The Controversy Over the Paint Remnants on *Titanic's* Recovered Officers' Quarters Window

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Introduction

To establish the frame of reference for those who are not familiar with this debate, let's first show *Titanic's* recovered officers' quarters window in Figures 1 & 2.

Figure 1

Titanic's recovered officers' quarters window

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Figure 2

Close-up of adhering paint on *Titanic's* officers' quarters window

There is no paint left on the window except for a rust-colored paint remnant. This is the remnant of paint which we will consider. I believe these remnants are the same color as "dark mast' which was discussed in this article: "Dark Mast" Article.

The Case for the Paint Remnant Being Red Oxide

For reference purposes, Figure 3 represents the most common shade of red oxide paint.

Figure 3

The most common shade or red oxide paint

Curiously, the case for the paint remnants being red oxide is built almost exclusively on color. But rather than show that the paint remnants are the same color as most examples or red oxide, several examples of relatively uncommon shades of red oxide are offered instead.

I am struck by the coincidence that the examples given for the more uncommon shades of red oxide have such a similarity to the generally accepted color of "dark mast" paint. One would think that if these remnants were obviously red oxide that they would be more like the more common color of red oxide which couldn't be mistaken for "dark mast" paint. The prime example for the alternate color of red oxide given is the paint which still adheres to the officers' quarters window.

The Case for the Paint Remnants on the Officers Quarters' Window Being "Dark Mast"

The first argument against these paint remnants being red oxide is that red oxide is a primer used on ferrous metals like iron or steel to prevent the formation of rust. The officers' quarters windows are ***not*** ferrous metal. They are cast brass. There is no need for a rust preventative like red oxide over cast brass because brass can't rust.

It is also claimed that a primer like red oxide was needed to provide a better surface to which the color coats of paint would adhere. The problem with that argument is that if one examines the paint remnants on the window, there are ***no*** remnants of another paint color adhering to the surface of the paint remnants. It could be possible that there was a primer coat of some type used under the paint remnants but there is no evidence for one.

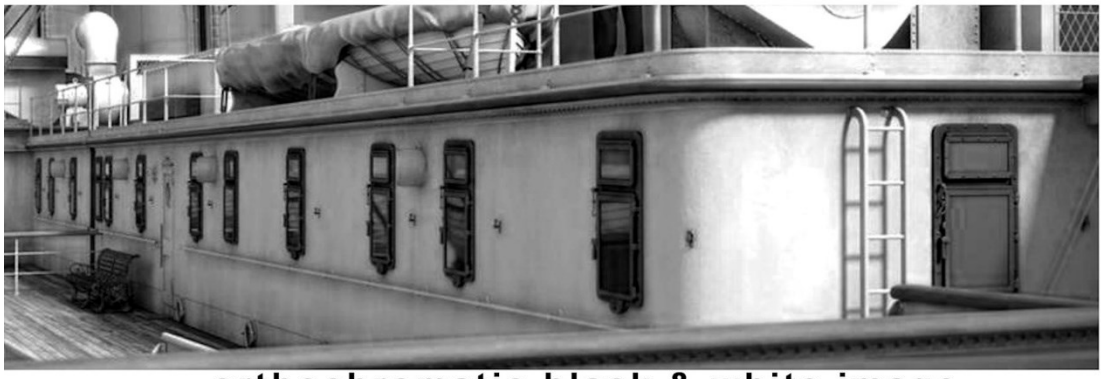
What is the origin of the theory that the color coat of the officers' quarters windows was dark brown? For many years it was assumed that the officers' quarters windows were painted a dark brown color. The reasons seem to be twofold. First there were many windows withing the public spaces on *Titanic* which had dark wood window frames. The second reason has to do with photography. There were no color photos taken of the officers' quarters window frames. Only two known autochrome color photos were taken of the Olympic class ships and neither of them show these window frames.

So, historians have been left with only black and white photos to analyze. In examining these photos, the window frames appear very dark in shade. Understandably this would lead someone to believe that these windows were painted with a very dark shade of paint. The problem with that observation is that it does not take into account the nature of black and white film in the era of *Titanic.*

The black and white photos taken of *Titanic* were taken with orthochromatic black and white film. Some of the characteristics of this type of black and white film are that it makes reds, yellows, and oranges appear very dark and it makes blues look very light. Modern

panchromatic black and white film does not have these drawbacks. Figure 4 shows a digital image of *Titanic's* officers' quarters with the window frames painted with the "dark mast" color.

color image



orthochromatic black & white image

panchromatic black and white image

Figure 4

Comparison of different types of photographic film

This digital image was made by digital artist Vasilije Ristovic. The first black and white image below the color image is a representation of how an orthochromatic black and white film image would appear. The bottom image is a representation of how modern panchromatic black and white film would appear.

I believe that the misjudgment that the color "dark mast" could not appear as dark as it does in orthochromatic black and white photos has led some to believe that the paint remnants on *Titanic's* recovered officers' quarters window couldn't be the final color coat of paint. Therefore, they had to have an explanation for the color of the paint remnants. All they could do is declare that it was actually red oxide primer then look for examples of shades of red oxide which they believed were close to the shade of the paint remnant on the window. This analysis did not start with which color the remnants matched but rather that the remnants didn't match the darker color in black and white photos. Therefore, they had to define the paint remnants as being red oxide then find uncommon shades of it as proof.

The Fallacies of the "Red Oxide Position"

1. ***The paint remnants on the recovered Titanic* officers' quarters window were too light in shade to be the final color coat for the windows.**
2. ***Red oxide was necessary as a primer coat on the windows.***

Several questions which arise are:

1. Why do you need a red oxide rust preventative primer on a metal that cannot rust?
2. If the shade of red oxide used by Harland and Wolff was for all intents and purposes the same as the color "dark mast" then why would a color coat be necessary for those areas which are painted "dark mast", such as masts, dadoes, etc.?
3. If the paint remnants were a primer to provide a surface for better adhesion of a color coat, why are there no remnants of a color coat on the paint remnants which are proposed to be a red oxide primer?

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has ben to counter the contention that paint remnants on *Titanic's* officers' quarters window are red oxide. This contention does not correspond with available evidence. Therefore, with this article and the previously linked article, I believe that the case has been made that the paint remnants are indeed the paint color coat "dark mast".