

How Captain Smith Died

Daily Sketch

Tuesday 30 April 1912

His Last Act was to Save a Child's Life

Refused to get into a boat.

Of all the wild and irresponsible messages that were sent to this country in the first hours following the sinking of the Titanic the one that caused the grief to Englishmen was the statement that Captain Smith had committed suicide on the bridge of his ship. That statement was quickly contradicted. It was proved that Captain Smith died like a sailor, but the exact manner of his death was not described. Many eyewitnesses have testified to seeing the captain on the bridge as the great liner was engulfed, and others say they saw the officer dive from the bridge just before the ship sank, but according to an interview published in the New York World Captain Smith died the greatest of all deaths. His last act was to save the life of a child.

Survivors account

The story is told by Charles Williams, coach of the Harrow Racquet Club, who was one of those saved from the Titanic.

Mr. Williams is the guest of Mr. George E. Standing, and the latter gave the New York World reported the account as told to him by Mr. Williams.

"He is a good swimmer," said Mr. Standing, "and went overboard with a life preserver when he couldn't stay on deck any longer. He was in the icy water for over two hours before he was finally hauled into one of the lifeboats. He say that he saw Captain Smith swimming around in the icy water with an infant in his arms and a lifebelt. When the small boat went to his rescue Captain Smith handed them the child, but refused to get in himself.

"He did ask what had become of First Officer Murdoch. We told him Murdoch had blown his brains out with a revolver. Then Captain Smith pushed himself away from the lifeboat, threw his lifebelt from him and slowly sank from sight. He did not come to the surface again."

It may be stated that there is no official confirmation that Mr. Murdoch shot himself: we give the whole account as it appeared in the New York World.

Mr. Williams story is borne out by Harry Senior, a fireman of the Titanic who arrived on the Lapland on Sunday.

In an interview Senior said:-

"The ship was pretty near sinking then, and the captain shouted, 'Each man for himself'. I had noticed him on the bridge before that. He was pacing up and down sending up rockets and giving orders.

"It is a dirty lie to say that such a man as he shot himself".

When the Captains order came Senior dived over the side.

"As I was swimming to the boat I saw the Captain in the water. He was swimming with a baby in his arms, raising it out of the water as he swam on his back.

"He swam to a boat, put the baby in, and then swam back to the ship. I also had picked up a baby, but it died from the cold before I could reach the boat."

We publish today a photograph of the steward who took the baby from Captain Smiths arms.

Courtesy of Brian Ticehurst

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