

The International Ice Patrol

(From *The Friendly World*, by R.E.S. Chalmers and J. Chalmers)

The White Star liner *Titanic* sped across the Atlantic Ocean on her maiden voyage. It was almost midnight on 14 April, 1912. The stars were shining ahead. He sounded the warning bell, and telephoned his report to the bridge. For more than thirty seconds nothing happened. From his place in the crow's nest, the look-out watched with horror as the ghostly mass of ice loomed nearer and nearer. At last – it seemed almost by a miracle – the bow of the giant ship swung clear and avoided a head-on collision. Seconds later however, there was a grinding jar. The submerged edge of the iceberg had torn a great gash in the ship's side below the water-line. The sea began to pour in. The ship, which had been considered unsinkable, was doomed. In less than three hours the *Titanic* sank, with a loss of 1,513 lives.

The *Titanic* disaster shocked the world. In 1913, as a result of an international conference held in London, it was decided to send out ships to patrol the danger area. Thus, the International Ice Patrol came into being. From the beginning it has been managed by the United States. Each member country pays for the upkeep of the service according to the tonnage of its ships which pass through the patrol area.

Most of the icebergs come from the eastern and north-western shores of Greenland. The great glaciers from the mountains of Greenland, forced by the pressure of millions of tonnes of snow and ice, are forever creeping towards the sea. Every so often the lip of a glacier breaks off at the shore line. There is a thunderous roar and an enormous splash, and another iceberg is born. Thousands of these icebergs, many of them longer than a football field and higher than a twenty-storey building, float away every year. Those from the eastern shores of Greenland are swept by currents round the southern tip of the island. They are joined by icebergs from the north-western shores. In time, all are caught in the grip of the Labrador Current and carried towards Newfoundland and the shipping lanes. Fortunately, many run aground on the way and melt harmlessly in the sun. Others survive and continue to drift southwards. Eventually the icebergs meet the northward-flowing Gulf Stream, which is a current of water about twenty degrees (Celsius) warmer than the Labrador Current. In a few weeks this warmer water melts the icebergs, and the danger to shipping is removed. Thus, nature succeeds where man has so far failed. Many attempts have been made to dispose of the icebergs. Shells, torpedoes, mines, and incendiary bombs have all been tried in vain.

It is the duty of the International Ice Patrol to locate all icebergs and chart their course. This task is made more difficult because, during much of the

iceberg season, which lasts from April to July, the region is blanketed by dense fogs caused by the meeting of the warm Gulf Stream and the cold Labrador Current. Today all the resources of modern science are used to make the sea-ways safe. Every February, reports of icebergs approaching the shipping lanes are radioed to the Ice Patrol headquarters in Newfoundland. These are sent in by the United States Coast Guard.

As reports come in, each iceberg's position is accurately recorded on a huge wall map at headquarters. Patrolling aircraft and fast cutters fitted with radar keep a constant check on ice movements. Twice daily a bulletin is broadcast in Morse code to all ships in the ice area. Every four hours ships at sea report their position and speed, together with ice conditions, visibility, and wind direction.

It is the source of great pride to the International Ice Patrol that, since it began, no lives have been lost in the transatlantic steamship lanes it guards.

A Meaning in context

1. Give the meaning of each word or phrase as it is used in the passage.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) liner (l. 1) | (i) run aground (l. 30) |
| (b) maiden voyage (ll. 1, 2) | (j) dispose (l. 36) |
| (c) bridge (l. 4) | (k) torpedoes (l. 36) |
| (d) crow's nest (ll. 5, 6) | (l) incendiary bombs (ll. 36, 37) |
| (e) loomed (l. 6) | (m) chart (l. 38) |
| (f) a grinding jar (l. 9) | (n) blanketed (l. 40) |
| (g) water-line (l. 10) | (o) bulletin (l. 48) |
| (h) shipping lanes (l. 29) | (p) visibility (l. 50) |

2. Give a synonym for each word and make sentences with both words.

EXAMPLE

directly (l. 3) — straight

He looked **directly** at us when he made the remark.

We told him to drive **straight** on till he came to the traffic-lights.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| (a) ghostly (l. 6) | (f) grip (l. 28) |
| (b) gash (l. 10) | (g) duty (l. 38) |
| (c) doomed (l. 11) | (h) dense (l. 41) |
| (d) conference (l. 14) | (i) constant (l. 48) |
| (e) upkeep (l. 17) | (j) broadcast (l. 49) |

B In each case, choose the best answer.

1. We can infer from Paragraph 1 that the look-out of the *Titanic*
- was negligent in performing his duty.
 - performed his duty conscientiously.
 - was tardy in reporting what he saw.
 - informed the wrong person of what he saw.

2. How did the liner avoid a head-on collision?
 - A The iceberg floated away from the ship's path.
 - B The ship slowed down and stopped.
 - C The ship quickly changed direction.
 - D The ship reversed quickly.

3. The International Ice Patrol has as its members
 - A the shipping magnates of the world.
 - B captains of ships which ply between Europe and North America.
 - C individuals who are concerned about safety at sea.
 - D nations which want the sea-ways made safe for their citizens to travel.

4. Which statement about icebergs in the Atlantic Ocean is false?
 - A Icebergs are masses of ice which broke off from glaciers.
 - B Most icebergs come from the shores of Greenland.
 - C Icebergs cease to be a threat to shipping when they reach Newfoundland.
 - D Icebergs take a few weeks to melt in the Gulf Stream.

5. The International Ice Patrol is responsible for
 - A the disposal of icebergs.
 - B monitoring the movements of icebergs.
 - C clearing the shipping lanes of dense fogs
 - D ensuring that no accidents at all arise in the sea-ways.

6. Which of these statements is true?
 - A The International Ice Patrol has been efficient in carrying out its functions.
 - B The International Ice Patrol has been successful in keeping the sea-ways free of icebergs.
 - C The International Ice Patrol has achieved less than what it had set out to do.
 - D The International Ice Patrol is proud that it has prevented deaths of any kind in the transatlantic shipping lanes.

C Answer these questions in your own words.

1. Why do you think we can attribute the shipwreck of the *Titanic* to the look-out? You can infer the reason from the first paragraph of the passage.
2. What service was introduced to ensure that such a disaster would not occur again? How is the service maintained?
3. How are icebergs formed? Where do most of them come from?
4. "... nature succeeds where man has so far failed." Explain how.
5. For how many months does the normal iceberg season last? How are the sea-ways made safe during that season?
6. How do ships at sea and the Ice Patrol headquarters maintain contact? What do the ships report?