

A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



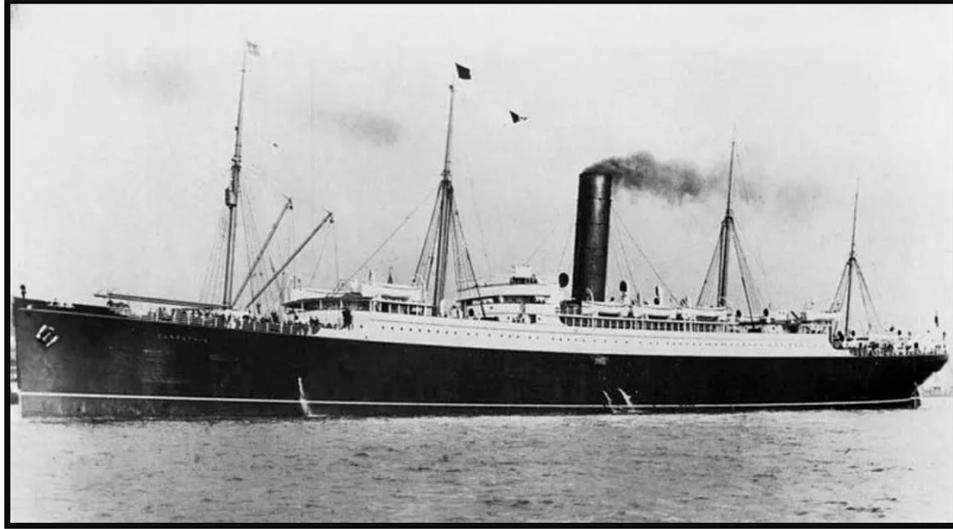
Image credit: Chris's Titanic page

RMS CARPATHIA

TITANIC: CARPATHIA

INTRODUCTION

In addition to their premier transatlantic liners, major steamship companies transported people and goods on intermediate ships, which were considerably smaller. Designed to carry nearly as many passengers but in more modest accommodations, and more cargo, they were economical to run. The White Star Line's intermediate vessels traveled from Liverpool to Boston, New York, New Zealand and Australia, while those owned by White Star's great rival, Cunard, traveled from England to Canada and the Mediterranean. By operating at a modest speed of about 14-15 knots, they were good investments and steady earners.



RMS Carpathia
Credit: Pinterest

Built in 1902, RMS Carpathia was such a vessel. Fitted with a single funnel and four masts, she presented a sturdy yet graceful appearance. She had a crew of 300 and carried well over 2,000 passengers, mostly in Third Class, and could carry more than 12,000 tons of dry bulk and refrigerated cargo. Officially classed as a saloon and Third-Class passenger/cargo steamer, Carpathia's twin screws were powered by seven boilers and two 4-cylinder quadruple expansion engines, producing about 9,000 horsepower. Entering service in 1903, she provided steady and reliable service from Liverpool to Boston in the summer and from New York to Mediterranean ports in the winter, transporting mostly Hungarian emigrants. Popular with passengers, her accommodations were enlarged in 1904. Pricing was economical; Third-Class passage worked out to about a half penny a mile.



Carpathia Interior
Credit: Jake Rutigliano



Wireless Operator Harold Cottam
Credit: Wiki Fandom

THE WIRELESS OPERATOR: HAROLD COTTAM

Harold Thomas Cottam was born in 1891 in Southwell, England, the oldest of five brothers. After grammar school, he entered the British College of Telegraphy in London. A fast learner, at age 17, Cottam was their youngest graduate. Obtaining a post with the Marconi Company (all wireless operators in Britain worked for Marconi, not the steamship lines), he joined his first ship, Empress of Ireland. He held a variety of assignments on land and sea, circling the globe twice and doing a stint with the British post office. He reported aboard Carpathia in February 1912. In the early hours of April 15, Cottam was on Carpathia's bridge reporting the day's messages when Titanic's first distress calls went out. Back in his wireless shack to turn in for the night, Cottam listened for another ship to confirm a previous message. While undoing his shoelaces, he heard some wireless traffic for Titanic from Newfoundland and Cape Cod. As a courtesy, he contacted Titanic to let her know there were messages waiting in the queue. Titanic's senior wireless operator, Jack Phillips, immediately tapped back a distress call urging Carpathia to rush to their aid. Taking in this astonishing message, Cottam ran to the bridge. Both he and the officer on watch rushed to Captain Rostron's cabin to wake him with the stunning news.



Captain Arthur Rostron
Credit: Wikipedia

THE CAPTAIN: ARTHUR ROSTRON

Arthur Henry Rostron was born in Lancashire, England in 1869. He attended the training ship Conway at age 15 and was apprenticed to the Waverly Line aboard the iron clipper Cedric the Saxon. After serving on numerous windjammers and steamships and joining the Royal Naval Reserve, he earned his Master's License in 1894. Joining Cunard, he became 4th Officer on the liner Umbria. He worked on six Cunard ships before being called to serve in the Royal Navy during the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. Upon his return, he was appointed 1st Officer aboard RMS Lusitania for her maiden voyage. At the last minute, he was promoted to captain and transferred to the small cargo vessel Brescia, the first of many Cunard ships he would command.

By 1912, Rostron had been at sea for 27 years, 17 with Cunard. This was only his third month as Master of Carpathia. Rostron had retired for the night when Cottam and 1st Officer Dean burst into his cabin without knocking. After confirming the news with Cottam (and before scolding the two for a clear failure of discipline), Rostron ordered Carpathia to turn around and hurried to the chart house to work out his course. It was providential, he later wrote, that Cottam had not gone to sleep.

THE RACE THROUGH THE NIGHT

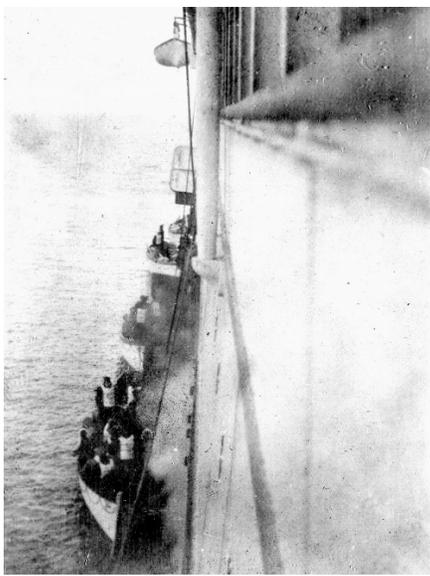
Harold Cottam returned to the wireless shack, adjusted his set and re-established contact with Titanic. Asked when Carpathia would arrive, he replied, 4 hours; far too long. While Cottam worked his set and kept the captain informed, Rostron formulated a plan: rouse out all the engineering staff and make all possible steam; prepare lifeboats and derricks, the medical staff, stewards and pursers; prepare food and accommodations; the captain and officers to give up their cabins to survivors; keep Carpathia's passengers calm; rig lights and ladders, open gangway doors and rig slings to lift the injured on board. These and numerous other preparations were in place as Carpathia began her 58-mile run to Titanic. At 1:45 am, Cottam heard Titanic's last clear message, "Come as quickly as possible, old man, the engine room is filling up to the boilers." As the distance closed between the two vessels, Cottam implored Phillips to stay tuned in to his signal, then silence. All eyes strained to see Titanic in the dark when suddenly a faint and brief green glow was seen low-down on the horizon. Reflected starlight revealed an iceberg. Carpathia turned hard, then saw another iceberg and made another hard turn. The ship avoided six large icebergs and never slowed. All hands kept a sharp lookout for more icebergs and the elusive green glow. Rostron fired rockets and Cunard Roman candles, the company signal. Carpathia lunged ahead at 17 knots, shuddering with the effort, faster than she would ever go again, her crew restless with excitement. At 4 am, they reached the spot. In the quiet sea and starry night, Rostron stopped his engines.

DELIVERANCE

A dazzling and empty sea lay before Rostron, where Titanic should have been. As he tried to piece together what happened, the green glow again flickered low ahead, dimly revealing the shape of a lifeboat and momentarily highlighting another large iceberg. Rostron maneuvered Carpathia clear of the ice, shielding the lifeboat from the rising wind. It was boat #2, commanded by 4th Officer Boxhall. After the boat was alongside and the survivors safely on board, Boxall reported to Rostron on the bridge. Barely able to control his voice, he said what Rostron already knew; Titanic had foundered.

Morning twilight displaced the darkness, slowly illuminating the expanse of field ice, intermingled with several giant icebergs. As the sun rose, and colors fanned out, the incredible, dream-like sight overwhelmed all who saw it. A young boy in a lifeboat exclaimed, "There's the beautiful North Pole with no Santa." Lifeboats were scattered over several square miles. Titanic's 5th Officer Lowe wisely gathered four boats together, making Rostron's job a bit easier. In the rising breeze, Lowe set sail and towed one distressed boat toward Carpathia. A number of men, precariously standing on a capsized lifeboat, were retrieved by another boat. Rostron carefully maneuvered Carpathia to provide shelter from the rising wind, and one by one, the lifeboats, tiny specks on the ocean, made their way to the ship. Survivors were lifted aboard, or helped up pilot ladders; few words were spoken. Carpathia's passengers gave survivors clothing and other essential items. Children were hustled into galleys to thaw out.

Bruce Ismay, manager of White Star Line, was given Carpathia's doctor's room, where he remained alone. Vulnerable to those seeking a scapegoat for the tragedy, it was the start of an opiate-addicted, self-imposed exile that lasted to his death in 1937. By 8:30 am, only one lifeboat, #12, remained to be picked up. With the wind increasing, and the boat dangerously overloaded, Rostron hurried to shelter them from the wind. Finally, the survivors were taken on board; sadly, it was too late for one of them. Before departing the mournful scene, Rostron called for the Episcopalian clergyman on board to hold a brief service of thanks and respect. While prayers were said, Rostron took a last look around for lifeboats as Carpathia steamed slowly through Titanic's wreckage. There was only one body among the flotsam. Satisfied that all survivors were on board, Rostron rang for full speed to New York.



Titanic lifeboats alongside Carpathia
Credit: Britannica



Survivors aboard Carpathia
Credit: Britannica



Carpathia at Pier 54, New York
Credit: Titanic Facts

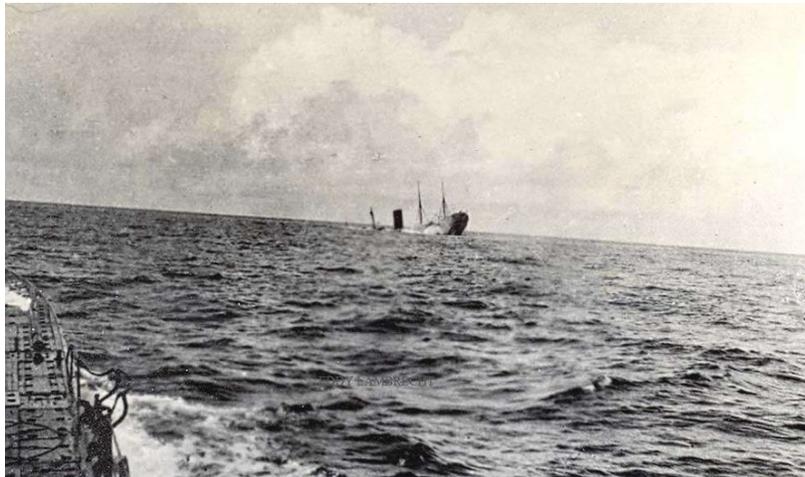
EPILOGUE

From the morning of April 14 until late on the 18th, Harold Cottam worked continuously sending messages. He fell asleep once at his desk, and Titanic's injured junior operator, Harold Bride, came to assist. Carpathia's wireless set was of limited range, so only the names of survivors were being sent, relayed to New York by Titanic's sister ship, Olympic. Cottam brushed aside radio requests from newspapers; he and Rostron considered getting survivors' names to their families a priority. Cottam was accused of holding on to the story for personal gain. However, during inquiries following the disaster, he stated that he only sold his story, with Cunard's permission, for \$750 to "The NY Times." Cottam worked for another 10 years as a wireless operator, coming ashore when he married in 1922. He eventually took a job selling Mini Max fire extinguishers. He was modest about his role in the rescue and turned down offers to play himself in films about the disaster. Harold Cottam died in 1984 at age 93. He was cremated, and his ashes were scattered in the Garden of Rest in Nottingham, England.

Captain Rostron ordered as many of Titanic's boats hoisted on board as possible. Three bodies were recovered from the boats. One survivor died on board the morning of the rescue; all were buried at sea. While preparing to leave the area, Rostron was considering where to take his unexpected passengers. Halifax was close, but ice ruled that out. Continuing east toward the Mediterranean would tax Carpathia's food stocks. The costliest to Cunard was to return to New York, but Rostron decided this was best. Weather would be good, and it would land Titanic's people where they were headed.

Early news of the disaster was sporadic. In the early morning hours of April 15, it was known that Titanic had struck ice, but little else. Scarce information led to outlandish newspaper headlines. However, by the evening of the 15th, it became apparent that the ship and most of those on board were lost. After testifying at the disaster inquiries, Rostron received numerous awards, including the Congressional Gold Medal from President Taft. He left Carpathia the following year and continued his maritime career. He eventually became Master of the most prestigious and largest liners operated by the Cunard Line. His Atlantic crossings were so punctual, that passengers dubbed them, "Rostron's Express." During WWI he again went to war, this time in the Gallipoli campaign against the Ottoman Empire. Rostron retired in 1931 and wrote his autobiography, "Home from the Sea." While on a visit to his daughter, he contracted pneumonia and died in November 1940 at age 71. He had spent 46 years at sea.

Thousands lined the Hudson River shores in the rainy evening of April 18 as Carpathia delivered Titanic's survivors to Cunard's Pier 54. When she left New York on April 20 to resume her interrupted voyage, cheers went up for ship and crew; Capt. Rostron doffed his cap to return the salute. Flags on the ship and throughout the city were at half-staff. Carpathia resumed ferrying passengers across the Atlantic until the beginning of WWI, when she was converted into a troopship to carry American and Canadian soldiers to Europe. She left in convoy on July 15, 1918 bound from Liverpool to Boston with 223 persons on board. Two days later, while steaming on an evasive course to avoid submarines west of Fastnet Rock, Ireland, the ominous wake of a torpedo was spotted. The rudder was put over but it was too late; the torpedo hit under the bridge. Moments later, a second torpedo struck Carpathia in the engine room, killing five firemen and injuring two engineers. The captain ordered abandon ship and fired rockets ordering other ships in the convoy to scatter. Fortunately, Carpathia died slowly, giving her 218 passengers and crew time to escape. The captain, officers and gunners remained on board to dispose of code books and other secret information. Once the documents were destroyed, Captain William Prothero summoned a lifeboat to evacuate the remaining crew. U-55, frustrated by her foe's stubborn refusal to sink, surfaced and fired yet another torpedo into the mortally wounded ship. Carpathia sank in 10 minutes, over 2½ hours after the first torpedo hit. U-55 menaced the lifeboats until an escort, HMS Snowflake, arrived and opened fire. The survivors were picked up and landed in Liverpool. The most famous rescue ship in history rests in 500 feet of water, 200 miles off the Irish coast.



Carpathia's last moments, taken from U-55
Credit: Wikipedia

Sources: NY Times, Owlcation, The Great Ocean Liners, Encyclopedia Titanica, Tumblr, Chris's Cunard Page, GG Archives, Wikipedia, Fandom, Wikiquote, History, Titanic Facts, Jake Rutigliano, Pinterest