

## Pitman's Own Private Iceberg

by Senan Molony

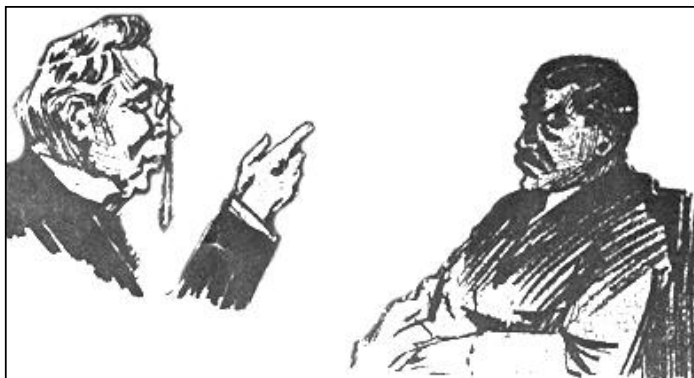
### ***Titanic Research***

Monday 19 July 2004



HERBERT Pitman appeared to lose confidence following the shattering experience through which he passed in April 1912.

*Titanic's*



**Senator Smith:** You were in command. They ought to have obeyed your orders?

**Pitman:** So they did.

**Smith:** They did not, if you told them to pull toward the ship.

**Pitman:** They commenced pulling toward the ship, and the passengers in my boat said it was a mad idea on my part to pull back to the ship, because if I did, we should be swamped..."

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*Titanic* disaster.

*Titanic* syndrome which, it might be argued, was all about giving the Board of Trade a double-bottom against future mishap.

It had also been charged with advising whether any alterations were desirable in the BoT sight tests then in force for persons serving or intending to serve in the Merchant Service.



**Captain  
Norman  
Craig, MP.**

The committee found no evidence of casualties arising from defective vision, nor even a trustworthy estimate of the collisions and strandings caused by bad lookout. But it became seized with the evidence of two colour blind gentlemen - one an unnamed Royal Navy officer, and the other the yachtsman Captain Norman Craig, MP. Craig had originally been booked on the *Titanic* but cancelled because of parliamentary business.



If you cannot see a swirl of orange dots crossing this image you may have a form of colour blindness.  
Explanation and examples



An inability to distinguish between them could stand the observer vessel into grave danger of collision.

Long experience compensates considerably for a certain decline in physical fitness due to age, but the Board of Trade promulgated in July 1912 that "no person who is liable to fail to detect the presence or to confuse the colours of average ships&#8216; sidelights at a distance of one mile is competent to discharge the duties of an Officer of the Watch."

*Titanic*



Into this gathering nightmare walked Pitman, who had been four years as an apprentice with James Nourse Ltd., three years as an officer in the same employ; a year in the Blue Anchor Line running to Australia, six months in the Shire Line sailing to Japan, and five years with White Star.

*Titanic* disaster, lookouts were not obliged by law to pass any eyesight tests at all.

*Titanic*, Fred Fleet had not been tested since 1907, and Reg Lee not since his army days in 1900.\*

*Titanic* sank, it could very well be that a colour-blind officer would decide on the fundamental matter of whether a light was red or green. The implications of what was cheerfully disclosed to Lord Mersey are staggering in retrospect.

## **SIGHT TESTS FOR SEAMEN**

*The Times*

More and more spirited letters poured in, including this one:

## **SIGHT TESTS FOR THE MERCANTILE MARINE**

*The Times*

*The Times*, Wednesday May 7, 1913. p. 24)

*Titanic*

## MERCANTILE MARINE SIGHT TESTS

*Titanic*

*The Times*

With regard to the cruel case of an Allan Line officer, who was one of the victims of the Board of Trade sight tests, which is furnished in your columns by that well-known ship owner Mr John Glynn, allow me to put a parallel case, that of the surviving Third Officer of the *Titanic*, one of the finest specimens of British Mercantile Marine officer that I have come across - and I know many.

*Titanic* he presented himself for a further test under the then prevailing instructions of the White Star Line that their Captains and Officers should go through these tests periodically. He was then failed, and has now been invited by the Board of Trade voluntarily to surrender his certificate.

*Titanic* was, I should say, most sympathetically treated by the White Star Line, who have now appointed him as an assistant purser on one of their biggest vessels.

*The Times*, Tuesday May 13, 1913. p.3)

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*Titanic* publication to mention Pitman's subsequent career is Don Lynch's *Illustrated History*. It seems to imply that retirement to the job of purser came gradually for the Third Officer:

"Herbert Pitman remained at sea for thirty-five more years, although failing vision forced him to leave the bridge and join the purser's staff. For a period he even found himself serving aboard the *Olympic*. A

widower, he retired to the town of Pitcombe, England, where he lived with a niece until his death in December 1961."

*Titanic* disaster he had seen his certificate ordered surrendered by the Board of Trade when his eyesight was just as good as it had always been.

It seemed the Pitman case may have sparked a small rebellion among officers at White Star, because the company announced pay and watch improvements in April 1913, and also that:

"The officers will not, as hitherto, be required to undergo the sight tests at the Board of Trade, but will be examined by the company's own doctor."

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[For more on the lookouts' eyesight, see  
<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/discus/messages/5914/5022.html>]

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Courtesy of Senan Molony

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