Answering the Objections to Inboard Sliding Doors in *Titanic's* Forward A Deck Crew Stairway Enclosure

By Bob Read, D.M.D

Introduction

In attempting to determine what kind of configuration was used at *Titanic's* forward A deck crew stairway entries, three realistic possibilities have been established. (From here on these will be referred to in the singular even though there are duplicate entrances on port and starboard. They are:

1. No door to cover the crew stairway entrance.
2. A sliding door mounted inboard in the stairway enclosure.
3. A lower half "Dutch door" mounted at the doorway.

All of these three possibilities have pros and cons. There is insufficient evidence at present for any one of the three possibilities to be preferred to the exclusion of the others.

The purpose of this article is to examine and counter the objections to an inboard-mounted sliding door which could close over the doorway to the enclosure.

Objections to the Inboard Sliding Door

The primary objection to having an inboard mounted sliding door in the enclosure has been that there would be the interference of framing on the inboard side of the enclosure. Figure 1 shows a hand drawn plan of the steel screen which was added (port and starboard) to the forward end of the A deck promenade on Titanic.

Go to next page

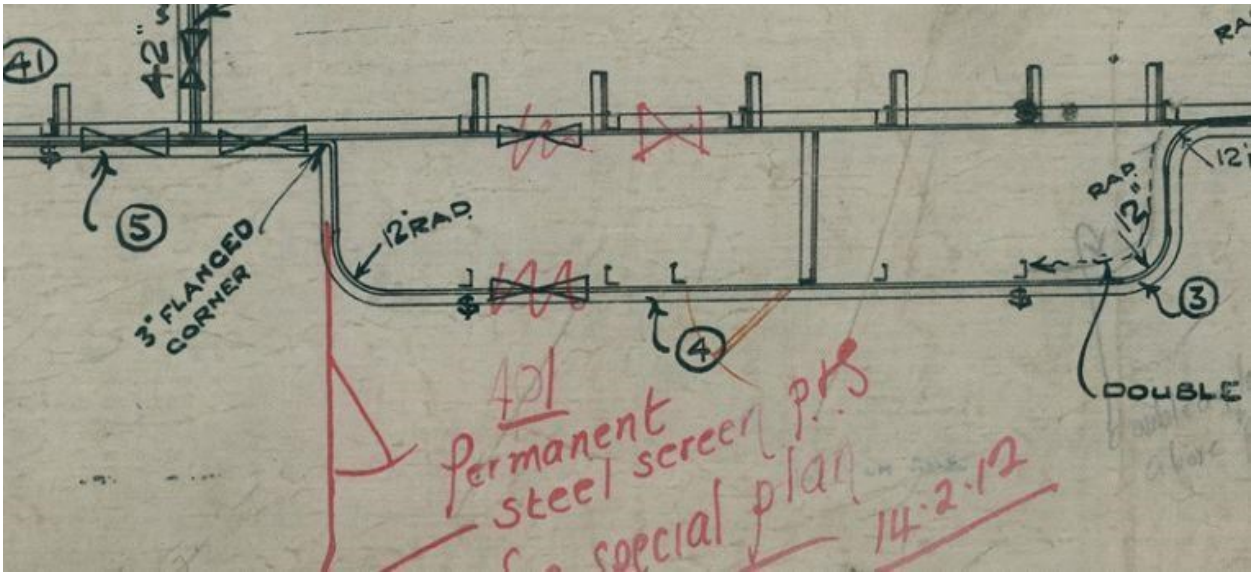


Figure 1

Plan of forward A deck promenade screen and stairway enclosure

There are also a few changes made regarding windows and the location of a doorway. The doorway drawn looks like a hinged type of door but we know from *Titanic* photos that there was no conventional hinged door.

Modifications Necessary for Installation of an Inboard Sliding Door

The requirements for a sliding door assembly are a clear horizontal space of 64 ½ inches. The opening for a 27 in. wide clear opening to the stairway through the enclosure is a 31 in. wide clear opening so that a 4 in. wide part of the door with a handle will be visible when the door is fully opened. To accomplish this this, the enclosure frame forward the door indicated on the plan must be moved forward approximately 2 ft. At this position there will be no interference to the installation and operation of a sliding door. Figure 2 shows a drawing of the inboard side of the starboard enclosure with a sliding door installed.

Go to next page

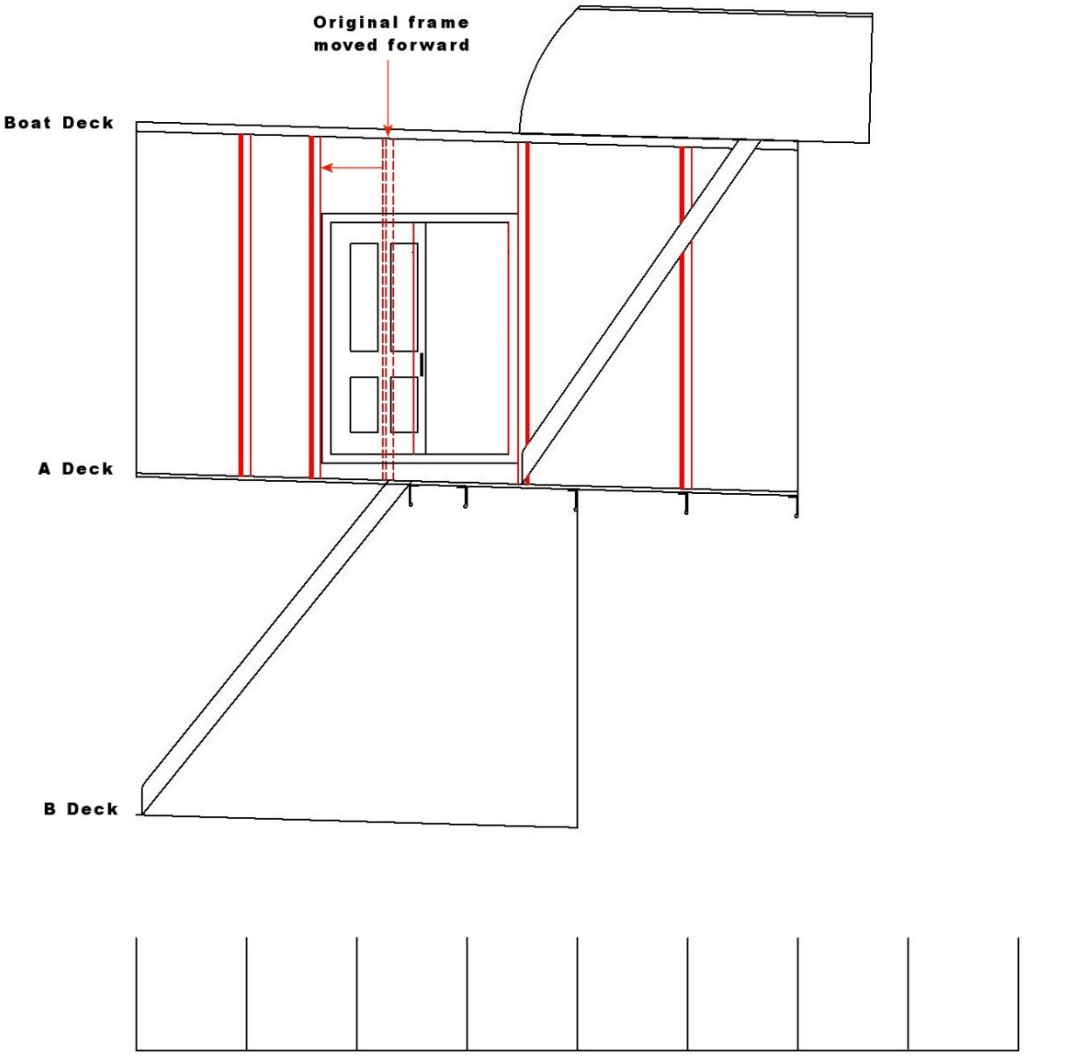
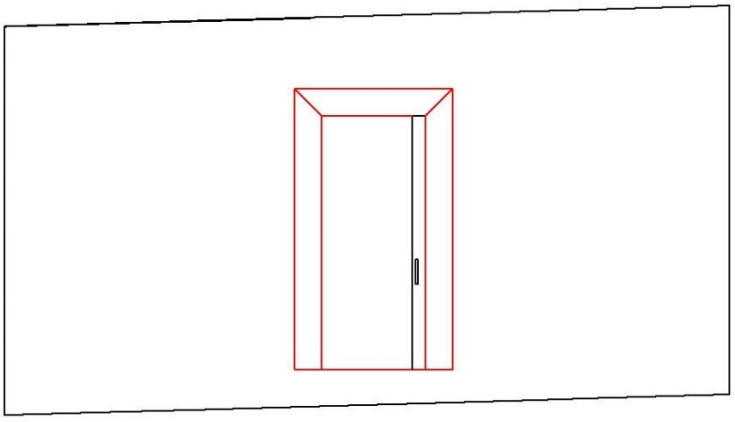


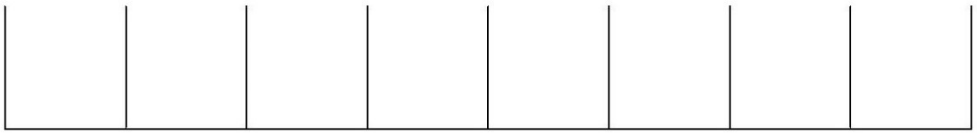
Figure 2

Inboard view of starboard A deck stairway enclosure looking outboard

This drawing shows the single frame on the original plan which must be moved forward. Figures 3 and 4 show the outboard aspect of the starboard enclosure with the door opened and closed. Therefore, it can be seen that repositioning one frame cannot be considered a major obstacle to the installation of and inboard sliding door.



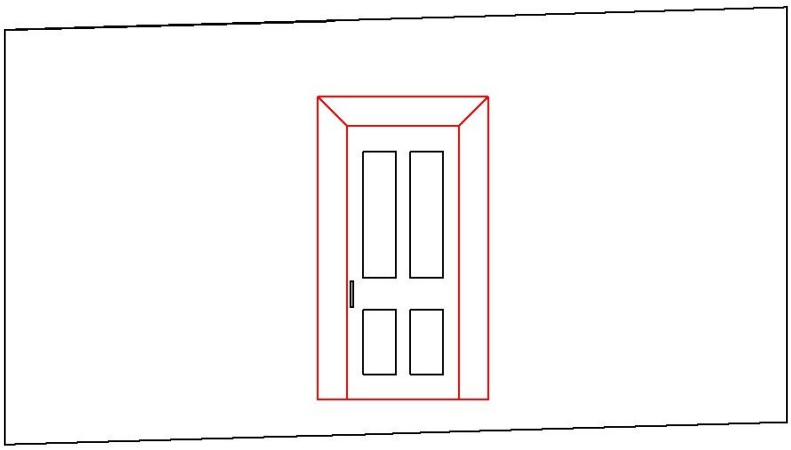
Starboard A Deck Crew Stairway Enclosure Looking Inboard Door Open



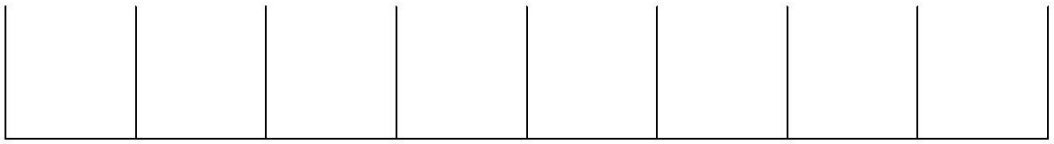
68 70 72 74 76

Figure 3

Starboard A deck crew stairway enclosure looking inboard



Starboard A Deck Crew Stairway Enclosure Looking Inboard Door Closed



68 70 72 74 76

Figure 4

Starboard A deck crew stairway enclosure looking inboard

Go to next page

Precedent for Interior Sliding Door

A secondary objection to having an interior sliding door installed in the stairway enclosure is that some have claimed that there is no precedent on *Titanic* of an interior sliding door. This claim is wrong. The aft facing doors of the Verandah Café did indeed have interior sliding doors. Figure 5 shows the starboard sliding door on *Titanic's* starboard Verandah Café.

Figure 5

Interior sliding doors in *Titanic's* Verandah Café

Some might object that this is not a crew-only installation. What we are talking about is whether it was feasible for H&W to engineer, design, and install interior sliding doors. The answer is obviously yes. To move a single interior frame in the enclosure to accomplish this does not even scratch the surface of H&W's capabilities.

Rationale for Being Able to Close the Doorway to the Crew Stairway Enclosure

The advantage for having a sliding door over a doorway to a crew stairway is that it cannot be accidently opened into someone on the exterior of the enclosure like a conventional hinged door would. That is why round windows were often installed on conventional hinged doors so that it could be determined if it was safe to open.

The next aspect that a sliding door provides is that it is able to close the doorway opening. This is an advantage with a door on a weather deck where the opening is exposed to the elements.

If freezing spray were to be blown into an open crew stairway it would make the entry platform between the upper and lower stairs potentially hazardous. We know that there was concern about this because of this entry (Figure 6) in the RMS Britannic Specification Book:

Linoleum treads to be fitted to the stairs leading down to the bridge deck P & S from "A" deck, and also on those from Boat Deck to "A" deck at fore end.

Figure 6

Entry from RMS Britannic Specification Book

The text reads: **"Linoleum treads to be fitted to the stairs leading down to the bridge deck P & S from "A" deck, and also on those from the Boat Deck to "A" deck at fore end."**

Some object to the A deck crew stairway entry needing to have a door when the entry to the stairs on the Boat Deck was open and stairs were exposed on B deck. I will admit that I don't know the reason but we can perhaps deduce what Titanic's arrangement was from her sisters. *Olympic's* A deck drew stairway enclosure had an exterior sliding door as can be seen in Figure 7.

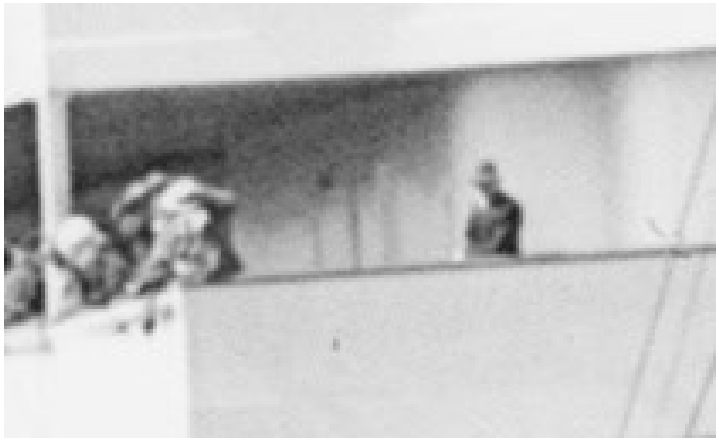


Figure 7

RMS *Olympic* A deck crew stairway exterior sliding door

RMS *Britannic* was designed to have a sliding door over the A deck crew stairway enclosure entrance as can be seen in Figure 8 which shows an entry from the RMS (not HMHS) Specification Book which specifies a sliding door for the crew stairway enclosure on A deck.

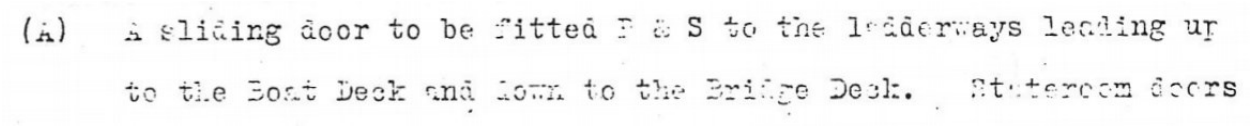

(A) A sliding door to be fitted P & S to the ladderways leading up to the Boat Deck and down to the Bridge Deck. Stateroom doors

Figure 8

Entry from the RMS Britannic specification book

The entry reads: **"A sliding door to be fitted P & S to the ladderways leading up to the Boat Deck and down to the Bridge Deck".**

It does not specify whether it was an exterior or interior sliding door. We at least know from HMHS photos that it was not exterior. Since there is evidence from *Olympic* and *Britannic* which precedes and follows *Titanic's* configuration, it is not too speculative to believe that *Titanic* also had sliding doors.

The question might be asked why would they switch from an exterior sliding door on *Olympic* to an interior sliding door on *Titanic*? I believe that the reason might be that an exterior sliding door might be prone to freezing up if freezing spray got into the guide tracks. On *Olympic* they rigged a temporary canvas screen forward of the sliding doors to be a wind screen for the promenade and a weather screen for the external sliding door. On *Titanic* they constructed a permanent steel screen for the promenade and positioned it aft of the enclosure around the crew stairway enclosure on A deck. If the sliding doors were vulnerable to freezing spray, having them installed on the interior of the enclosure would protect the slide mechanism.

Some have proposed that both the temporary canvas weather screen on *Olympic* and the permanent steel screen on *Titanic* were both elaborate measures to restrict passengers from entering the A deck crew stairway enclosure. It was even proposed that the forward promenades of A & B decks were restricted to crew only. However, I am not aware of restrictions of passenger access to the forward promenades during daylight hours. The promenades may have been darkened and restricted at night to eliminate light sources which could compromise bridge officers' night vision.

There was no reason to physically restrict access to the A deck crew stairway enclosure. All they needed to do was to post notice boards (which they did) telling passengers that the stairway door was for use of crew only. Etiquette and manners of passengers aboard British liners in 1912 was such that passengers obeyed the notice boards notwithstanding the actions of characters portrayed in Cameron's Titanic film.

Conclusion

This article has been written to answer objections to the installation of inboard sliding doors in the enclosure around the crew stairway entrance on A deck forward. The engineering measures which would be necessary to install an interior sliding door were illustrated. Additionally, the precedent of the installation of interior sliding doors on *Titanic* were illustrated. The most important aspect of the article was the demonstration that no matter the access to the crew stairway on the Boat and B decks, the designers demonstrated the need to provide a door which could be closed to the A deck crew stairway entrance when needed but which would remain open in fair weather.