**The Titanic Script**

Hi. Good morning. Before we start, as usual, don't forget if you go to my site stevenaskew.com you can download the MP3, the script, some listening questions and sample answers for this whole talk and all of my other talks. Also, if there are any topics you'd like me to talk about, please put them in the comments section below here.

Right, today, we're going to talk about the Titanic. Now, I'm pretty sure you all know of the Titanic. You've probably seen the movie. James Cameron's almost four-hour movie. The director cut I think is over four hours. And that covers a lot of the story. Anyway, let’s go into it in a little more detail today.

First, let's talk about the background. So, the Titanic was owned by the White Star Line. The White Star Line started in about 1850ish, and they owned many ships, and they were primarily concerned with the England America leg, across the Atlantic. Now, in about 1908 or 9 ish, they decided they wanted to build some more ships, so they commissioned three Olympic class ships. The Titanic was not built on its own. The Titanic had two sister ships. They were called the Britannic and the Olympic. Now, all three of the ships were pretty much identical. They varied in very slight details, but if you looked at them in a photograph you probably wouldn't know which was which. All three of these ships, funnily enough, have actually sunk. The Olympic sank in 1916 and the Britannic also sank in 1916. If you've heard any of my earlier talks, you might know that I don't agree with coincidences. So, let's just say that that's not a coincidence. 1916, of course, was World War One. Many ships were sunk in the Atlantic in World War 1. It's not unusual for two ships to have been sunk. Anyway, Titan, from Titanic, means giant.

Now, the White Star Line at that time had a number of rivals. One of the rivals they had was the Cunard Line. The Cunard Line, their ships were known as being much faster so, where the White Star Line couldn't compete in speed, they tried to make up for it in luxury. So, the Titanic was billed as the largest and the most luxurious ocean liner the world had ever seen.

The Titanic was 296m long 32m high. It weighed 53,000 tons and it could carry 3,547 people. The biggest ship of its date. However, if you compare it to the biggest cruise ship of today, the Harmony of the Seas, the Harmony of the Seas is 362m long, 66m high, 227,000 tons and can carry 6,687 people. Almost twice as many people. So, although the Titanic was very very large, by today's standard, it's not that big.

The Titanic was divided into three main classes of passengers. You had the first class to second class and the third class. First class being the best of course. The most expensive room on the boat was a suite, the grand suite, which cost £870, which in today's money is about $100,000. The cheapest rooms, the cheapest room, the cheapest bed cost about £3, which is about $350 of today's money. There were a lot of people emigrating to the Americas at that time, so, there were a lot of third class passengers on most ships, especially on the Titanic. There was a US agent called Anna Herkner who actually wanted to test the main cruise ships, the main ocean liners of the three main companies, so she disguised herself as a third-class passenger and she took trips on three of the different main boats and she discovered that actually the White Star Line's service for third class passengers was the best. The other lines, Cunard for example, they just basically gave a large open space for these third-class people to be in. The food wasn't very good, the service was pretty terrible. However, the White Star Line had separate rooms for the people, they had decent food, a dining room for the third-class passengers, and they also provided free postcards so once the third-class passengers arrived they could write back to their family, which is, which is of course good advertising strategy, because these people are going to say, you know, “White Star Line was pretty good. If you come to America come on the White Star Line.” It was good advertising. But the standard of service on the White Star Line, especially the Titanic was actually pretty good.

OK. So, what happened? You've all seen the movie. You know that the boat sank, obviously. So, let's look at how it happened. The captain of the Titanic was Captain Edward Smith. He was the most senior captain on the White Star roster. He was sixty-seven years old. He had been a captain for a long long time. He was very very trusted. He was given charge of this very important boat. The boat left Southampton on the 10th of April 1912, sailed briefly to France and then went on to Ireland, a town called Queenstown. On the 11th of April the boat left Queenstown, sailed out into the Atlantic, aiming for New York. Obviously, it never reached there. On the 14th of April at 11:40 pm, the ship, the Titanic hit an iceberg. The front of the boat, some of the plates on the side were bent in, the boat filled with water. It started to sink. At about 2:20 in the morning the boat broke in half, sank completely. 2,224 people were aboard the boat. Of those 1,503 died. About two hours after the Titanic went down another boat called the Carpathia arrived and picked up the survivors. 705 people survived. Luckily … Luckily is maybe not the right word, I don't know, but before the Titanic sailed there was actually a coal strike in England, and, because of that, a lot of ships had been canceled. So, the Titanic was sailing with a much lower number of passengers than could otherwise have been expected. The boat could carry a lot more than it actually did. Luckily, because of the coal strike, the number of people that died was much lower than it could have been or should have been. So, the boat snapped in half. It sank. People searched for the wreck for a long long time. It wasn't until 1985 that they found the wreck. That's generally because people thought the boat had gone down as one piece, but it actually broke in half and the two halves were about a kilometer apart from each other. So, in 1985 they found the wreck.

So that's what happened. Now, let's look a little bit at why it happened, which is probably more important. I think there are maybe ten main reasons why this disaster occurred. Let's look at them. Firstly, the captain. Very few ships sink without the captain being at least partly responsible. Captain Edward Smith, he is the oldest, the most senior captain in the White Star fleet. He has a lot of responsibility. He has been entrusted with the biggest, the most famous, the most expensive boat in history. He has a lot of pressure riding on him to get this boat across the Atlantic in a record breaking time. He also has a lot of pride in himself, in his own abilities and he has a lot of confidence in his ship. He said a few years before he was made captain of the Titanic that because of modern technology no ship would ever sink again. He was proven wrong, of course, but that does show how confident he was in his ship's ability to stay afloat no matter what. And, of course, the Titanic was built with floodable compartments. The bottom of the Titanic was split up into compartments and if any three of those compartments flooded the Titanic would not sink. So, he had a lot of faith in his boat. Because of that he pushed it much further, much faster, much further north than he would possibly otherwise have done.

Now, the second thing is Bruce Ismay. He is the chairman of the White Star Line. He's sailing on the Titanic. He is also under a lot of pressure to get this ship across the Atlantic as fast as possible, so he would have put pressure on the captain to go faster. To sail when possibly he should not have done.

The rivets. Rivets are pieces of metal that seal two other pieces of metal together. You basically put a hole through the metal. A rivet is like a screw, an unthreaded screw, that goes through, another piece of metal is closed on the end and it seals together. Because it's made hot, when it gets cold it contracts and it holds the metal together. Now, they have brought some of these rivets up from the bottom of the sea, from the wreck, and they are not made of the best iron possible. The rivets are a little bit inferior. Also, the rivets at the front of the boat, where it actually hit the iceberg, were set by hand rather than by a machine. That's because … because of the shape of the boat. They couldn't get the machine to that area, so they used inferior rivets done by hand and what happened when the i … when the Titanic hit the iceberg is these rivets actually popped, they sheared off, which made the problem worse. It doesn't mean that even if the boat had had good rivets it wouldn't have sunk, but it could be one of the factors.

Number four: a lack of binoculars. Of course, now we have radar. We can see what's coming from hundreds of kilometers away. Back then they didn't, they relied on people with their naked eyes looking out at the horizon with binoculars. Now, for whatever reason, the Titanic had forgotten their binoculars. Also, that night it was dark. So, it's a dark, moonless night with no binoculars. Trying to look at a horizon to see icebergs that are coming is almost impossible, but there is another reason.

Now, the radio operator on the Titanic is another reason why this disaster could possibly have been prevented. Now, on the Titanic the radio operator, in fact on most boats, the radio operator did not work for the boat. Most radio operators were employed by a telecommunications company, in this case Marconi, and their job on the boat was to send out communications from the passengers, generally the first class, the wealthy passengers. So, the radio operator on the Titanic, his job was to send and receive messages for the passengers not to send and receive messages for the ship, so, when the Titanic was warned of icebergs as they were, they were warned about six or seven times, this is number six by the way, they were warned about six or seven times of icebergs, the radio operators responsibility wasn't to listen to that but to send out their own correspondences. In fact, there is recorded evidence of the radio operator actually shutting up a warning from another ship. He said, “Shut up, shut up I'm talking to somebody somebody,” because he's trying to do his job. Also, of course, radio operators did not work twenty-four hours a day. They had to sleep, so, during the night, there wasn't any radio communication.

Number seven: Thomas Andrews. He is the architect, the designer of the Titanic. He actually wanted to make larger bulkheads. Down in the bottom of the ship, these bulkheads, these compartments that filled with water. The bulkheads were supposed to go up higher but if they did that they wouldn't be able to put in as many rooms, they wouldn’t be able to carry as many passengers. So, because of money, these bulkheads were made much lower than the architect actually wanted. If they'd been made to his standard, possibly when the first compartments filled, the water wouldn't have flowed over into the other ones. Again. that's not a definite reason. but it could have been a contributing factor.

8. Here's a big one. The S.S. Californian. This is another ship captained by a man called Stanley Lord. Now, what this ship did, it sailed into the area the Titanic is in and it actually stopped because of the warnings of the icebergs. And when Stanley Lord later spoke to the investigators about this, his story changes a lot, but it looks like the S.S. Californian was about ten kilometers away from where the Titanic stopped and sank, and the people on the S.S. Lord, the ones that were not asleep, they saw the Titanic sail. Then, when the Titanic started to sink, of course, it fired its emergency flares, its emergency rockets. The people on the S.S. Californian saw those rockets, but didn't think they were an emergency message, they just thought that maybe they were celebrating, I guess, and then when the lights went out on the Titanic, they didn't think anything of it. The Titanic sank. It wasn't until the following morning that they found out the ship had sunk and then they sailed in to help. If they had sailed in as soon as they saw the rockets go off the Titanic. there is a very high probability that they would have saved almost everybody on the Titanic. Stanley Lord, he lived with that through the rest of his life. Obviously, he tried to clear his name, basically until he died, but it's difficult to clear your name when you're pretty much obviously at fault. So, if the S.S. Californian had sailed over, then maybe the disaster wouldn't have been the disaster it is, of course.

Number nine: the temperature of the water. Water will draw temperature away from your body much faster than air will. If you go outside in the cold winter and take of all your clothes, you're going to be cold. If you then cover yourself in water, you're going to be even colder. The water in that area was so cold that anybody that jumped off the ship would die in about four minutes because of hypothermia, because of the temperature being pulled away from your body your internal organs, your heart would basically just stop in about four minutes. So, unless you were on a boat, it was impossible to be saved, basically.

Now here is the big one: lifeboats. The Titanic only carried twenty lifeboats, and that … those twenty lifeboats had the capacity of carrying 1,178 people, which is obviously not as many people as there were on the boat. A full Titanic would have almost twice as many people as that, although, by the laws of the day, the Titanic was carrying more lifeboats than it actually had to do. It wasn't required to carry that much. And lifeboats were seen differently as they are today. The idea of a lifeboat was to ferry passengers from a sinking ship to a rescuing vehicle, a rescuing ship. Nobody envisioned that a ship like the Titanic would go down in the middle of the sea and people would have to survive on lifeboats for a prolonged period of time. Nobody expected that to happen. The idea was, you would get on a boat, a lifeboat, the lifeboat but would take you to the rescuing vehicle, come back, get some more passengers and repeat. So, you didn't need enough lifeboats to carry all of the people at once. Obviously, in the case of the Titanic, this becomes unfortunate because they have to survive at sea for about two hours until the Carpathia arrives. Another problem, of course, was that most of the crew on the ship were not professional sailors. Only about five percent of the crew were professional sailors, the rest were waiters and hotel staff and engineers and machine operators and things like that, and they were not trained for emergency evacuations. So, the majority of these lifeboats left with very few people on them. In fact, one lifeboat with a capacity of sixty-five people actually sailed away with only twenty people on it, which is obviously not good. So, if they had filled the lifeboats properly, they could have saved many more people.

So, the Carpathia managed to save 775 people. Later on, other boats came back to try and pick up the deceased, but of course most of them didn't float. They managed to s … they managed to bring 333 bodies back to port. Most of those were first class people. The logic was that first-class people they were … they would have to see the body to ensure that inheritances proceeded smoothly. Second and third-class people were not so important so, generally, they were buried at sea. If you look at the number of people that died. I printed out some statistics here. It's difficult to see. If you want to pause the video you can have a look at that. That's actually from Wikipedia. But, if you calculate these percentages, the number of people saved in first class: seventy one percent of passengers were saved. In second class, sixty four percent and in third class thirty two percent. People of the day were very angry at this, very upset at this. It seemed that rich people were saved and poor people were not. One of the reasons, of course, is that the first-class people were higher up in the ship. The third-class people were at the bottom of the ship which flooded first, but again, it is pretty unfair. Also, if you break it up by gender or age, seventy two percent of children were saved, seventy six percent of women and only nineteen percent of men. The idea of course, the chivalrous idea of course, that was women and children first, so, a lot of men gave up their seats for women and for children. There are some … there is one story of a rich person who dressed up as a woman to try and get on the boat, and there are people who jumped on the boats to try and get to safety but, generally, it seems that the men gave up their seats for the women and the children which is very heroic, but also very sad.

So, what happened afterwards? What is the aftermath? What are the results of the Titanic sinking? Well, good did come out of this. No ship since the Titanic has been sunk by an iceberg. The first change, of course, was lifeboats. It became mandatory that boats, that ships had to carry enough lifeboats for all of their passengers and modern life boats are also equipped with food and G.P.S. and satellites and motors and lots of things like that. So, boats, ships had to carry enough lifeboats for every passenger on board. Also, passengers had to go through lifeboat drills, along with the crew. People had to be trained in emergency evacuation procedures. If there is a disaster, people usually panic. If you've trained, if you've practiced, it's much easier to get through safely and it's much easier to save more people. So, these kind of lifeboat drills were made mandatory as well. Twenty-four-hour radio became mandatory. Radio operators, radio stations on ships had to be worked twenty-four hours a day. Of course, now, with different ways of communication, wi-fi, Internet, all that kind of thing, it becomes a little bit different, there is no one radio operator but, the ships had to be in contact all the time. They had to be contactable all the time as well. Obviously, a law was made that if icebergs were sighted ships had to slow down. That goes without saying. And last, an international ice patrol was created. Now, the International Ice patrol’s job was tracking icebergs that floated through the sea. They did this with airplanes and with helicopters. Now, of course, it's done with satellites and G.P.S. and radar, but up until the invention of that it was done by helicopters and planes and they would release this information worldwide, so every ship in the sea would know where the icebergs were and could avoid them. So, since the Titanic, no ship has been sunk by an iceberg. So, the Titanic, because of its romance, because of the impact, because of the number of people that went down, because it was supposed to be unsinkable and it sank, because of many many things, it has entered mythology almost. The story of the Titanic has become one that everybody knows and I hear next year, 2018, you're going to be able to take submarine tours to the Titanic. I'm not sure how that's going to work, but some people have even talked about trying to bring the Titanic up, but I doubt that will ever happen either. Anyway, this was interesting. This was fun. Thanks for listening. I’ll talk to you next time. Bye.

**The Titanic Questions**

1. What is the odd thing about the Titanic and her sister ships?

A: They all cost a lot of money

B: They all sank

C: They were all fast

D: They were all identical

2. How did the White Star Line try to compete with the Cunard Line?

A: By having faster ships

B: By having ships that could sail farther

C: By having more luxurious ships

D: By having more ships

3. Why were there a lot of third-class passengers on the Titanic?

A: They were travelling to see friends and family

B: They wanted to get the free postcards

C: They were going on vacation

D: They were emigrating to America

4. Why was Captain Edward Smith put in charge of the Titanic?

A: Because he was the most senior captain

B: Because he was friends with the chairman of White Star

C: Because he had sailed on the Titanic before

D: Because he knew where America was

5. What effect did the coal miner’s strike have on the disaster?

A: They had to stop in Ireland to get more coal

B: They couldn’t carry as much coal as they needed

C: There was not enough coal to power the boat’s engines

D: There were fewer passengers on the boat than there should have been

6. Why did it take so long to find the wreck?

A: It was too expensive to look for it

B: Nobody knew where it had sunk

C: They couldn’t travel deep enough

D: They thought it sank in one piece

7. Why did Captain Smith think the Titanic was unsinkable?

A: There were many ways it could sink

B: He had a lot of responsibility

C: It had a new system to detect icebergs

D: Because it used modern technology

8. What happened to the rivets when the Titanic hit the iceberg?

A: They became very cold and shrank

B: They sheared off

C: They were made of inferior iron

D: There were not enough of them

9. Why was the Titanic’s radio operator sending messages for the passengers?

A: He was employed by a telecommunications company

B: He had to contact his friend

C: He ignored many warnings of icebergs

D: He didn’t know how to do his job

10. Why did the cold water kill people quickly?

A: Because they had to swim for a very long time

B: Because they were outside without any clothes on

C: Because cold water draws heat away from your body quickly

D: Because there was not enough space on the lifeboats

11. How did people expect to use lifeboats at the time of the Titanic’s sinking?

A: To be kept on board and not used

B: To take them to their place of destination

C: To survive on for a long time

D: To transport people to a rescue ship

12. Why didn’t the crew know how to fill the lifeboats?

A: Only 5% of them were sailors

B: They were all waiters

C: The captain didn’t tell them what to do

D: They did not have enough lifeboats

13. Why were people upset when the Carpathia arrived back at port?

A: Because they took so long to arrive at the Titanic

B: Because they just sat by and watched people die

C: Because they couldn’t save everybody

D: Because more third-class people died

14. Which of these statements about the survivors of the Titanic is **not** true?

A: There were more first-class survivors than third-class

B: There were 775 survivors

C: There were more female survivors than male

D: More children survived than any other group

15. What is the purpose of the International Ice Patrol?

A: To track icebergs

B: To follow ships in the northern sea

C: To help if ships hit an iceberg

D: To watch over survivors in lifeboats

16. In 1700 it took a ship two months to go from England to America. In 1900 it took 5 days. It took Concorde (the plane) 3.5 hours. Do we take the ability to travel great distances quickly for granted?

17. How do you think the sinking of the “unsinkable” Titanic shook people’s confidence?

18. Steven says, “if you calculate these percentages, the number of people saved in first class: seventy one percent of passengers were saved. In second class, sixty four percent and in third class thirty two percent.” What do you think about this?

19. Many safety improvements came out of the Titanic disaster. Do you think this is a good thing?

20. Steven says, “it has entered mythology.” Do you agree?

**The Titanic Answers**

1. B 2. C 3. D 4. A 5. D 6. D 7. D 8. B 9. A 10. C 11. D 12. A 13. D 14. D 15. A

16. In 1700 it took a ship two months to go from England to America. In 1900 it took 5 days. It took Concorde (the plane) 3.5 hours. Do we take for granted the ability to travel great distances quickly?

 I think we most certainly do take for granted the ability to travel long distances quickly. I myself have been sat on a plane during a twelve-hour flight wishing I could make the journey shorter. I have never had to sail across an ocean, which means I cannot appreciate how comparatively fast the plane is. As with any advancing technology, people that have no experience with a previous technology are unable to appreciate what they have. My daughter has never experienced life with no Internet, so she cannot appreciate how much easier it makes our lives. I don’t think it is a bad thing, it is just the way of technology. We could just as easily ask if having a washing machine makes us take out ability to have clean clothes for granted. Of course it does.

 Thinking ourselves more fortunate than people of times gone by is futile. We would be far better to spend the time thinking how more fortunate we are than people who are currently alive. Being able to fly on an airplane puts us in the top twenty percent of the world’s population in terms of wealth. Eighty percent of people have never flown. Next time you are eating your inflight meal at 10,000m, spare a thought for all the people who will never be able to do what you are doing. And, that is what you should be appreciating and that is why you shouldn’t take it for granted.

17. How do you think the sinking of the “unsinkable” Titanic shook people’s confidence?

 Well, anything that is publicly claimed to be impossible, but then happens, will shake people’s confidence. I think, in the early 20th century, we were entering a new era of civilization. The industrial age was a century past and we were “civilizing” ourselves. Technology was reaching new heights and we were building better, stronger and faster. We had explored most of the globe, air flight was beginning, the engine was developing, electricity was becoming commonplace, and we were solving all problems we could see. We were at a peak, we thought we were invincible. So, when a disaster like the Titanic hits, we suddenly see our mortality, our frailty, our impermanence again. It is a jolt that brings us back to earth. It wasn’t the first and it won’t be the last.

 Also, the claim that it was “unsinkable” was never made until after the ship had sunk. During its construction, it was billed as “practically unsinkable”. Only after it sank did newspapers start calling it the “unsinkable Titanic”. Almost like Prometheus taking fire from the gods for man, the idea of an unsinkable ship angering the gods and being reclaimed to the depths fed into the romanticism and the idea that it was almost predestined.

18. Steven says, “if you calculate these percentages, the number of people saved in first class: seventy one percent of passengers were saved. In second class, sixty four percent and in third class thirty two percent.” What do you think about this?

 I think it is unfair, obviously, but I also see it as the way of the world. Wealthy people always have, and probably always will, get preferential treatment. As a society we complain about this, but we ultimately accept it. Occasionally we have revolutions and overthrow the rich, but it usually isn’t long before the revolutionaries become the nouveaux riche. We know our place and we dream about moving into the next class up.

 It seems that there were three main reasons why the majority of the deaths were third-class passengers. The first is that US immigration law stipulated that the immigrants be kept separate until they could be processed at Elis Island. This meant they were usually down in the bottom of the boat. This was true about all ships from Europe to America, not just the Titanic. Of course, the ship flooded from the bottom up. The second reason is that their position meant they had to work their way through a maze of corridors to get to the top of the boat. By the time the reached the top, most of the lifeboats had departed. It is interesting that a large percentage of the third-class passengers that survived were English speakers. And, thirdly, it appears that a lot of the third-class passengers were afraid to leave their belongings.

19. Many safety improvements came out of the Titanic disaster. Do you think this is a good thing?

 That depends on the meaning of this question. If it means that good things came from the disaster then, of course, yes, it is a good thing. Anything that makes a death meaningful is a good thing. If, on the other hand, it means that the disaster was a worthwhile sacrifice for the improvements that came after it, then, no, I don’t think so. The four or five safety improvements that came about from the disaster are logical ones that could have come into force even without this disaster. World War 1 was just round the corner, and it is likely that they would have realized they needed a greater number of lifeboats if they were to set to sea on an ocean full of enemy submarines. World War 1 would also have required the use of 24 hour radio contact.

 All disasters are, obviously, to be avoided, but it is a good part of our character that each accident we have makes us safer overall.

20. Steven says, “it has entered mythology.” Do you agree?

 Yes, I do agree. Through countless books, magazine articles, documentaries and movies the Titanic has become more than just a boat that sank. It has become part of our culture. There have been several ship disasters with a higher casualty rate than the Titanic, but none of them are remembered, or have been the subject of four-hour Hollywood movies. We see something special in the Titanic. An unsinkable ship being sunk. The chivalry of men standing aside to let women and children go first. People stuck on a sinking boat in the dark and the cold. We find it almost poetic in its beauty. It has become far more than it ever actually was.