

# The sinking of the Empress of Ireland

The sinking of the British liner, *the Empress of Ireland*, was one of the worst ship disasters in history.

The ship, carrying 1,477 passengers and crew left Canada bound for Liverpool, England. As it travelled down the St. Lawrence River on its way to the ocean, a heavy fog descended. At 1.30 pm, on the morning of May 29, 1914, The Empress of Ireland collided with the Norwegian freighter Storstad in the gulf of Canada's St. Lawrence River. The Storstad penetrated 15 feet into the Empress of Ireland's starboard side, and the vessel sunk within 14 minutes, drowning 1,012 of its passengers and crew.

The tragedy came two years after the Titanic sank after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic, leaving more than 1,500 people dead. The Titanic disaster brought about public pressure to increase safety standards on ships, so crews were trained in emergency procedures and more than enough lifejackets and lifeboats were supplied.

On collision, the water rushed into the boat. From such stories as could be gathered from survivors and from members of the crew, it appears that Captain Kendall and his officers did all that was humanly possible in the fourteen minutes that the Empress hung on the river.

Many people went down with the ship, but some managed to jump into the river, clinging to bits of wreckage and praying for help.

Some passengers managed to get into the life-boats. 120 of these were young Christian people from the Salvation Army, who had been on mission to Canada and were returning to England.

Each one of them put on a life vest stored in the life-boat. But seeing the desperate people around them struggling in the freezing water, they gave up their own safety of the life-boats as they pulled people in. They gave up their places to others and jumped into the cold water, wearing life jackets. But as they saw the people around them with no life jackets, one by one, the Salvation Army youths took off their life jackets and threw them to the people around them.

One middle-aged gentleman was thrown a life jacket by a young girl of 18. "No," he shouted, "You must have it." After all, this girl had her whole life ahead of her. Why should she die instead of him?

"No," replied the girl, throwing the lifejacket back. "You must have it. I will die better than you."

The young people chose to do this because they all knew where they were going. Around them were people who probably did not know Jesus. The young people were giving the other people a second chance to die, hopefully one day, to die knowing with Jesus rather than without Him.

The Crewmembers of The Storstad (which collided with the Empress of Ireland and left with only a broken bow) picked up survivors along with two other rescue ships. But none of the 120 Salvation Army youth survived.

Just two years before this event, the founder and leader of the Salvation Army, William Booth, had gone to be with the Lord. Before he died, he was scheduled to travel and deliver a sermon. However due to illness he could not go. Instead he sent a telegram of his sermon. The sermon consisted of just one word, "others".