

## E. J. Smith, Coptic Aground and Rio---Two out of three ain't bad?

by Mark Baber

### E. J. Smith, Coptic Aground and Rio---Two out of three ain't bad?

There are several standard White Star history volumes which associate E. J. Smith, commander of Titanic, with the grounding of White Star's Coptic on Mai Island off Rio de Janeiro in

1890.[1] [2] [3]

#### From The Times (London)

[4] [5]

[6]

[7]

#### From New Zealand Newspapers

More details come from New Zealand.[8]

Even more details appear in The Poverty Bay Herald, of Gisborne, and The West Coast Times, of Hōlītika, which on 11 February and 20 February 1890, respectively, published reports of the official inquiry into Coptic's

grounding.[9] [10]

That Burton was in fact Coptic's commander for this trip is confirmed by various items which appeared in the New Zealand press from her 28 August arrival at Dunedin, where she was quarantined because of scarlet fever on board, to her 19 September departure for London.[11]

Smith's name comes into play only in connection with Coptic's first New Zealand arrival **after** [12]

Smith's actual service on Coptic was limited to that one

trip.[13] [14] [15]

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[1]

[2] <http://captainedwardjohnsmith.co.uk/2653/index.html> cites an earlier version of this memo to support the statement that "*Smith actually took command of the Coptic shortly after another captain had grounded the ship outside Rio de Janeiro.*"

[3]

[4] Unlike other newspapers, The Times did not routinely include ships' masters' names in its shipping intelligence column.

[5]

[6]

[7] The Times, 14 and 16 October and 1, 11, 16 and 21 November 1890.

[8] The National Library of New Zealand has digitized a significant number of old New Zealand newspapers and made them available free of charge (at least for present) and searchable on its web site, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>

[9]The Poverty Bay Herald article mentions Burton by name but the West Coast Times article, a transcription of which appears on the Encyclopedia Titanica Message Board at <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/cgi-bin/discus/show.cgi?tpc=6937&post=271968#POST271968>, does not. There seems to be no mention of this inquest in The Times.

[10]The court also provided that a mate's certificate should be issued to the captain if he chose to apply for one.

[11]

[12] A transcription of this article appears on the Encyclopedia Titanica web site, <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/arrival-of-the-rms-coptic-11318.html>  
<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/titanic-captain-smith-a-captains-career.html> .

[13]

[14]The Evening Post, Wellington, 30 May and 6 June 1890.

[15] The Evening Post, Wellington, 4 November 1890.

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