

Frank Prentice - A Titanic Survivor With An Amazing Story

Written by Andy Owen

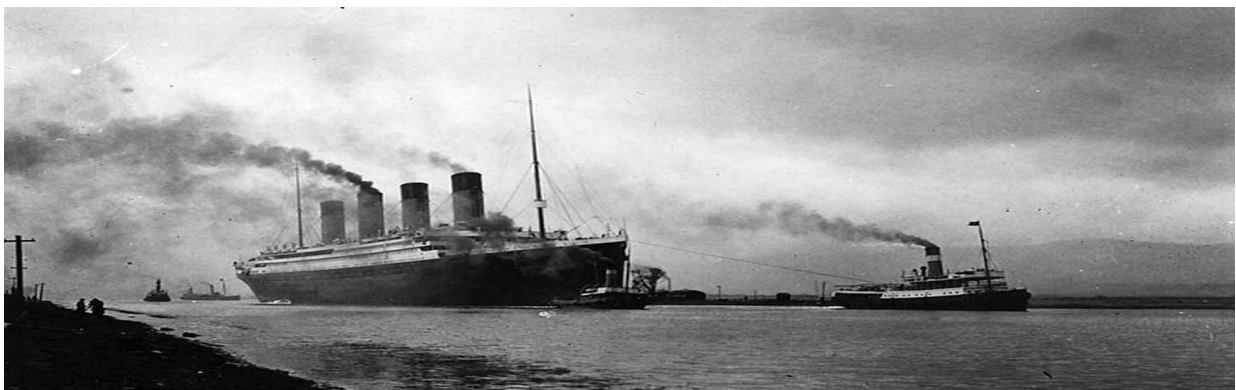


Frank Winnold Prentice was 23 years old when he signed on to the *Titanic*, on 4th April 1912.

He took the job as an Assistant Storekeeper, receiving a wage of three pounds fifteen shillings a month. 6 days later, he was on his way to New York on the *Titanic's* maiden voyage.

His story is amazing. And inspirational.

The *Titanic* caused quite a stir when she departed from Southampton, England, on April 10th, 1912. Thousands of people lined the docks and surrounding areas to wave her off.



She sailed to Cherbourg and then on to Queenstown in Ireland (now known as Cobh), to collect additional passengers. She then set sail for New York.

She had 2,240 passengers and crew on board.

Within 4 days, over 1,500 of them would be dead.

On the night of 14th April, Frank was in the storekeeper's room when he felt the ship shudder a little, but he thought nothing of it.

Things like that happen at sea all the time - and he was pretty busy that night, with loads to do.

The Titanic had sailed from Liverpool 4 days earlier and, from what he had heard, she was making good time and expected to reach New York in record time - and well ahead of schedule.

Frank smiled at the thought of extra time in one of the most exciting cities in the world.

He got on with his work, until he heard the order to go on deck.

"I wonder what's going on now", he thought. "Not another lifeboat drill I hope. It's bloody cold up there..."

When he got up on deck on the clear cloudless night, he met with a group of the other storekeepers and one of them offered Frank a cigarette. He lit it up and stood there with his workmates and it soon became clear, that this was no drill.



The ship was in real danger. "We've struck an iceberg apparently"...one of the other men said.

Someone cracked a joke about how sorry they felt for the iceberg - and they all laughed. "This ship is unsinkable, so a block of floating ice ain't going to hurt it, is it?" said a rather portly fellow on Frank's right.

But within the next few minutes, the atmosphere changed - and it became clear to Frank and his group, that something serious had happened.

Suddenly, there were many passengers, all wearing lifebelts, milling around. Officers were barking orders and lifeboats were being prepared.



It was less than an hour since the ship had struck the iceberg.

Frank was quickly involved and started to help with the loading of passengers into lifeboats.

One of his responsibilities was one of the worst anyone had to do - parting the women and children from their husbands and fathers, to get them into the lifeboats first. The cry was seemingly continual - "Women and children first".

At the early stage, things were emotional, but the passengers, in the main, were calm and did what they were told.

Charles Lightoller - the highest-ranking crew member to survive, was in charge of loading lifeboats on the port side.

"There was no jostling or pushing or crowding whatever," he testified at a British inquiry. "The men all refrained from asserting their strength and from crowding back the women and children. They could not have stood quieter if they had been in church."

However, the actual loading of the lifeboats was pretty chaotic and incredibly disorganised.



The first lifeboat was lowered with only 28 people on board. The boat was designed to hold 65 people. Unfortunately, this tragically became the norm, with nearly every lifeboat leaving the ship, left significantly under-filled.

Some were lowered with only a handful of passengers on board.

Frank continued to help load the lifeboats, until they were all gone. The third class passengers were now streaming on deck and the situation soon became ugly, when they realised the lifeboats had all gone.

Frank felt he could do no more, so started to move away.

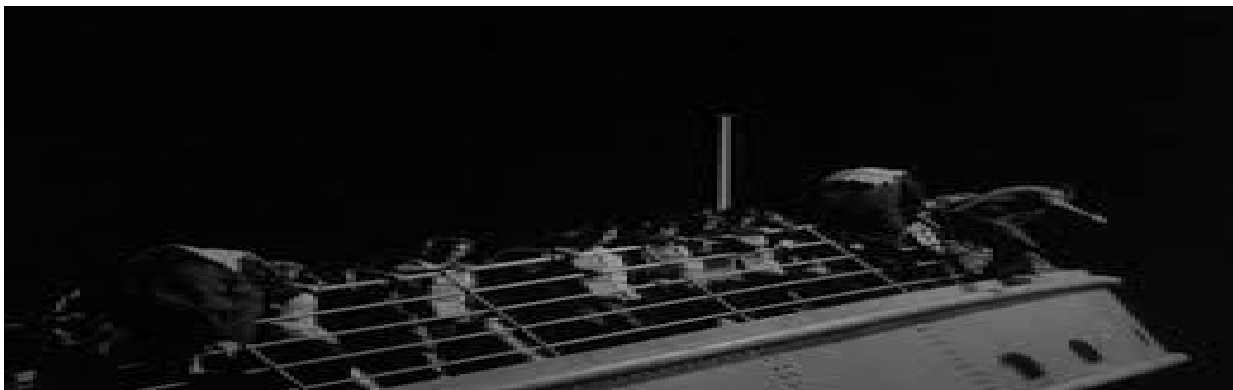


The ship was clearly sinking by the bow now and had an 11-degree angle. Frank started to make his way to the stern, using guard rails to help him.

He reached the Poop Deck, where many passengers and crew had congregated. There was confusion and fear everywhere, but he noticed a group singing hymns.

He spotted his friends, Cyril Ricks and Michael Kieran - and moved over to them. They quickly discussed their situation. They all agreed they had no option but to leave the ship before she sank, otherwise they would be sucked under with her when she went down.

After a few minutes, they climbed over the port side railing and jumped into the icy water.



The distance to the water was around 75 feet, and Frank thought he was never going to get there. When he finally hit the water, the shock took Frank's breath away - it felt like a knife, slicing into his flesh.

But, when he came to the surface he was able to strike out.

There were bodies and debris everywhere and Frank realised how lucky he had been, not to have struck anything or anybody, when he hit the water.

He found Ricks floating in the water. He was unconscious, apparently having hit floating wreckage.

Frank remained with him, but a few minutes later he died.

He never saw Keiran again.

As he swam away, he turned and watched the great ship in her death throes.

He could hear her breaking up inside and her propellers were out of the water. There were people screaming - and so many cries for help.

It was a truly awful thing to witness.

And, it was so *incredibly* cold...



Then, as he watched, just under 3 hours after striking the iceberg, the Titanic disappeared into the dark murky depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

Frank continued swimming away and luckily found Lifeboat 4 - and the occupants pulled him aboard.

A couple of hours later, they were rescued by The Carpathia. The lifeboat had 55 living survivors on board.

Frank was taken straight to the ship's hospital.

In a few days, he was in New York.



A few weeks later, physically recovered, he signed on as a crew member of RMS Oceanic - another White Star Line ship, which, before Titanic, was the biggest liner in the world.

A few days after they had sailed, the Oceanic returned to the spot where the Titanic had sunk. While there, they found a drifting lifeboat from the ship.

There were four men in the boat. They were all dead. As he watched the bodies being recovered, it was an emotional moment for Frank - and all his dreadful memories returned.

Frank stayed with the Oceanic - and, after two years, the First World War broke out. The Oceanic was converted into an armoured cruiser and sailed from Southampton.

Three months later, he found himself once again in the water.

The Oceanic hit a submerged reef off the Faroe Islands and sank. Just as he had done with the Titanic, he had to jump for his life.

And once again, he was picked up by a lifeboat.



Unsurprisingly, a few days later, while in a bar in Liverpool, he decided that he had more than pushed his luck with ships and the sea.

So, he decided to join the Army.

He enlisted with the Royal Tank Regiment, saw action in the First World War and had an illustrious military career. He became a Major, winning a Military Cross.

He married Mabel in 1919 and they had three children.

Frank enjoyed a relaxing retirement in Bournemouth, playing golf at his favourite course at Ferndown.

He died in Bournemouth on 19th May 1982, aged 93.



A real character until the end, he said this in an interview in later life, about jumping from the Titanic...

"I'm thinking of exhibiting myself at Brighton Pier in the summer, as a high diver."

Clearly, Frank was a very lucky man.

But, he was also a wonderful man. After I stumbled on his story and researched it for this article, I came to admire him greatly.

They don't make men like Frank anymore.

I would have loved to have met him.

Here he is, (incorrectly titled as a Purser) telling his astonishing Titanic story to the BBC in 1979.

[**Frank Prentice's Incredible Titanic Story**](#)