

Gunshots on the Titanic

by Earl Chapman

Titanic Research

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Were shots fired as the Titanic went down? If so whom and toward whom?

I saw a lot of Italians, Latin people, all along the ship's rails — understand, it was open — and they were all glaring, more or less like wild beasts, ready to spring. That is why I yelled out to look out, and let go, bang, right along the ship's side.

15856. *How was that? — It was because while I was on the boat deck just as they had started to lower, two men jumped into my boat. I chased one out and to avoid another occurrence of that sort I fired my revolver as I was going down each deck, because the boat would not stand a sudden jerk. She was loaded already I suppose with about 64 people on her, and she would not stand any more.*

15857. *You were afraid of the effect of any person jumping in the boat through the air? — Certainly, I was.*

15989. *You have told us about your firing a revolver in consequence of two men trying to jump in? — Yes.*

Senator SMITH. Who fired those two shots, do you know?

"Purser H.W. McElroy, as brave and as fine a man as ever lived, was standing up in the next to last boat, loading it. Two men, I think they were dining room stewards, dropped into the boat from the deck above. As they jumped, he fired twice in the air. I do not believe they were hit, but they were quickly thrown out."

Mr. GRACIE: As to what happened on the other side during our departure, the information I was given by the second officer was that some of the steerage passengers tried to rush the boat, and he fired off a pistol to make them get out, and they did get out.

Time (a.m.)		No. of Shots
1:15	5 th Officer Lowe	3, in air
2:00	1 st Officer Murdoch or Purser McElroy	2, in air
2:05	2 nd Officer Lightoller	1, in air

However, there have also been many unsubstantiated stories of gunfire, with the intent to kill or maim, which were directed at passengers and crew. These incidents are recorded both in private correspondence written by the observers, or in accounts published in newspapers shortly after the disaster. The earliest recorded gunshot incident was reported by Third Class Passenger Eugene Daly to Dr. Frank Blackmarr on board the rescue steamer Carpathia. Blackmarr, a passenger on the Carpathia, was able to obtain a number of oral and written statements from survivors, including one from Daly. Daly, with two women under his care (his cousin Maggie Daly and his neighbour Berta Mulvihill) had worked their way from steerage quarters on F Deck all the way to the forward boat deck and Collapsible B where he eventually made his escape. Daly gave the following account to Blackmarr:

Finally some of the women and children were let up, but, as you know, we had quite a number of hot headed Italians and other peoples who got crazy and made for the stairs. These men tried to rush the stairway, pushing and crowding and pulling the women down, some of them with weapons in their hands. I saw two dagos shot and some that took punishment from the officers.

At the first cabin when a boat was being lowered an officer pointed a revolver and said if any man tried to get in, he would shoot him on the spot. I saw the officer shoot two men dead because they tried to get in the boat. Afterwards there was another shot, and I saw the officer himself lying on the deck. They told me he shot himself, but I did not see him. I was up to my knees in the water at the time. Every one was rushing around, and there were no more boats. I then dived overboard.

While the last boat was leaving, I saw an officer with a revolver fire a shot and kill a man who was trying to climb into it. As there remained nothing more for him to do, the officer told us, 'Gentlemen, each man for himself, Good-bye.' He gave a military salute and then fired a bullet into his head. That's what I call a man!!!

'Stand back,' shouted the officers who were manning the boat. 'The women come first.' Shouting curses in various foreign languages, the immigrant men continued their pushing and tugging to climb into the boats. Shots rang out. One big fellow fell over the railing into the water. Another dropped to the deck, moaning. His jaw had been shot away. This was the story told by the bystanders afterwards on the pier. One husky Italian told the writer on the pier that the way in which the men were shot down was horrible. His sympathy was with the men who were shot. 'They were only trying to save their lives,' he said.

[Titanic: R.I.P.](#)

Lightoller told my father in Queenstown that Mr. Bruce Ismay kept pressure on Captain Smith to keep the Titanic to her maximum speed of 22-23 knots in order to create a new record time for the souther track crossing of the Atlantic. This Captain Smith did in spite of ice warnings from other ships in the area...Murdoch shot one crewman in the jaw as he tried to rush the lifeboats...

[Titanic: Sinking the Myths](#)

Newspaper	Date of Publication	Remarks a
<i>Bangor Daily Commercial</i>	Apr 19, 1912	Steward Thomas White
<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	Apr 19, 1912	1 st Class Passenger W.F. Bond
<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	Apr 26, 1912	3 rd Class Passenger Victor Sunderland

lifted and dropped
overboard."

Daily Sketch

Apr 20, 1912

1st Class Passenger
Duff-Gordon

Daily Sketch

Apr 29, 1912 Fireman Robert Williams

Un-named male
passenger

"I saw Mr. Murdock shoot
down an Italian. This
officer performed heroic

Daily Sketch

Apr 30, 1912

1st Class Passenger
Charles Williams (as
related by Mr. George
Standing to a reporter
from the New York World)

"He [Captain Smith as he
approached a lifeboat in
the water] did ask what
had become of First
Officer Murdoch. We told
him Murdock had blown
his brains out with a
revolver. Then Captain
Smith pushed himself
away from the lifeboat..."

Mirror

Apr 20, 1912

1st Class Passenger
Duff-Gordon

killed instantly. His body fell in the boat at our feet. No one made any effort to move, and his body remained in the boat until we were picked up."

The Times

Apr 20, 1912

1st Class Passenger
George Brayton (a.k.a.
George Breret)

* This individual does not show up on Titanic's Crew List.

Conclusions

References:

Courtesy of Earl Chapman

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