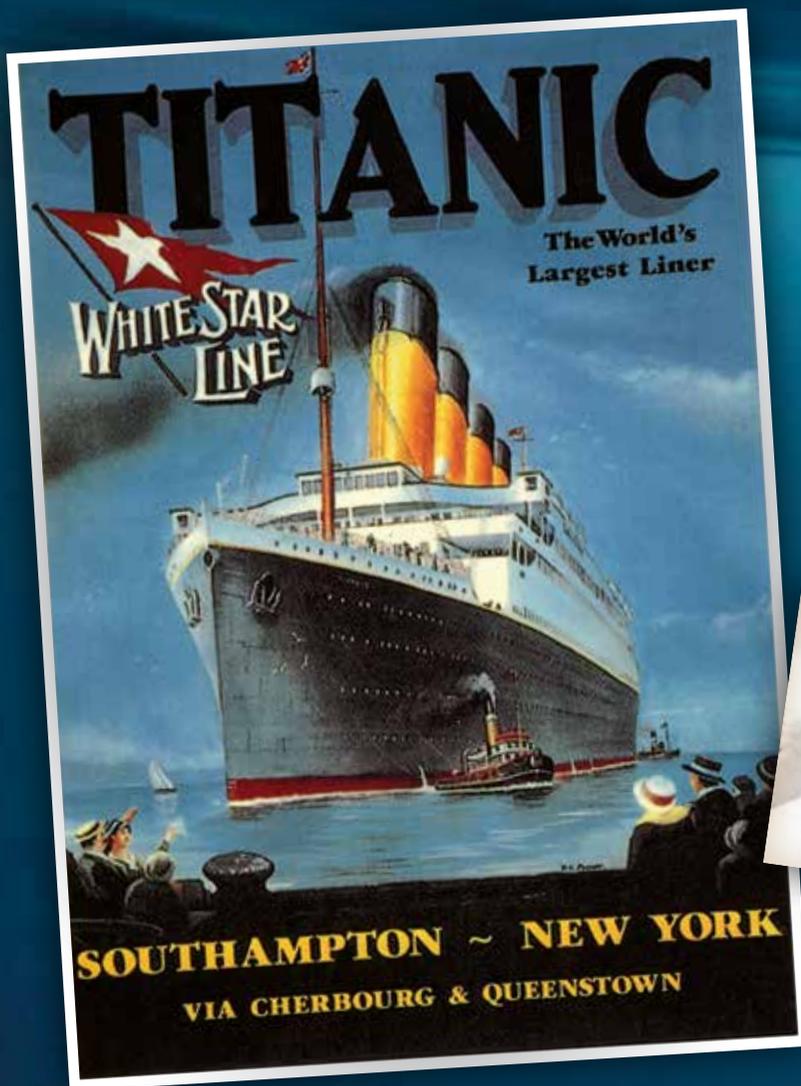


# INTO THE DARK



Jack Thayer (above) was thrilled to be aboard the most luxurious ship in the world.

Nonfiction

THROUGH  
YOUR EYES

TRUE  
TEEN  
STORIES  
FROM  
HISTORY

# WATER

Jack Thayer, 17, was on the voyage of a lifetime. But then disaster struck. As the *Titanic* began to sink, he was separated from his parents and lost almost all hope for survival. **BY LAUREN TARSHIS**

TURN THE PAGE  
to read this story.





## AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

The headline of this article, “Into the Dark Water,” has a literal and figurative meaning. In other words, it symbolizes more than just the *Titanic* sinking into the sea. Think about this as you read.

**I**n just a few hours, the *Titanic* would be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Some 1,517 people—men, women, and children—would be dead.

Yet at 11:00 that evening, April 14, 1912, there was not the slightest hint of doom in the air. Jack Thayer, 17, had come outside to admire the brilliant sky before going to bed. The stars were shining so brightly that they reminded Jack of diamonds. The ocean was perfectly calm. All was quiet except for the steady hum of the ship’s engines and the whistle of a gentle breeze.

“It was the kind of night,” Jack would later recall, “that made one glad to be alive.”

Indeed, this bright and curious boy from Philadelphia had much to feel glad about. He and his parents were returning from a two-month trip to Europe. Everywhere Jack looked, he saw signs of a fast-changing world—a world made brighter by new electric lights, made faster by motorcars and steam engines,

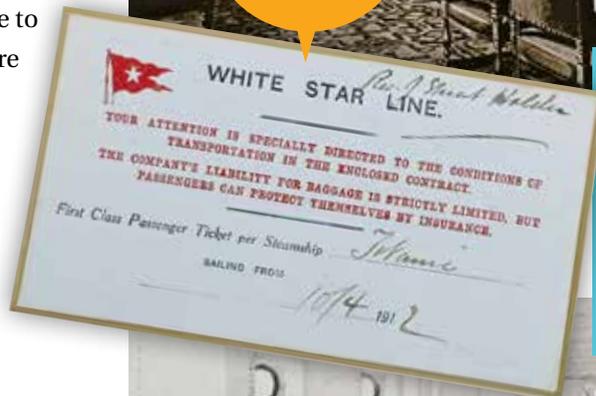
made safer by breakthroughs in science and engineering.

And perhaps nothing on Earth embodied these changes more perfectly than the *Titanic* itself—the biggest, most elegant, most technologically advanced ship ever built. How lucky Jack felt to be on its first transatlantic voyage.

Even the Thayers, a family of wealth and privilege, were dazzled by the ship’s grandeur. Their large first-class cabins were as **lavish** as rooms in the finest European hotels. There was an array of luxurious **amenities**, many of which had never been offered on a ship before. There was a swimming



First-class tickets cost \$4,000 (about \$90,000 today).



While Jack Thayer and the 353 other first-class passengers dined in extravagant restaurants (above), nearly a thousand second- and third-class passengers ate in cafeterias like the one below. The White Star Line made most of its profit conveying thousands of ordinary people across the Atlantic.



Many third-class passengers were on their way to America to start new lives. Their rooms, though cramped and much less fancy than those in first class, were far more comfortable than on other liners.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: SSPL VIA GETTY IMAGES; PA PHOTOS/ABACAPRESS.COM/NEWS.COM; SSPL VIA GETTY IMAGES; UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY IMAGES

pool with heated ocean water and an exercise room staffed with a professional trainer. Savory meals were served on dishes etched with 22-karat gold.

Jack, with his **dapper** wool suits and worldly confidence, mingled easily with the tycoons and power brokers he met in the first-class salon and dining rooms. He especially enjoyed his conversations with Thomas Andrews, the designer of the *Titanic*. Andrews was modest by nature, but he couldn't deny that the *Titanic's* maiden voyage was a magnificent success. In three days, the ship was due to arrive in New York to great **fanfare**.

### "Unsinkable"

It was almost 11:30 when Jack went back to his cabin, which was next to his parents' suite. He called good night to his mother and father. Just as he was about to get into bed, he swayed slightly. He realized the ship had veered to the left—"as though she had been gently pushed," he would later say.

The engines stopped, and for a moment, there was a quiet that was "startling and disturbing."

Then Jack heard muffled voices and running footsteps. He threw on his overcoat and slippers, told his parents he was going to see what was happening, and rushed outside. Soon he was joined by a crowd of first-class passengers, including his father. Jack wasn't worried. Indeed, there was a mood of adventure, especially after word

spread that the ship had struck an iceberg. The men in the crowd joked and puffed on cigars as they craned their necks and squinted into the dark night. They all wanted to see the **audacious** object that had dared interrupt the voyage of the great *Titanic*.

"Nobody yet thought of any serious trouble," Jack would recall. "The ship was unsinkable."

That's certainly what most people believed: that the *Titanic's* state-of-the-art safety features—16 watertight compartments to contain flooding—would keep the ship afloat no matter what. So it was with no sense of urgency that Jack and his father roamed the ship, trying to find out when they would again be under way.

But then Jack and his father saw Andrews standing with several of the ship's officers. Andrews's grave expression sent a stab of fear

through Jack's heart. If anyone understood the truth about the *Titanic's* plight, it was the man who knew the ship inside and out.

And the truth was dire. The iceberg's jagged fingers had clawed through the steel hull. Water was gushing into the ship's lower levels. "The *Titanic* will sink," Andrews said. "We have one hour."

That, though, was only half of the horrifying story. As Jack would soon learn, the *Titanic* had only 20 lifeboats, enough for about half of the passengers and crew members.

The *Titanic* was 800 miles from New York. The temperature of the ocean was 28°F. Immersed in water that cold, a human body goes into shock almost immediately. The heart slows. The skin begins to freeze. Death comes within 80 minutes.



For those who couldn't escape by lifeboat, there was almost no hope of survival.

## Lost in the Crowd

Jack put on a warm wool suit and a sweater. He tied on his life preserver and slipped into his overcoat, then rushed back up to the deck with his parents. What they found was confusion and deafening noise—people shouting, distress rockets being fired into the air. Jack was with his parents and his mother's maid, Margaret Fleming. They were soon joined by a young man named Milton Long, whom Jack had befriended at dinner earlier that night. The group made their way through the ship, hoping to find a lifeboat.

Suddenly they were in the middle of a surging crowd of panicked passengers. To Jack's horror, he and Milton were separated from his parents and Margaret. He searched desperately but could not find them. He became convinced that they had all boarded a lifeboat, leaving him behind. And there were no lifeboats left.

Jack and Milton were on their own.

Amid the noise and panic, the screams and shouts and explosions, Jack and Milton tried to **bolster** each other's courage as the ship continued to sink. "I sincerely pitied myself," Jack said, "but we did not give up hope."

They determined that their best chance for survival was to wait



**“Down, down I went, spinning in all directions.”**—Jack Thayer

until the ship was low enough in the water that they could jump in without injuring themselves.

That moment came at about 2:15 a.m. The ship lurched forward, its **bow** plunging deeper into the black waters of the Atlantic. Jack and Milton shook hands and wished each other luck.

Milton went first, climbing over the railing and sliding down the side of the ship. Jack would never see him again.

Jack threw off his overcoat and, he later said, “with a push of my arms and hands, jumped into the water as far out from the ship as I could. . . . Down, down I went, spinning in all directions.”

He struggled to the surface, gasping from the cold, his lungs near to bursting. He had been

floating for only a few minutes when one of the ship's enormous **funnels** broke free. In a shower of sparks and black smoke, it crashed into the water just 20 feet from Jack. The suction pulled him under the water once again. This time he barely made it back up.

But as he surfaced, his hand hit something—an overturned lifeboat. Four men were balancing on its flat bottom. One of them helped Jack up. From there, they watched the *Titanic* in its final agonizing moments—the stern rising high into the sky, hundreds of people dropping into the sea, the lights finally going out.

Then, in a moment of eerie quiet, the ship disappeared into the sea.

The silence was broken by

the first **plaintive** cries for help. People—hundreds of them—were scattered everywhere in the water, kept afloat by their life vests. The individual cries became “a continuous wailing chant” of terror and pain and desperation, Jack said.

Over the next few minutes, he and the others on the lifeboat managed to pull 24 men out of the water alive. The group was “packed like sardines” on the boat, their arms and legs tangled together. Freezing waves washed over them. Nobody moved for fear of slipping into the water.

Little by little, the terrible wailing faded.

Floating in the silent blackness,

numb with cold and fear, Jack waited for death.

But then came a light—at 4:30 a.m., a ship called the *Carpathia* broke through the darkness. Its captain had received the *Titanic's* distress call and rushed his ship through the icy waters. Among the first faces Jack saw when he boarded the rescue ship was his mother's. Margaret was also aboard.

The joy of their reunion was overwhelming—but so was the shock when Jack's mother asked a simple question.

“Where is your father?”

As it turned out, Mr. Thayer had not left on a lifeboat.

“Of course, I should have known

that he would never have left without me,” Jack said.

The *Carpathia*, carrying the *Titanic's* 705 grief-stricken survivors, docked in New York City on April 18 and was greeted by a crowd of 30,000 people. Jack and his mother then returned to Philadelphia.

Jack went on to marry, had two sons, and attained a powerful position at the University of Pennsylvania. Years later, he wrote his own account of the sinking of the *Titanic*, dedicated to his father's memory. In it, he writes that the *Titanic's* demise signaled the arrival of a new and uncertain era, one with



The sinking of the *Titanic* was the first disaster to be covered in “real time.” Operators on the ship (above) used a telegraph (a precursor to the telephone) to send messages about their situation and location. Thousands gathered in New York City (right) to get updates, which were written on a large board.



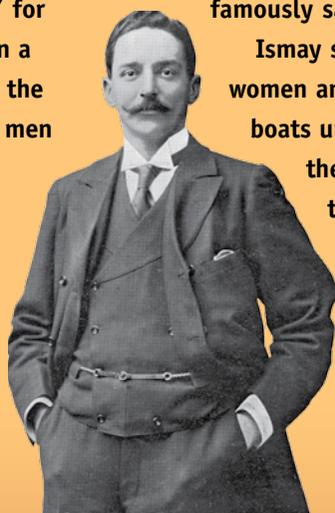
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: BETTMANN/CORBIS; STAPLETON HISTORICAL COLLECTION/HIP/THE IMAGE WORKS; ALAMY

# “The Coward of the *Titanic*”

Millionaire J. Bruce Ismay managed to get on a lifeboat before the *Titanic* sank. The world never forgave him.

**M**ost of the *Titanic*'s survivors were treated as heroes, but one man was scorned around the world: J. Bruce Ismay, president of the White Star Line, which owned the *Titanic*.

Ismay was branded “the coward of the *Titanic*” for having taken a seat on a lifeboat. According to the “code of the sea,” all men were to step aside until every woman and child had been saved. Indeed, only 19 percent of the *Titanic*'s men survived. Many men in first class who



died were celebrated for their gallantry. Millionaire Benjamin Guggenheim changed into his evening clothes and waited out the sinking while sipping brandy with his assistant. “We’ve dressed up in our best and are prepared to go down like gentlemen,” he famously said.

Ismay swore that he helped women and children onto boats until moments before the sinking. He said he took a spot on the boat only because there were empty seats and no more women and children to fill them. But others,

including Jack Thayer, said they saw Ismay forcing his way onto a boat. Some claimed that despite reports of icebergs, Ismay had urged Captain E. J. Smith to run the *Titanic* as fast as possible in order to break speed records.

Later, these accusations were largely dismissed. Some people defended Ismay, pointing out that one cannot blame a man for how he behaves in a moment of panic and shock. Nevertheless, Ismay was despised for the rest of his life.

Ismay never recovered from the shame. He retired from White Star the next year and lived in seclusion. He never spoke about the *Titanic* again.

“less peace, satisfaction, and happiness.” Indeed, the coming decades brought two bloody world wars and widespread economic hardship.

As for Jack himself, he never seemed able to regain the feeling

of confidence and excitement he’d felt as he stood on the *Titanic*'s deck that April night, gazing up at the brilliant stars. He lived most of his life in his hometown of Philadelphia. In 1943, he suffered another tragic loss, when his oldest

son was killed in World War II. Jack sank into a deep depression. And this time he could not pull himself out of the swirling blackness.

The heroic survivor of the *Titanic* took his own life at the age of 50. ●

## CONTEST

**Layers of Meaning** What are the literal and figurative meanings of the headline, “Into the Dark Water”? In other words, what does the “dark water” symbolize? Use details from the article and sidebar in your response. Send it to **TITANIC CONTEST**. Five winners will get Deborah Hopkinson’s *Voices From the Disaster*. See page 2 for details.

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