

A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



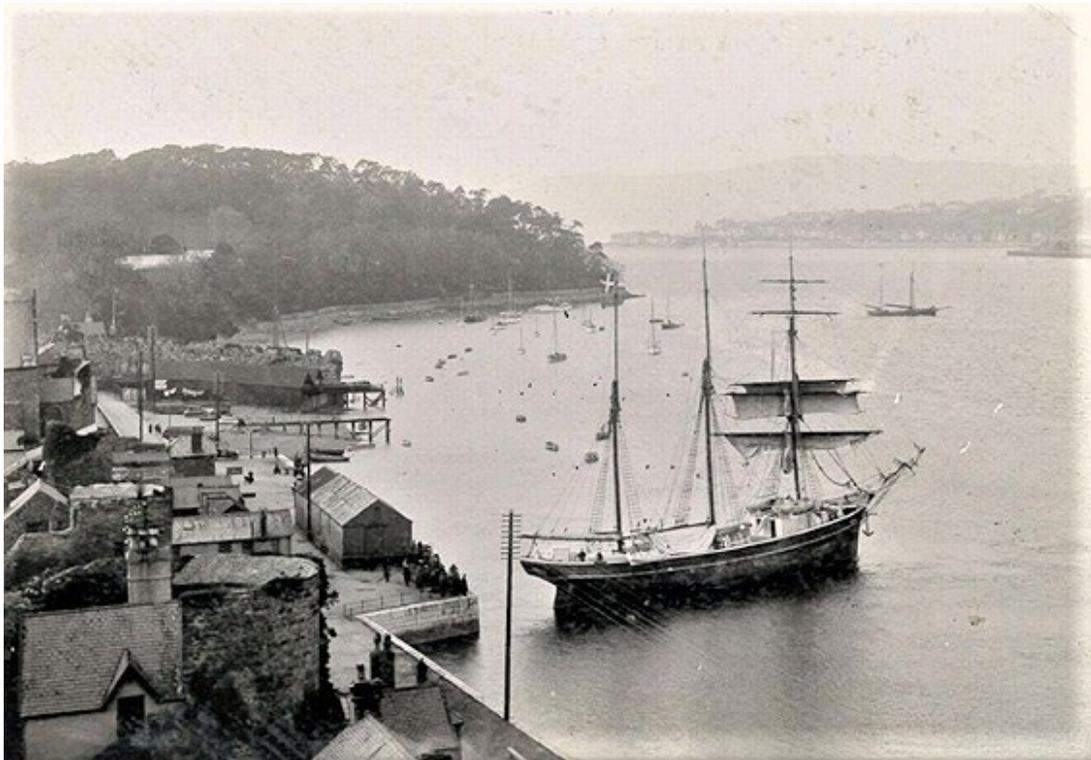
FIFTH OFFICER LOWE

TITANIC'S FIFTH OFFICER



Harold Godfrey Lowe
Credit: Wikipedia

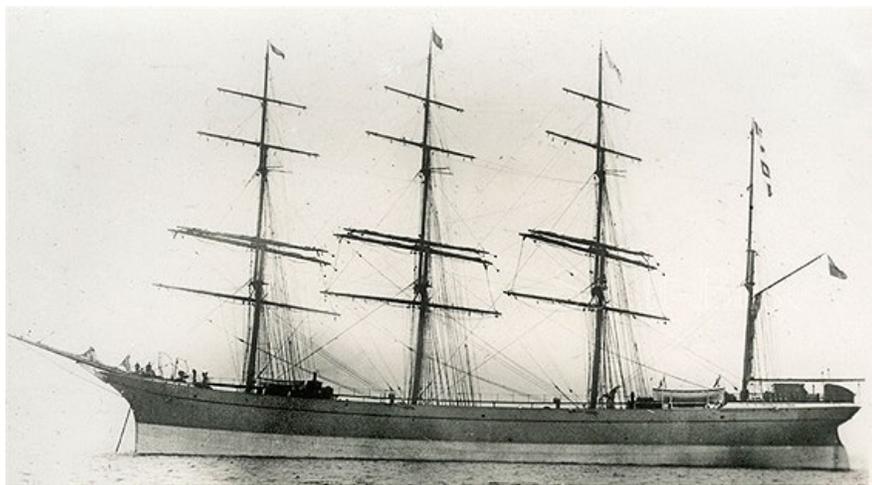
Harold G. Lowe was born in Conwy County Borough, Wales, in 1882. His family operated a jewelry shop called Lowe & Sons (still in business). Growing up near the shore, he became a skilled sailor and a good swimmer; he once swam a half mile to shore when his boat capsized. Described as highly intelligent and bold, he ran away at about age 14, when his father tried to apprentice him to a business man. Saying, "I wouldn't work for nobody for nothing," he went to sea aboard coastwise sailing vessels as an ordinary seaman.



English barkentine, Conwy Harbor Wales
Credit: Titanic Officers

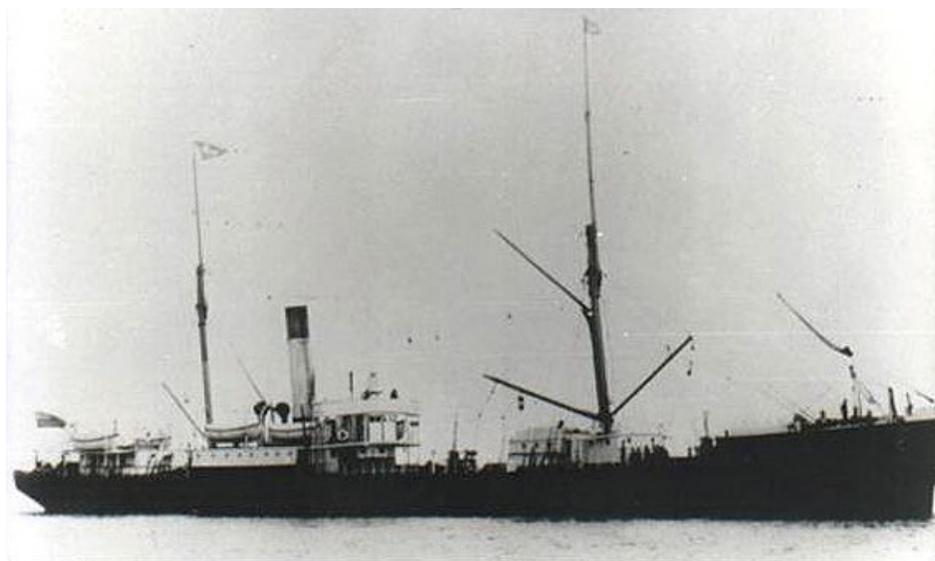
SEAFARING CAREER

Graduating to sea-going square riggers, Lowe signed on the large four-masted bark Cortez as an able-bodied seaman in 1901. He continued in deep water sail, joining the crew of the new four-masted bark Ormsary in 1903 and spending more than 14 months on the big windjammer.



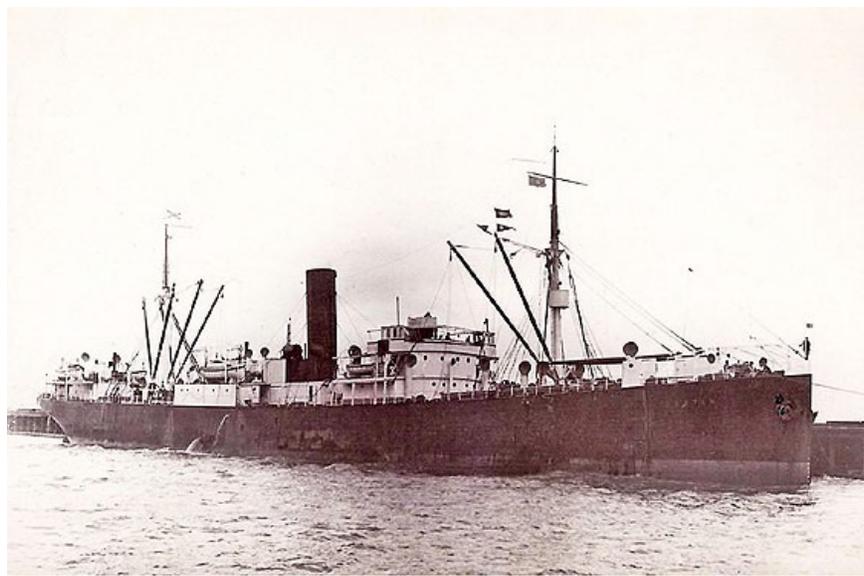
Barks Cortez (L) and Ormsary (R)
Credit: Titanic Officers

Lowe circled the globe, visiting numerous ports, including Australia and Hawaii. He delayed taking his Second Mate's examination to join his first steamship, Prometheus, and the Royal Naval Reserve. However, his time on Prometheus was brief, as the ship was involved in a collision. (Lowe appeared as a witness during the inquiry.) Signing on the steamer SS Telemachus as able-bodied seaman, Lowe sailed to Japan via Seattle. He finally sat for his Second Mate's license in 1906.



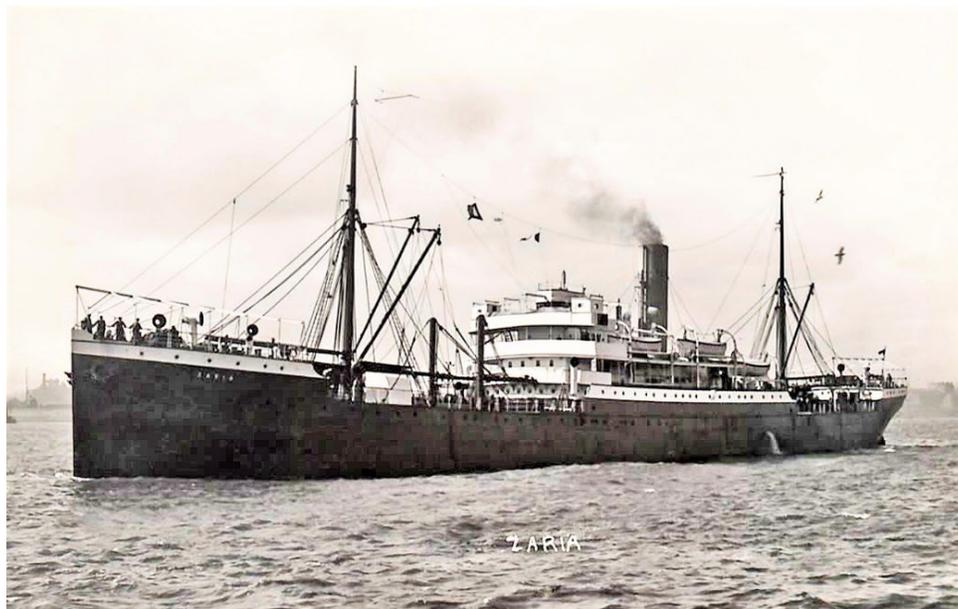
SS Telemachus
Credit: Titanic Officers

Failing the test on his first attempt, he returned to sea aboard the SS Justin. He retook and passed his examination 7 months later.



SS Justin
Credit: Titanic Officers

Having a Second Officer's license didn't guarantee employment as an officer, but Lowe held out and secured a position as Third Officer on a small cargo steamer, SS Ardeola, out of Liverpool, bound for the Canary Islands. Heading into the West African trade, Lowe was on two ships as Fourth Officer until March 1907. Looking to advance in rank, he failed his First Mate's certificate but received a passing grade a week later. He signed on as Second Officer on an aging ship, SS Madeira, then interrupted his career for more than a year to care for his ailing mother, who suffered a stroke and died in 1909. After receiving his Master's Certificate in 1910 (proud of his experience and accomplishments, he had his license framed), Lowe returned to the British and African Steam Navigation Company and made his last voyage for them on the steamer Zaria.



SS Zaria
Credit: Scottish Built Ships

After completing his trip to West Africa in 1911, Lowe sought out a new company, the White Star Line. Filling out his service form with White Star, he indicated that he had served no apprenticeship but was a "hawsepipe officer," a freelancer who had started from scratch in the maritime trades. His first White Star ship was the steamer Tropic on the Australian route.



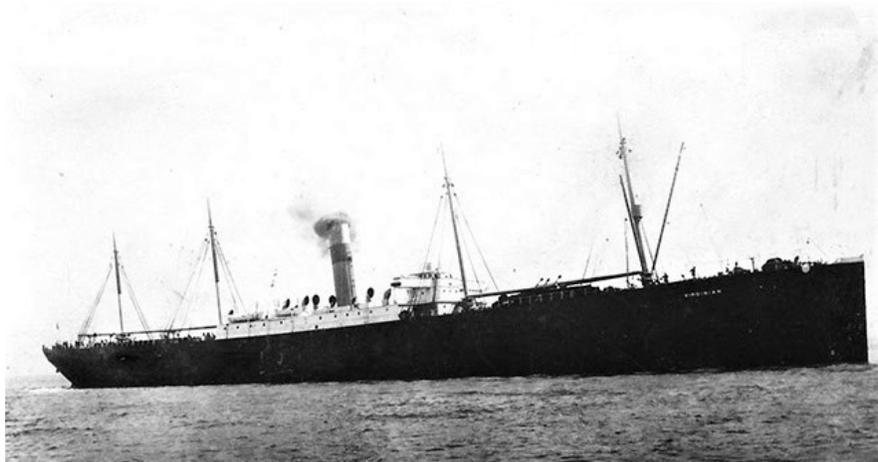
SS Tropic
Credit: Wikipedia

From September 1911 to March 1912, Lowe was Chief Officer on the sail training ship Mersey, purchased by White Star to train cadets. The training voyages went to Australia. Seemingly a retrograde career move, Lowe's broad sailing experience was put to good use. Under his supervision, the boys continued their general education and learned maritime skills, such as navigation, meteorology, charts, and ship construction. Other Titanic officers were also involved with Mersey: future Titanic Chief Officer Henry Wilde was briefly in command, and Third Officer Herbert Pitman served as an able-bodied seaman.



Training ship Mersey
Credit: Wikipedia

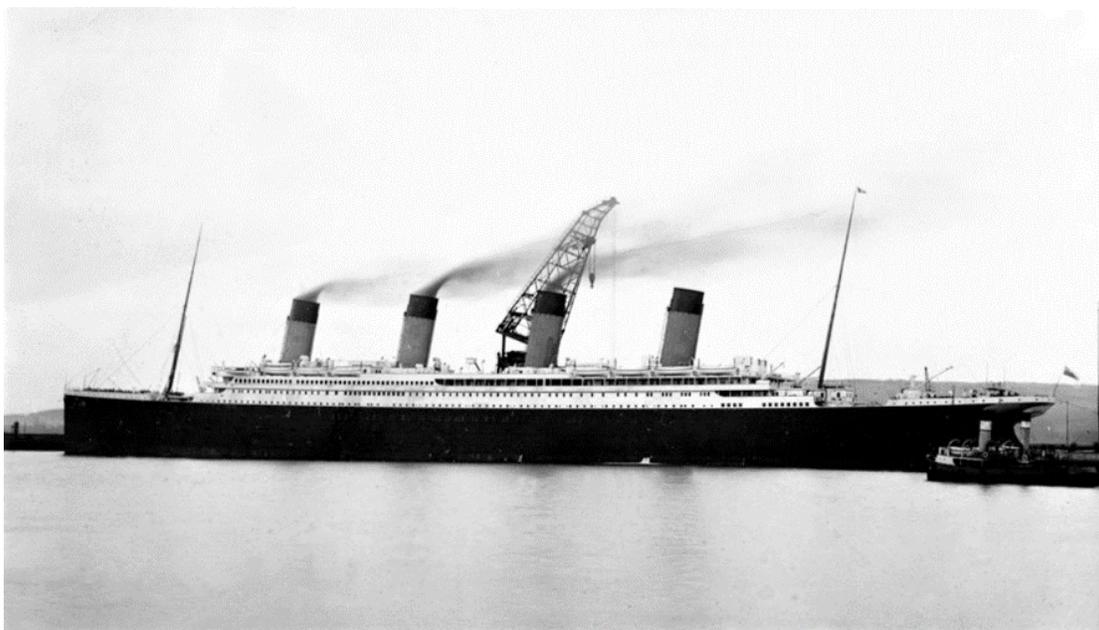
Lowe's next assignment was on White Star's SS Belgic. However, a coal strike prevented her from sailing, so Lowe, now 29, was transferred to Titanic, arriving at Belfast on noon of March 27, 1912.



SS Belgic
Credit: Waratah Revisited

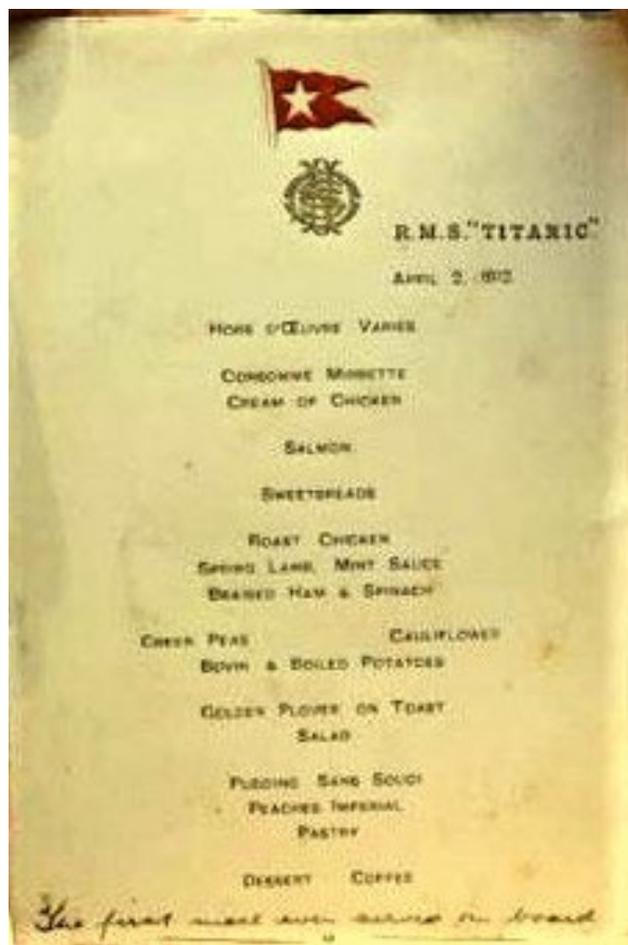
TITANIC'S MAIDEN VOYAGE

Reporting to First Officer William Murdoch, Lowe's first duty was to inspect the lifeboats, ensuring they contained all the necessary equipment. Lowe understood, as did all junior officers, that senior officers were in charge of running the ship, and junior officers took care of the rest. Titanic's sea trials, delayed by a day because of high winds and squally conditions, began on the early morning of April 2.



Titanic at Belfast; sea trials postponed
Credit: Reddit

Sea trials consisted of steering maneuvers, emergency stopping, traveling at speeds of different engine revolutions, calculating fuel consumption and other assessments. Once sea trials were completed, the workmen went ashore at Belfast, and Titanic proceeded to Southampton to begin her maiden voyage. Lowe describes the weather as clear and calm. Titanic arrived in Southampton at midnight, and Lowe was assigned day duty from 9am until 5pm. A final test, lowering and retrieving two starboard-side lifeboats, was made on sailing day. During departure, Lowe was stationed on the bridge, relaying pilot George Bowyer's orders to other officers by telephone. When meal service began, Lowe took a menu, wrote on the bottom, "first meal served on board," and mailed it to his fiancée, Ellen Whitehouse. He had his own cabin and settled into his duties as Fifth Officer, pleased with the order and discipline of his new routine.



First meal menu signed by Lowe
Credit: Titanic Officers

On April 14, Lowe plotted Titanic's position at noon and again on the second dog watch (6pm-8pm). That afternoon, he had noticed a slip of paper with "ice" written on it. It was still there when he came on watch at 6pm. Noting the position where ice was reported, and with Titanic's engines producing her highest speed yet, he calculated that they would not be near the ice region during his watch. Relieved at 8pm, and exceedingly tired, he fell asleep, undisturbed by the collision a few hours later. He was woken by the sound of passengers just outside the officers' quarters on the boat deck and was shocked to see women milling about wearing lifejackets. Heading to his station, he felt that his feet weren't falling quite right, straying forward toward the bow.

Working with Third Officer Pitman and gathering his crew to lower the lifeboats, Lowe determined that each boat could hold 50 people without buckling. Other officers were more conservative and loaded about half that number. Given the situation, Lowe accepted the risk and loaded his boats. Passengers stumbled on the rope falls (the tackles used to lower the boats), and Lowe, known for his short temper, scolded them to watch their step. White Star Managing Director Bruce Ismay, increasingly unnerved by the ship's condition, was waving one arm in big circles and shouting, "Lower away, lower away," severely interfering with lowering boat No. 5. Lowe, having had enough, shouted, "If you'll get the hell out of the way I'll be able to do something! You want me to lower away quickly? You will have me drown the whole lot of them." Another dilemma was finding seamen who could handle both oars and sails (the boats were equipped with sailing rigs). Lowe would later say at the inquiries, "Few seamen are boatmen, and few boatmen are seamen." Working in the intense rush of the distress rockets, Lowe successfully lowered four starboard-side boats, then went to the port side, but not before fetching his personal Browning automatic pistol, in case he had to maintain order. Lowe joined Chief Officer Wilde to load women and

children into boats Nos.14 and 16. Because boats were being sent off without officers to command them, Lowe was urged to take charge of No. 14 by Sixth Officer Moody, who said he would command the next boat. As No. 14 began descending, Dr. John Simpson handed Lowe a flashlight, saying that he would likely have better use of it. Lowe never saw him again. With the boat slowly jolting down (its haphazard progress alarming the occupants), Lowe grew concerned about the growing desperation he could see on the faces of those still on Titanic. Fearing the sudden weight of men jumping on the boat would cause it to buckle and dump everyone into the sea, he fired his pistol twice between the ship and the boat, keeping male passengers at bay. The rope falls jammed a few feet above the water and had to be cut. The boat fell with a splash, straining some planks and causing leaks that the women passengers kept under control.

Lowe took his boat 150 yards from Titanic, close enough to render assistance if needed. Using his whistle, he signaled other boats to gather together under his command. In the dark, he heard what he thought were explosions and saw Titanic sink. Hearing the shrieks in the night, Lowe organized his little fleet for rescue work. While distributing the passengers, Lowe noticed a young man wearing a shawl placed over his head by a woman passenger, in an attempt to disguise his sex. In a rage, Lowe flung him bodily into the bow of the boat alongside but said nothing. He set off toward the diminishing cries in the dark. Boat No. 14 returned to the wreckage and picked up six male passengers (one later died). A Chinese stoker was seen clinging to a door. Lowe refused to pick up a "Jap" but reconsidered, his displeasure turning to admiration as the man rowed through the night. Lowe set sail and began removing people from boats that were swamped, taking another in tow for the rescue ship Carpathia and telling his boat crew to keep a sharp lookout for anyone who might appear alive. Boat No. 14 was picked up after 7am.



Lowe steering (standing) boat No. 14 and towing collapsible D to Carpathia
Credit: Titanic Officers

Lowe, later praised for his rescue actions, was also criticized for his brusque attitude, use of profanity and insensitive suggestions ("A good song to sing would be, Throw Out the Life Line," and "I think the best thing for you women to do is to take a nap."). Some accused him of consuming alcohol. Insulted by the accusations of drinking, Lowe made it plain during the US inquiry that he was a teetotaler and abstained from liquor. Pointing to a glass of water in court, he said, "...that is the strongest drink I take." Lowe returned to England with the other surviving crew to face the British inquiry. To avoid a repeat of the difficulties in the American inquiry, and on the advice of counsel, he kept his answers short and polite. Even so, he was rebuked for his

contempt for other nationalities and was compelled to apologize for his derisive statements about Italian male passengers.

Returning home in June, Lowe was given a large reception, honored with a gold watch and dubbed, "the true hero of the Titanic." He resented the attention. Returning to sea with White Star, he couldn't escape his celebrity, even in Australia. Sick of the constant fawning, he refused to discuss Titanic. He married in 1913 and entered the Royal Navy for training in gunnery. He was temporarily assignment to Lord Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory.



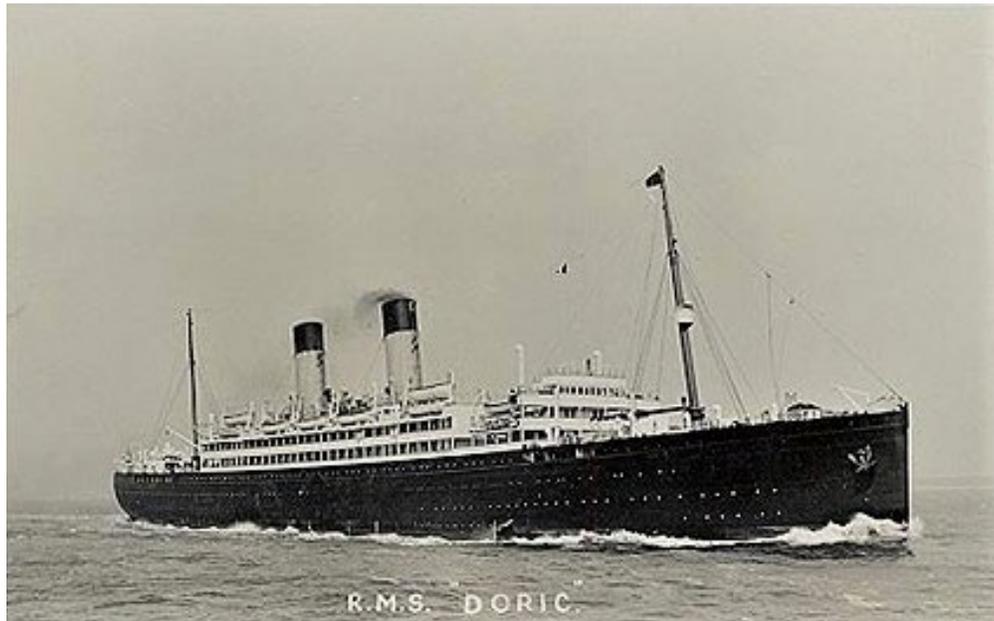
HMS Victory
Credit: Wiki Commons

When World War I broke out in 1914, Lowe was sent to duty with the Royal Naval Reserve. Serving on a number of warships in the European theater, he deployed to Japan and Russia aboard HMS Suffolk.



SELF IN WINTER RIG
Lowe with friend in HMS Suffolk, Vladivostok
Credit: Titanic Officers

Discharged from naval service in the summer of 1919, Lowe returned to the merchant marine on an old steamer. However, with the post war shipping recession in the early 1920s, work was scarce, and Lowe experienced some lean years. He secured a position shipping to Australia, eventually returning to the North Atlantic. He joined his final White Star ship, SS Doric, as Second, then First Officer, staying with her until he retired in 1931.



SS Doric

Credit: White Star Ships

Lowe spent his retirement boating, fishing and shooting. During an outing on a friend's boat, he fell overboard and nearly drowned but was rescued and taken home to recuperate. Even 20 years after the Titanic disaster, Lowe remained tethered to the ship: local papers reported, "Titanic survivor rescued, fell into river." At the start of World War II, Lowe served as an air raid warden. Suffering from a stroke and the long-term effects of malaria, which he had contracted during the years he had sailed to West Africa, Lowe became wheelchair-bound. He died in 1942 at age 61, the first of the surviving Titanic officers to pass away. He is buried near his home in Conwy County.

Sources: British and American Wreck Inquiries; Post WW1 recession, Wikipedia; A Night to Remember by Walter Lord; Crew of the Titanic by Gunter Babler; Titanic Officers; Titanic and other ships by Charles Lightoller