



## *Article:*

### *Mysteries: Shots In the Dark*

The most controversial account of gunfire occurring on the ship as it sank was centered around Collapsible A, forward on the starboard side of the Boat Deck, as the bow was plunging into the sea. Reports from highly varied sources - many of them in personal accounts to friends or family - came to light that officers had used firearms in those last moments. Some of the most shocking among these were reports that some passengers had actually been shot by the officers. Even more shocking were reports that the officer who shot the passengers then turned the gun on himself.

We know that the officers were armed; Chief Officer Wilde had made sure of that earlier during the sinking. But which officer or officers had played a part in this event? We know that Chief Officer Wilde, First Officer Murdoch, Sixth Officer Moody and Chief Purser Herbert McElroy were all present. We know that there had to be an event that included gunfire, because otherwise there would be no reason for numerous witnesses to report it in a manner that was apparently not originally intended to become public.

But identifying the officer or officers responsible is more difficult. Not one of these men's bodies were ever found, and hence there is no forensic evidence to eliminate or single out any candidate. None of them had any apparent previous motive for suicide, but this was an extraordinary situation where tensions and emotions were running high and any one of them could have done anything in the heat of that moment.

Some have felt that First Officer Murdoch, in command of the ship when it struck the iceberg, is the most likely candidate. Based on the limited evidence at hand, perhaps he was. However, Murdoch is to this day considered a proud hero by his relatives and home town - and most rightly so. When it began to come up that Murdoch was a likely candidate - and especially after James Cameron's *Titanic* was released depicting him as the officer who commit suicide - his "defenders" were quick to point the finger in other directions.

Certainly even nine decades after the fact, the subject is highly charged emotionally. However, it must be remembered that even if one of the officers on the scene did shoot passengers in a scramble during those last moments, he was doing his duty in trying to protect the collapsible from being swamped or sunk during a panic. That that same officer would have turned the gun on himself after that might have been no more than a natural reaction to the realization that he had just taken another

person's life.

All of the officers in question worked like heroes during the sinking, and many a survivor owed their life to the efforts of these men and others. That they paid the ultimate price for their sacrifice only extols their nobility. They gave their lives that others might live. How they met their individual, tragic ends is immaterial.

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