



Alvin Clarence Thomas more commonly referred to as, “Titanic Thompson,” could easily be considered the best hustler of the 20th century.

He excelled at hustling people out of all of their money by betting on the outcome of card games, golf tournaments, and even horse races.

He could and would bet on anything, often fixing bets to ensure himself a win.

Over the course of his lifetime, Titanic won millions of dollars through traveling across the country and hustling anyone who crossed his path including other famous gamblers like Howard Hughes and Arnold Rothstein.

Even though he made millions of dollars over the course of his lifetime, Titanic died without a penny to his name and without a friend in the world.

Alvin “Titanic” Thomas was born in 1892 in Monnet, Missouri but his father, Lee, wasn’t present at his birth because he was too busy gambling at a nearby saloon. Early on, Titanic’s parents got a divorce due to his father’s addiction to gambling.

When Titanic was only a baby, his father took the rest of his family’s money and skipped town. His mother, Sarah, ended up marrying a Hog Farmer who lived in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, which is where Titanic ended up spending the majority of his childhood.

His new family, which consisted of a step-father, two step sisters, and two step brothers, were devout Christians who went to Church every Sunday and believed every word that was written in the Bible. Sarah happily accepted her new family’s way of life, but Titanic decided to follow a different path.

All seven shared a small three-bedroom cabin and Titanic was always trying to find an excuse to get out of the house. He volunteered to chop logs for firewood, as long as his dog, Carlos, could tag along.

He never excelled in school and would probably be considered illiterate by today’s standards but dropping out of school at an early age gave him more time to develop his hustling skills and strategies.

He started off playing checkers and dominoes until he found a strong natural ability when it came to poker.

Early on he started marking his cards in his own deck, making him nearly impossible to beat.

His card marking system was simple but efficient: a mark was placed on the edge of the card if it was a high value, a mark anywhere else on the card represented a low card, and any in between cards were left unmarked.

He even found a way to mark someone else’s deck by using his fingernail to make a nearly invisible mark that allowed only him to know which type of card was underneath.

Titanic started off as a thin boy with a soft-spoken voice but turned into a strong man with a bold approach. He moved out of his home with only spare change in his pockets, as he could no longer live under his parent's strict rules.

He hustled people at each town he stopped at, slowly but surely building up a bankroll to be proud of. He fished and hunted for his meals while on the road until he had enough money to eat solely at restaurants.

1912 was the year that the Titanic crashed into an ice berg, leading to the death of over 1,500 people. If you're wondering why a traveling hustler would be named after such a horrific event, then we have the answers you are looking for.

It all started when Alvin decided to stop at Snow Clark's pool hall in Joplin, Missouri where he managed to beat every player that had enough courage to take him on. This sparked the attention of the pool hall's owner, Snow Clark, who was unbeatable at that time.

Titanic and Snow decided to play a round of billiards at a wager of \$500, which at the time was a significant amount of money. It actually was equal to an average man's yearly wages. Of course, Titanic won the game, leaving Snow speechless.

Beating the owner out of a huge sum of money was just simply not enough though.

He noticed a sign on the window that read "*\$200 to Any Man Who Jumps over My New Pool Table,*" which was nine feet long and four and a half feet wide.

"I can do it," Titanic said boastfully.

Even though the men at the pool hall were impressed with his skills at the table, they laughed at his statement which caused him to walk out the door. Not even ten minutes later, Titanic returned with an old dirty mattress which he placed next to the pool table.

He used the mattress for leverage, launching off of it and landing on the other side of the table flawlessly.

After Titanic walked away with his \$200 award, someone asked Snow what his name was. He answered, "*I don't rightly know, but it ought to be Titanic because he sinks everybody.*"

In a 1972 edition of Sports Illustrated, Titanic commented on the story, confirming the truth behind it.

When Titanic was of age, he was drafted into the Military where he was promoted to a Sergeant's position after just a couple of months. Titanic did more than just teach his men to be good soldiers, as he taught them to be good gamblers as well.

Titanic served for almost eight years before World War I ended, and he was discharged. Thanks to the hundreds of bets he made during his time in the service, Titanic had accumulated over \$50,000 in cash. Now that Titanic had enough starting capital to start making larger bets, he decided to travel the country again, hustling every innocent bystander he encountered along the way. He bet on everything imaginable and went to extreme lengths to ensure his bets would win.

He once bet that he could throw a walnut over a building, winning solely thanks to the fact that he put lead in it prior to the bet in order to weigh it down and make the throw plausible.

Another scam Titanic was known for was the time he stood on the steps of the hotel he was currently staying at, waiting for a truck loaded with watermelons to stop by. He was talking to some town locals and bragged that he could guess the exact number of watermelons in the truck.

To their surprise, he was only off by only two watermelons. Little did the people know that he had paid the driver the day before to count the watermelons and drive past the hotel at precisely that time.

Titanic had the privilege of meeting Al Capone, Harry Houdini, Howard Hughes, Minnesota Fats, and a plethora of other famous hustlers of the twentieth century.

Titanic generally won every bet he placed, but he did have a weakness when it came to betting on horses, where he generally lost millions of dollars in just one night. He also lost over one million dollars to Minnesota Fats after a long night of playing pool for high wagers.

When it came to golfing, Titanic was a natural, despite not being introduced to the game until he was in his late thirties. He immediately fell in love with the sport, taking classes from professional players so he could enhance his skills.

Once he had confidence in his abilities, Titanic started hustling rich country club players out of their money. On average, he hustled over \$30,000 from players in just over a week, sometimes making \$15,000 bets at a time.

His secret to success was his ability to be able to play well both left-handed and right-handed.

A typical method of his was to beat a golfer playing right-handed and then offer double or nothing to play the course again left-handed.

His opponents thought they were guaranteed to win, as they were unaware that Titanic was naturally left-handed. Whenever Titanic was asked if he would ever consider going pro, he always answered with a snarky,

"I could not afford the cut in pay."

Legend has it that Titanic once bet that he could drive a golf ball 500 yards, even though the best recorded drive at the time was just over 200 yards. He cleverly won by driving the ball across a frozen lake, where it was able to roll past the required distance, thanks to the slipperiness of the ice. He was financially backed by the famous pool player: Minnesota Flats.

Titanic would often take young, un-known players and turn them into legends by showing them his techniques. Several of the men he mentored were inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame including Byron Nelson, Harvey Penick, Paul Runyan, and Sam Snead to name a few.

Ben Hogan, the professional golfer who travelled with Titanic in the early 1930s referred to him as, *"The best shot-maker he ever saw."*

Titanic's pride and joy was his nickel-plated, two-ton Pierce-Arrow and in it he always had a set of left- and right-handed golf clubs, a suitcase full of cash, and anything else he may need for his current hustling adventure.

He drove that rusty beauty until the day he couldn't drive anymore, at which point he was sent to a nursing home in Dallas, where he spent the remainder of his life. He passed away on May 19th, 1974 at age 82.