do Your Part Faithfully With a Sense of Urgency

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

All of Rostron’s actions that night of 15 April were those of a man who did everything meticulously and with a tremendous sense of urgency.

According to Jim Collins’ book *Great by Choice*, the 10X companies (those outperforming their comparison companies by at least 10 times) were characterized by fanatical discipline, empirical creativity and productive paranoia. These companies prepared well and were disciplined from the beginning, not just after they became big companies.

One great example of ruthless preparation was Lady Margaret Thatcher.

Margaret Thatcher, now affectionately called “Lady T” by those close to her, is one leader who made a science of preparation. Recently I had the privilege of cohosting a small lunch at which Lady Thatcher was the guest of honour. As is customary, in preparation for the event we had submitted the biographies of the guests to her office. During lunch, we made sure that everyone had the opportunity to sit next to her, and when my turn came, I was quite eager to ask her what factors contributed to her success.

Mrs Thatcher gave me three answers. “My parents taught me the importance of hard work”, she said, pausing for a reflective moment afterward. “Second, integrity. People may not like what you stand for, but they have a right to know what you stand for.” Finally, she put her hand on my arm and looked me straight in the eyes. “like you I am a tax lawyer by training”, she said. “And I always know my facts”.

I was speechless. Here was Margaret Thatcher, in her eighties, and she knew my background. She had worked hard. She was prepared.¹

Trust God to be at the Helm of your Life

When the Carpathia had found all the lifeboats which made it off the Titanic, and everyone was safely aboard the rescue ship Captain Rostron observed “When I saw the ice I had steamed through during the night, I shuddered, and could only think that some other Hand than mine was on that helm during the night.”

Your future may look uncertain; you may feel like you are heading for icebergs by various names: unemployment, a broken financial system, challenging relationships, global poverty, and overwhelming circumstances. God is calling you and me today to face our icebergs, to respond to calls for help and to put our trust in Him.

Fearful perils are before those who bear responsibilities in the Lord’s work. Perils the thought of which makes me tremble. But the word comes, My hand is on the wheel, and in My providence I will carry out the divine plan. (Ellen G. White, Review, May 5, 1903)

Every morning I pray with the psalmist:

Let me hear of your unfailing love for you in the morning, for I am trusting in you. Show me where to walk for I come to you in prayer. Save me from my enemies, Lord, I run to you to hide me. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.

Psalms 143:8-10.

Rewards

How do you want to live your life? Like the first class passengers on the Titanic? Like the crew on the Californian, safe and secure? Or like Arthur Rostron and his crew: ready to change course at a moment’s notice to respond to those in distress?

There are no rewards for those causing catastrophes or for the complacent. The rewards are for those who live a life of courage and commitment. Captain Rostron and his crew received awards and rewards, most notably:

The government: in 1913, Rostron was given the Congressional Medal of Honour, the highest accolade bestowed upon a non-American by the US government; in 1926, Rostron was knighted.



Herta von Stiegel is the founder and CEO of Ariya Capital Group Limited, an FSA regulated financial services and project development firm focusing on clean energy and infrastructure investments in Africa.

His epitaph:

Sir Arthur Rostron, Captain of RMS Carpathia. Saved 706 souls from SS Titanic, 15 April 1912.


The question for each one of you this evening is: Herta von Stiegel is the founder and CEO of Ariya Capital Group Limited, an FSA regulated financial services and project development firm focusing on clean energy and infrastructure investments in Africa.

‘Which ship do you want to be on this evening and for the rest of your life: the Titanic, the Californian or the Carpathia?’

How do you choose to live your life? Is your life a catastrophe or heading in that direction? Are you basically a good person, but not too concerned about the people around you? Or do you decide to live each day committed to Jesus and his rescue plan for the world? Which ship do

you want to be on this evening and for the rest of your life: the Titanic, the Californian or the Carpathia?

His master [Jesus] replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness! (Matthew 25:23)

The best news is that we can make the right choices and that we are not alone as St Paul reminds us 2 Timothy 1:7: **“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and self-control.”** 

Reference

¹Herta von Stiegel with Gina Smith, *The Mountain Within – Leadership Lessons and Inspiration for your Climb to the Top*. Mcgraw Hill, 2011.