NOAA and the RMS TITANIC
RMS TITANIC
Discovery

2004 Treaty

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The Case for
Captain Lord

By Lieutenant Commander Craig McLean, NOAA, and David L. Enno

RMS Titanic sank in the North Atlantic Ocean during the early morning hours of 15 April 1912. The cause: uncontrollable flooding after colliding with an iceberg. More than 1,500 persons perished, and the world learned of the disaster. The cause: an insufficient number of lifeboats, which was the subject of a Senate investigation that led to the conclusion that the Californian saw the Titanic and did nothing about it.

The evidence for and against Captain Lord is lengthy. The book contains a full account of events between ships in the area, a frequently repeated error in the reconstruction of the evidence. In the Atlantic, by observing local weather and setting the course of each vessel at noon, the U.S. Senate and British Board of Trade conducted inquiries in 1912 and mistakenly concluded that Captain Stanley Lord, master of the SS Californian, was within visible range of the Titanic as she sank and failed to render aid. The cause: aggressive investigations more focused on the convenience of a conclusion rather than the labor of elucidating the truth.

The popular version of the Titanic story advanced by the 1912 investigations is that the sinking vessel sighted the lights of a mysterious vessel within five miles. Her officers launched distress rockets more than 300 feet into the air and signaled by Morse code with powerful lamps in an attempt to communicate her distress to the nearby ship. The Californian observed no response from that vessel. The Californian likewise sighted the lights of a mysterious vessel, but she was not to the north of the SS Californian, as witnessed by the telltale flash of a searchlight at the time of the Titanic's sinking.

The SS Californian and her dismasted "master," Captain Stanley Lord, the most famous Titanic opposite page.

per for a sum equal to his annual salary and immediately departed the ship, never to be heard of again. His account and the conclusion that the Californian saw the Titanic and did nothing about it is the evidence for and against Captain Lord is lengthy. The book contains a full account of events between ships in the area, a frequently repeated error in the reconstruction of the evidence. In the Atlantic, by observing local weather and setting the course of each vessel at noon, the U.S. Senate and British Board of Trade conducted inquiries in 1912 and mistakenly concluded that Captain Stanley Lord, master of the SS Californian, was within visible range of the Titanic as she sank and failed to render aid. The cause: aggressive investigations more focused on the convenience of a conclusion rather than the labor of elucidating the truth.

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The SS Californian and her dismasted "master," Captain Stanley Lord, the majestic Titanic opposite page.

Gill said he saw the Titanic moving at full speed, whereas the liner was actually stopped, taking water, and down by the head. He also reported seeing— from north of the Titanic—a port side light. The Titanic, sailing west, did not reveal a port side light to the north, even after striking the iceberg and backing down. Those who condemn Captain Lord rely heavily upon the testimony of the Californian's third officer, Charles Gauze. He asserted that the ship he sighted to the south was a "passenger steamer," not a medium- or small-size troop steamer as her other officers described. The 1912 investigators entirely missed the point that the vessel he described could not have been the Titanic. Like Gill, Gauze said he saw a port side light; he never saw a green one. Groves described the numerous deck lights of the vessel he saw, having turned off before midnight, as customary for the sleeping comfort of passengers in transatlantic trade. But all of the Titanic's survivors attest to the continuous burning of exterior lights until the ship's final plunge two hours later.

The Californian's second officer, Herbert Stone, has been frequently cited for having suggested that the ship he observed was going to the southwest in a gradual manner; as her stern lights disappeared over the horizon. When asked if the ship's stern light had disappeared, or if the ship that suddenly disappeared, he answered that the ship was a "glowing light." Stone's testimony ultimately reveals the neglected facts about the distress rockets. As the officer on board Californian who saw nearly all of the rockets in the sky, he
Return to Titanic

> May 27 - June 12, 2004

Explorer Dr. Ballard to assess state of the wreck

Nearly 20 years after first finding the sunken remains of RMS Titanic, marine explorer Dr. Robert Ballard is returning. Ballard will help the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) study the ship to better understand why and how fast it is deteriorating. Ballard and scientists from NOAA, Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, and other institutions will spend 11 days at the site, mapping the ship and conducting scientific analyses of its deterioration. JASON Foundation for Education is developing a new middle-school math curriculum based on the expedition. Read more >
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RMS TITANIC