

The Californian Incident, A Reality Check

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Could Captain Lord and the Californian have done more to save the passengers and crew of the Titanic.

I. Purpose

Purpose -- The purpose of this paper is to set forth the argument that rescue of passengers and crew from the foundering transatlantic liner RMS Titanic on the night of April 14-15, 1912 by the freighter S.S. Californian was virtually impossible despite the proximity of the two ships.

Secondarily, this paper will set out reasons why Captain Stanley Lord of the Californian may have been correct in his decision not to go to the aid of Titanic that night.

The Californian -- The ship was a very typical cargo vessel of the time that started life as Hull# 159 at Caladon Shipbuilding in Dundee Scotland where she was launched on November 26, 1901. She measured 447 feet in length, 53 feet in breadth, with a hull 30ft deep and a gross tonnage of 6,223 tons. Her propulsion plant consisted of two double-ended boilers with a working pressure of 200psi supplying steam to a triple expansion engine linked to one propeller. The highest speed the ship ever attained was 13 knots on her sea trials on January 23, 1902. In actual service, she was described as Averaging 11 to 12 knots.

Assumptions -- For the purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that SS Californian was under way, but stopped and surrounded by ice at 11:40 p.m. on April 14, 1912 when RMS Titanic had its fatal encounter with an iceberg. It is further assumed that while the distance between the two ships cannot be ascertained with certainty, they were close enough to be observed visually by one another.

Rescue Was Impossible -- It is the belief of the authors that while it may have been possible for Californian to have saved some few additional lives, the notion that she could have saved most if not all of Titanic's 2,200 passengers and crew is false.

The authors do not assert that a rescue attempt by Captain Lord would not have been worthwhile. Certainly, any attempt to save lives is a noble undertaking. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to counter with hard fact the romantic assumption that Californian could have saved everyone aboard Titanic if only its captain, Stanley Lord, had been more decisive.

Disclaimer -- It should be made clear from the onset that it is not the intention of the authors to settle the debate over the incident, nor do we intend to minimize the accountability of either Captains Smith or Lord. They were, after all, the masters of their ships. They alone shouldered the burden of responsibility for everything that went on aboard their respective commands. This is as it should be. Considering the lethal and unforgiving environment in which it operates, a ship can ill afford the luxury of being a democracy.

While it would have been possible for the Californian to have saved some additional lives if she was indeed as close as Lord's critics state, the notion that she could have saved most if not all of them is a mirage! It is also not the intent of the authors to state or in anyway convey that although Lord could not have saved all he could not have saved some is that is not the case. Also any attempt to save any additional lives would have been more than worthwhile. However, there are several factors that most over look in criticizing Captain Lords decisions. It is our wish to point those out.

II. Charges Against Stanley Lord and Californian

Official Condemnation -- Confusion and disbelief surrounds every disaster. The 712 stunned, frightened and shivering survivors left adrift in the Titanic's lifeboats had difficulty understanding what they had just experienced. Why had the largest, safest ship in the world -- one hailed in the press as unsinkable -- foundered in less than three hours, after a collision so slight, most of the passengers and crew slept right through it? These questions continue to plague maritime historians nearly 90 years after the event.

The first official attempt to find answers began even before the rescue ship, RMS Carpathia docked in New York with Titanic's survivors. Senator William Alden Smith set in motion a full Congressional investigation that opened only four days after the sinking. He was hardly alone in asking hard questions or forming opinions.

Everybody -- passengers, crew, the families of the dead, city editors of newspapers, preachers in their pulpits, and politicians -- everybody wanted answers. Above all, the public wanted a reckoning, someone to blame for this otherwise senseless tragedy. Almost immediately, J. Bruce Ismay the managing director of the White Star Line was cast as the villain of the hour. He had been aboard the ship and had the indiscretion to survive.

However, another scapegoat also emerged. He was Captain Stanley Lord, master of a ship that allegedly refused to respond to Titanic's distress signals. His vessel, the SS Californian was claimed to have been stopped for the night within sight of the sinking liner. The thorny issue of the Californian has become the most controversial aspect of the Titanic saga.

The underlying core of the controversy surrounding Californian are charges that this particular ship could have rescued most (if not all) of the persons aboard the doomed liner. This charge is implicit in the U.S. Senate Subcommittee report on the sinking of the Titanic in which it was concluded:

"Had assistance been promptly proffered, or had the wireless operator of the Californian remained a few minutes longer at his post, that ship might have had the proud distinction of rescuing the lives of the passengers and crew of the Titanic."

The conclusion of the investigation mounted by the British Board of Trade was the same. Investigators in London concluded that Californian had ignored the cry for help from 1,500 people "in peril on the sea". Lord Mersey, head of the British probe wrote:

"These circumstances convince me that the ship seen by the Californian was the Titanic and if so, according to Captain Lord, the two vessels were about five miles apart at the time of the disaster....When she first saw the rockets the Californian could have pushed through the ice to the open water without any serious risk and so have come to the assistance of the Titanic. Had she done so she might have saved many if not all of the lives that were lost."

For nine decades, these official condemnations of Captain Stanley Lord and his ship, Californian, have been accepted and repeated as gospel. Unfortunately, they do not stand the test of reality.

III. Factors Against Successful Rescue By Californian

The Time Factor -- Californian simply could not have arrived on the scene of the disaster soon enough to have significantly reduced the appalling loss of life. This turns out to be true whether the ships were separated by the minimum distance suggested by those who condemn Captain Lord or the maximum

claimed by defenders of Californian's beleaguered captain. The faction condemning Lord is often called anti-Lordites and it holds that the ships were separated by a distance of no less than eight miles, and no more than twelve miles. The other faction, known among Titanic researchers as Lordites, insists that the ships were separated by nineteen to twenty-one miles. That was the distance Captain Lord testified to during the 1912 investigations.

What if the ships were separated by eight to twelve miles? Or, what if they were separated by nineteen to twenty-one miles? It turns out that either way Californian was beyond effective range to assist Titanic in either case. One reason was an approximately one-hour delay by the stricken liner between the iceberg accident and the launching of the first rocket. Below is a quotation from Stone himself asking what and when he gave Captain Lord the information.

7829: What did you communicate to him? I communicated that I had seen white lights in the sky in the direction of this other steamer which I took to be white rockets.

7830: What time did you give him [Captain Lord] that information? -Just about 1:10.

This means that Lord did not receive word of the rockets until an hour and half after the accident. Which means that in order for them (Californian) to be of any effort they would have to get manned and ready and leave in the next 5 minutes.

Titanic took about 2 hours 40 minutes to sink, but Californian did not see the first rocket until almost 12:45 a.m. But again he wasn't told until 1:10am. That meant Captain Lord had only a little over 1 hour to have effected a rescue.

The Californian's best ever speed was 13 knots. The ship could likely have repeated that achievement on April 14. If we assume that it would have taken at least 30 minutes for the ship to have worked out of the ice, we can calculate how long

It would have taken Captain Lord to bring his vessel to the disaster site.

Table #1

ESTIMATED ARRIVAL TIMES FOR CALIFORNIAN

(Assuming 30 minutes to extricate from ice.)

DISTANCE	SPEED	DURATION OF RUN	TIME TO CLEAR ICE	ESTIMATED ARRIVAL TIME
19 Miles	13.5	1:24	0:30	3 a.m.
8 "	13.5	0:59	0:30	2:45 a.m.

From the above table, if the two ships were separated by 19+ miles, it would have taken more than two hours for the Californian to get going, thread her way through the ice field, and arrive at the Titanic's position. The earliest she could have arrived would have been well after three in the morning, at least 40 minutes after the liner disappeared beneath the waves. That is assuming that Lord was told of the rockets at 110 am and immediately acted.

Or, if the vessels had been only 8 miles apart, Table #1 gives some hope that a rescue might have been accomplished. In theory, Californian could have arrived on the scene at 2:45 a.m she would arrive just as Titanic is foundering. Criticism of Captain Lord for not responding to the sinking liner's distress rockets is based on the fact that Lord made no attempt at all. When the reality is that he would have been plucking people out of the water and not off of the Titanic.

Additional Lost Time – If somehow the Californian managed to get there before the ship sank as some claim then he would have had to face a variety of other problems. Once Captain Lord and his ship arrived on the scene, the Californian would have had to slow down so as to stop at a safe enough distance. Obviously, no good would have been done by hitting the Titanic, yet the rescue ship would have had to come close enough to the sinking liner do some good. Any approach would have required extreme caution, which would have eaten up valuable minutes.

Slowing down would have been necessary at some distance from the sinking liner. Lord would have faced a nagging problem of avoiding Titanic's lifeboats already scattered about and not easily visible in the darkness.

The length of time necessary to slow Californian for a safe passage through the lifeboats and then maneuver into a safe position and then stop to launch boats within a reasonable distance to be effective. Certainly, it would have taken at least 10 minutes, and more likely longer. Some have claimed that Californian would have arrived a good half of an hour before the doomed liner went to the bottom. They say that if he had gone full speed as soon as the first rocket went up he would have been there a good half of an hour before the ship went down. However they seem to forget that he would still have to get his way there through an ice field which he knew lay in front and all around him, the extent of which he did not know and work up to full speed, if conditions made a full speed run possible. Even if he could get there at full speed from the start, a scant half hour would not have been enough time to accomplish the rescue of the 1,500 people still aboard Titanic. Some yes, but not all.

Transfer of People -- Intership transfers at sea are time and labor-intensive operations. The prudent method would have been to use lifeboats as ferries between Titanic and Californian. Each boat, no matter from which ship, would have required an adequate crew of trained seamen (see paragraph below).

If the Californian had arrived at 2:09 like some claim other problems would have come to light. Once Captain Lord brought Californian to a stop near Titanic his crew would have had only 20 minutes to lower their lifeboats row them over to the foundering liner. Which is completely possible if Californian had 18 trained sailors to lower the lifeboats from the deck and an extra 30-trained seaman to man the boats once they were in the water, then keep all the routine underway watches manned at full capacity. However we know this is not the case. That is 48 sailors just for the boats. Including at least 2 of the officers. Considering lookouts would have been posted probably 4 and then another 3 on the bridge including the wheelsman. Out the 29 seamen that as stated above included all the officers as well as cooks and stewards that means you need one extra person. Oh, and then there is the fact that the cooks and the stewards were not trained to carry out any of the positions that where needed. The question then goes begging who would be directing passengers once they where aboard. There would be nobody left.

Simultaneously, Titanic's lifeboats would have had to have been brought alongside and emptied of their passengers. This would have prepared them to return to Titanic for another load. Even Captain Rostron who commanded the ship that actually rescued the lifeboats was unable to accomplish such a feat. It took Rostron and his crew several hours simply to lift the 712 survivors from their lifeboats to the safety of Carpathia's decks. Rostron was not faced with the challenge of launching his own boats or conducting a lifeboat shuttle between ships.

The above problem could have been solved by waiting to launch the boats until the Californian was actually at the wreck site. It could have taken up to a half of an hour to do this. At which time Captain Lord could have told his lookouts to man the boats. Rather than launch all 6 of his boats he could launch only two, with 12 man crews. However, these two boats would have faced the same problem. 1500 people trying to get a seat. When the reality is there was less then 120 seats available. Whether they were on the sloping decks or swimmers in the water. 12 men in each boat would have to fend off the 1500 in the water. They could have become swamped. Survivors trying to get aboard would be tugging at both sides of the lifeboats. They would most likely cause the boat to turn over. In which case you now have another 24 men to save. 24 men that Lord by all rights did not have to send down those lifeboat falls.

Below we mention a "Panic Factor". The reason for this is it is the authors belief that Captain Lord would have been going into a "worse case scenario" if he arrived just as Titanic disappeared from the surface. It did not matter when he arrived before or directly after the sinking. Captain Lords 48 men would have been faced with 1500 freezing and dying survivors whose only instinct is now to survive. At any cost. Even if the number is cut in half and it is assumed that only 750 people made it into the water and where able to swim towards the boats only 24 men in two boats would be able to greet them. 31 times the amount in the water. It would have been a nightmare.

The Panic Factor -- Had Californian arrived at 2:09 a.m., its lifeboats would have been pulling toward an unstable ship that was in the beginning of a major breakup. Aboard the

sinking ship panic was becoming common. Captain Lord would have had to send his lifeboats into a cold, scared and dying mob of 1,500 people. These boats would only have 5 crewmen to fend off the 1500 that would be trying to get a seat. Lord would have had to have asked his crew to put their lives at undue risk by manning the rescue boats. Shore bound historians who have viewed the problem only in terms of getting Californian up to Titanic conveniently overlook this point.

The people in Titanic's own lifeboats feared the panic situation aboard their own ship so much they rowed away from their own friends and loved ones still aboard. Fifth Officer Lowe commanded the only boat to go back to the wreck site and he waited nearly an hour to do so.

Here is a break down of the boats that went back to the wreck site after the cries had calmed down and it was assumed safe to return to look for survivors.

Boat #4 Under the Command of Quartermaster Perkis went back and only picked up five from the water who were still alive. Two possibly three died during the night.

Boat #14 Under the Command of Fifth Officer Lowe went back and picked up only three swimmers and one survivor who had climbed up onto a piece of wreckage.

Collapsible B had close to thirty onboard and they were straddling the overturned boat.

Assuming Californian's crew was made of sterner stuff, what if they had rowed their empty rescue boats alongside the dying liner? Certainly, they would have been bombarded by people jumping from the slanting decks. A 150-pound body slamming into a wooden lifeboat from a height of 20 or 30 feet would likely have damaged or sunk the boat.

First Class passenger Hugh Woolner made such a jump into one of the collapsible lifeboats as it was being lowered. He described the jump to Senator William A. Smith during the U.S. Senate probe into the sinking:

SENATOR SMITH: ...water came in -- on A deck?

MR. WOOLNER: On that A deck. Then we hopped up onto the gunwale preparing to jump out into the sea, because if we had waited a minute longer we should have been boxed in against the ceiling. And as we looked out we saw this collapsible, the last boat on the port side, being lowered right in front of our faces.

SENATOR SMITH: How far out?

MR. WOOLNER: It was about 9 feet out.

SENATOR SMITH: ...Was it filled with people?

MR. WOOLNER: It was full up to the bow, and I said to

Steffanson: "There is nobody in the bows. Let us make a jump for it. You go first." And he jumped out and tumbled in head over heels into the bow, and I jumped too, and hit the gunwale with my chest...

The danger of jumping into a lifeboat while it was in the process of being lowered is obvious. Yet, what other method except jumping would have been available to load Californian's rescue boats when they came alongside Titanic? The ship had gangway doors, but few of these would have been positioned at a convenient height for loading boats. Worse, asking panicked passengers to go down into the interior of the obviously foundering ship would have been impossible.

The dangers lie not only in the boats but in the falls that lower them. It is important to remember that two trained seaman are controlling how fast or slow the boat is lowered. By rope and bits they are responsible for making sure the boat is lowered evenly. An officer usually supervises such an evolution. A fall system is a slow and difficult one. If the boat is to full sailors can loose their grip on a line. The men controlling the lines can't see the boat so they have no way of knowing whether it is being lowered evenly or not. The line could part and one end of the boat would fall forcing all of its occupants into the water. Such a problem can occur even with new davits.

Swimmer Rescue -- Once Titanic's passengers were in the water, it would have been a race against time to fish as many out as many as possible and get them to warmth aboard the Freighter. For the vast majority of the people at risk, this would have been a death sentence. A rule-of-thumb used by modern rescue teams is:

50 degree water X 50 minute exposure = 50% Chance of death

The water temperature at the time Titanic sank was 28 degrees. That's more than 20 degrees colder than this rule, so the death rate would be correspondingly higher. According to the cold water survival times given by the U.S. Search and Rescue Task Force, exhaustion and unconsciousness would have set in within 15 minutes of entering the water. Death would have followed for most of Titanic's passengers in as little as 15 minutes. No one could be expected to have survived more than 45 minutes.

About 30 swimmers who found a haven aboard an overturned collapsible lifeboat demonstrated the fatal consequences of exposure to cold. This boat floated away as Titanic as it foundered. Second Officer Charles H. Lightoller was among this group. Even though they were able climb on the boat, the freezing cold water took its toll. Lightoller recalled how some of those who reached the overturned boat did not survive.

MR. LIGHTOLLER: There were two or three that died. I think there were three or four who died during the night.

SENATOR SMITH: Aboard this boat with you?

MR. LIGHTOLLER: Yes, sir; I think the senior Marconi operator was on the boat and died. The Marconi junior operator told me that the senior was on this boat and died.

SENATOR SMITH: From the cold?

MR. LIGHTOLLER: Presumably.

Medical authorities term the deleterious affects of cold on the human body as "hypothermia". Eventually, large muscle control is lost and the victim slips into a coma-like state prior to death. Treatment for severe cases of hypothermia requires elaborate re-warming techniques not available in 1912.

A universal symptom of hypothermia is that victims are virtually unable to assist in their own rescues. This means that Californian's boat crews would have been forced to pick survivors out of the water by brute force. This is more difficult than it sounds. The round shape of a boat gives the victim no toehold, which deprives him of the power of his legs. Few people have the upper body strength to pull themselves upward and into a lifeboat. Captain David G. Brown has rescued 9 men and women using craft with similar gunwale height to a lifeboat.

"Even a college athlete can't pull himself into the boat without help. Two men lifting from the boat are needed. Women and older men have more difficulty. One 65-year-old man required three people lifting and one in the water pushing to raise him. He was in good physical Condition, but a few minutes in cold water had sapped his strength. I would guess it took us nearly 5 full minutes to haul him to safety."

Trained Crew For Lifeboats – As mention earlier the size of Californian's crew is another factor overlooked by those who believe that it could have saved all 2,200 people aboard Titanic. How many could have been spared from necessary shipboard duties to man the boats?

The crew list published by Leslie Reade in his book, *The Ship That Stood Still*, indicates there were 51 crew aboard. The ship's log and testimony at the inquiries indicate the number was only 48. (The ship's maximum crew complement was 55 sailors.) Of this number, 21 were engineers, firemen and trimmers. There was one Marconi operator aboard. To restate some numbers that where previously said it would have taken 3 men to lower the boat from the deck (in order for a rescue as some claim in possible to work all the boats would have to be lowered at once so three men to lower is a total of 18 men). Plus the 5 needed to man the boat (that is far to few for a rescue effort) in each boat that is 30 men. A total of 48 men just for the boats. That is almost the total crew. Fireman and Engineers are not trained in the lowering of boats. They only knew what boat they belonged to. So those 21 one men (half of which would have been on watch) none of them could have been used. Then you have the extra lookouts (4 at a minimum). The bridge crew of at least 4 including Captain Lord. You are running out of people.

Californian carried lifeboats that included four full sized lifeboats, a pinnace and a gig. None were motorized. The combined capacity of these boats was 218 persons. Californian simply did not have enough crew aboard to provide that many trained seamen without compromising the equally necessary proper watch in the propulsion plant and on deck.

The total number of trained seamen needed to supply crews to each of the six boats and to man the davits actually exceeded the total number of crew aboard Californian that night. Here are the numbers:

Table #2

CALIFORNIAN CREW REQUIREMENT VS AVAILABILITY

NUMBER OF BOATS	BOAT CREW	DAVIT CREW	TOTAL CREW	AVAILABLE MANPOWER
(None In Water)	0	0	0	51
6	30	24	54	-3

Table #2 uses author Leslie Read's larger number of crew aboard. If the actual number were the 48 claimed by the ship's log, then the crew deficit would actually have been 6 sailors. But 48 would be needed just to lower the boats which leaves only 3 to run the ship.

The deficit in total crew would have required that full davit crews could not have been employed for each boat. Possibly only 2 men would lower the boat while their shipmates yelled which side of the boat was being lowered faster than the other. This would have increased by six fold the time needed to get all of Californian's boats into the water.

Certainly, Captain Lord would have begun preparations for launching his lifeboats while underway to Titanic. In order for this evolution to be carried out while the vessel was underway, would have forced hard choices. Many jobs vital to the safety of a ship require the skills of trained sailors and not those of a cooks or stewards. Should he keep his trained seamen as lookouts, or put them at work on the lifeboats? With his shortage of manpower, if trained seaman prepared to lower boats, then Californian would have been relying upon untrained sailors acting as lookouts as it approached Titanic and its nearly invisible lifeboats not to mention an ice field.

Rafting Alongside -- Captain Lord would not have been able to take Californian alongside Titanic, throw a plank across, and let 2,200 people run to safety aboard his ship.

While its not impossible for ships to "raft" (tie alongside each other) in a harbor or at sea in a dead calm, no master in his right mind is going to deliberately tie up to a sinking vessel. Especially one over five times his size.

It should be noted that destroyer sized warships and other small military vessels raft together on a regular basis. However, rafting is not a routine practice for a merchant vessel. Further, pulling alongside a sinking ship would have entailed a high degree of risk (if not being near-suicidal). Once alongside the sinking liner, Californian would have exposed itself to serious if not fatal damage once Titanic foundered. It is impossible to predict the chaos that would have resulted had the liner broken apart while the smaller freighter was still alongside.

Captain R.W. Roberts, of the Mercantile Marine Service Association, ruled rafting alongside the Titanic out of the question in 1912. He observed:

"The Californian could never have gone alongside the sinking ship. All she could have done was to lower her own boats to pick up such people as were in the water, or were prepared to jump for it, and get those people in boats already on board."

Because of the dangers involved, it is safe to assume that Captain Lord would not have chosen to raft Californian alongside the sinking Titanic. So, the 1,500 people left aboard on the liner after the departure of its lifeboats would have had two choices: 1. wait on the slanting decks for the lifeboats to return; or, 2. Jump overboard and hope to swim to safety away from the sinking ship. In the end, both options were the same because Titanic did not remain afloat long enough for a laborious and time-consuming transfer of people via lifeboats.

Captain's Responsibilities -- Captain Lord's detractors find it convenient to ignore his overriding responsibility for the lives and safety of the crew that he would have put in jeopardy performing a rescue of Titanic's personnel. Lord's sole responsibility was for the safety of his ship and crew. Shipmasters are legally and morally required to go the aid of other persons in peril only insofar as they can do so without putting their own vessels, crew, or passengers in danger. This is spelled out in the U.S. Federal Code:

2304 Duty to provide assistance at sea

(a) A master or individual in charge of a vessel shall render assistance to any individual found at sea in danger of being lost, so far as the master or individual in charge can do so without serious danger to the master's or individual's vessel or individuals on board.

While this language applies only to U.S. flagged vessels, it is similar to the laws of all seafaring nations. Masters must go to the aid of another vessel or person in danger, but only if they do not put their own

people in jeopardy.

By law, by custom, and by morals Captain Lord was in no way responsible for the lives of the 1,500 people put in peril by the sinking Titanic. Responsibility for them rested with Captain Smith and the White Star line. Captain Lord was required first to look after the ship and lives in his charge and only secondarily to go to the aid of anyone in distress.

IV. Captain Lord's Mistake

The Mistake -- It is the opinion of the authors that Captain Stanley Lord was correct in his assessment of the ice dangers surrounding his ship, Californian, on the night of April 14-15, 1912. Furthermore, those dangers indicate that Captain Lord was prudent in not resuming making way upon sighting white rockets fired by a ship (probably Titanic to the south of Californian. Captain Lord's sole mistake was in the manner in which he handled the situation once he discovered what had happened and not in his seamanship.

Captain's Responsibility -- It comes as a surprise to many on shore that Captain Lord did not automatically have to rush to Titanic's aid that fatal night. As mentioned above, his primary responsibilities were to his ship and his ship only. This was made perfectly clear by written orders from his company, The Leyland Line:

"Commanders must run no risk which might by any possibility result in accident to their ships. It is to be hoped that they will ever bear in mind that the safety of the lives and property entrusted to their care is the ruling principle that should govern them in the navigation of their vessels, and that no supposed gain in expediting or saving of time on the voyage is to be purchased at the risk of accident.

The company desires to maintain for its vessels a reputation for safety, and only looks for such speed on the various voyages as is consistent with safe and prudent navigation.

Commanders are reminded that the steamers are to a great extent uninsured, and that their own livelihood as well as the company's success depends on immunity from accident; no precaution which ensures safe navigation is to be considered excessive."

This quote from the above section says safety came first, business second aboard Leyland Line ships of 1912. By placing the safety of the ship above all, these company orders established a pattern for making decisions in emergencies such as the distress of a nearby ship. Captain Lord had effectively been told that the safety of his ship, its crew, passengers, and cargo was to come above all else – including other ships that might be sinking. The similarity to current U.S. law is not accidental.

Actions of SS Californian -- Historians no longer question that of the ships known with certainty to be in the vicinity of RMS Titanic when it foundered, the Leyland Line's freighter SS Californian was the closest. (Hypothetical mystery ships notwithstanding.) Nor is it widely contested that the officers on the Californian observed at least some if not all of the Cotton Power Company socket signals (called "rockets" by both crews) as they were fired by Fourth Officer Boxhall from the decks of the Titanic. Stanley Lord, the captain of Californian was told of these rockets by his bridge watch, a full 25 minutes after the first one went up, but he took no action. Specifically, Lord did not go to the bridge to see the rockets for himself. Nor did he wake the ship's radio officer to check for any unusual wireless traffic. It is widely held that officers on Californian's bridge watched helplessly as Titanic sank before their eyes.

The first of Titanic's rockets didn't make much of an impression on Californian's Second Officer, Herbert Stone. The initial distress rocket appeared little different from a Number of meteors he had seen that night. He described what he saw to the British Board of Trade hearing in London:

"...I was walking up and down the bridge and I saw one white flash in the sky, immediately above this other steamer. I did not know what it was; I thought it might be a shooting star."

Stone told the London inquiry that he did not think anything about this first rocket. He was curious enough, however, to use his binoculars to look at the other ship. He was questioned about additional rockets by Butler Aspinwall:

MR. ASPINWALL: And how many more did you see?

MR. STONE: I saw four more then.

MR. ASPINWALL: What were they, rockets?

MR. STONE: They had the appearance of white rockets bursting in the sky.

MR. ASPINWALL: Did they come in quick succession?

MR. STONE: At intervals of about three or four minutes.

MR. ASPINWALL: Now what did you think they were?

MR. STONE: White rockets.

Despite several attempts by both Mr. Aspinwall and the Wreck Commissioner, Lord Mersey, Second Officer Stone steadfastly refused to identify these rockets as distress signals. The closest he came was to admit that the other vessel must have been signaling to some other ship.

Had Captain Lord gone up to the bridge that night and identified the rockets as distress signals, he would most certainly have awakened his wireless operator. (Californian's single operator had turned off his equipment and gone to bed prior to Titanic's encounter with an iceberg.) Within seconds Lord would have known that the world's largest liner was headed to the bottom. That news would have forced Stanley Lord to face a decision:

Should he attempt to navigate his way out of the ice that surrounded his ship?

Should he risk navigating through ice at night while attempting to get lifeboats ready for lowering?

Could he post extra lookouts needed to avoid the ice while still maintaining routine underway watches?

Or:

Should he prudently remain stopped until daylight when he would be able to more safely navigate through the ice surrounding Californian?

Captain Lord's Actions -- To understand why Stanley Lord acted the way he did on the night of April 14-15, 1912 it is necessary to examine events aboard Californian. In particular, it is necessary to examine the ice conditions encountered about 10:20 p.m. on the 14th. To quote from Captain Lord's affidavit given in 1959:

" At 10:30pm, I observed a brightening along the western horizon. After watching this for a few minutes, I concluded that it was caused by ice. I personally rang

the engine room telegraph to full speed astern and ordered the helm hard aport. As those orders came into effect, the lookout men reported ice ahead. Under the influence of the helm and propeller going astern the ship swung around to ENE by compass. (NE true). The ship was then stopped by loose ice and from one-quarter to half a mile from the edge of a low ice field. As I could not see any clear place to go through, I decided to remain stopped until daylight"

Lord's own words describe a dangerous situation in which his ship has been stopped by loose ice. Captain Lord had taken Californian into a known ice field despite precautions such as posting extra lookouts. Stanley Lord wisely decided to stay where he was until morning to try to navigate his way through a very obviously dangerous ice field. So that is what he did. He ordered the Chief Engineer to keep the engines ready and had the bridge team contact him with any suspicious movements.

Lord kept busy either on the bridge or in the wireless room until around 11:30 p.m. by his own admission. He asked his wireless operator to relay to the nearest ship (his wireless operator identified the ship as Titanic) that he was stopped and surrounded by ice. Lord estimated the other ship to be only *"..6 to 8 miles away"* and that it was no larger than his. Lord based his opinions on the lack of lights from the decks except *"a few white lights which he judged to be from portholes or open doors"*.

Captain Lord had done his job up to this point. He had instructed his wireless operator to warn the nearby ship of the ice surrounding Californian. After noting that the other ship that was off his own starboard side, Lord retired to the chart room. Later that night he was told of "rockets" and given descriptions of the other ship's movements. However, it is important to remember that he was told of rockets not distress rockets. Captain Lord described what happened that night to Senator Smith at the U.S. Senate hearings:

"...When the second officer came on the bridge, at 12 o'clock o, or 10 minutes past 12, I told him to watch that steamer, which was stopped, and I pointed out the ice to him.... At 20 minutes to 1, I whistled up the speaking tube and asked him if she was getting any nearer. He said, "No; she is not taking any notice of us." So, I said, "I will go and lie down a bit." At a quarter past 1 he said, "I think she has fired a rocket." He said, "She did not answer the Morse lamp and she has commenced to go away from us." I said, "Call her up and let me know what her name is." So, He put the whistle back, and, apparently he was calling. I could hear him ticking over my head. Then I went to sleep."

A short time after his U.S. testimony, Captain Lord was called before the British Board of Trade inquiry into the Titanic disaster. He was grilled by, among others, Lord Mersey, the Wreck Commissioner and head of the investigation. The questioning was not friendly:

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: What did you think this vessel was? firing rockets for?

MR. LORD: I asked the second officer. I said, "Is that a company's signal?" And, he said he did not know.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: then that did not satisfy you?

MR. LORD: No, it did not.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I mean whatever it was it did not satisfy you that it was a company's signal?

MR. LORD: It did not, but I had no reason to think it was anything else.

COMMISSIONER MERSEY: That seems odd. You knew that the vessel was sending up this rocket was in a position of danger.

MR. LORD: No, my Lord, I did not.

COMMISSIONER MERSEY: Well, danger if she moved?

MR. LORD: If she moved, yes.

Some of Captain Lord's trepidation over moving his ship that night after it stopped in the ice can be seen in his last answer to Lord Mersey. Californian had been undamaged by its first run-in, but in Lord's mind would have been in danger if it resumed steaming.

Conclusions -- It must be kept in mind that Captain Lord had steamed into a field of ice at about 10:20 p.m. on April 14. After he ordered Californian to stop for the night it was still somewhat surrounded by that ice. If Captain Lord deemed to unsafe to proceed to the aid of another ship that night, then he should have said so and have had his decision and the reasons for it recorded in the ship's log. This would have been proof that he had been aware of the other ship's distress and that he elected not to respond because it would have put his own ship in peril. This simple log entry would have satisfied all of the legal and moral requirements on Captain Lord that night.

Safety at sea is an extremely serious thing. Captains and all officers and crews of any ship big or small passenger or otherwise take it very seriously. There is an unspoken rule (as well as a written one) that if another ship is in danger, you stop and help. However, every Captain who needs help knows and does not expect a possible rescue ship to risk it all. He does not expect any Captain to risk the lives of his crew and the safety of his ship to save his own life or the lives of his crew. Safety is number one.

V. The Life of Captain Stanley Lord

Nearly everyone who has studied the Titanic disaster is familiar with the Californian and its mysterious role in the incident. Few, however, know much about the ship's master, Captain Stanley Lord. Little emphasis has been placed on Lord, the man and his career, in both pro and anti-Lord literature.

Some critics have dismissed Captain Lord as an incompetent commander who couldn't be bothered to get out of bed on a cold night. Many of the man's proponents stick to arguing various technical aspects of the case. Both of these arguments have left Lord himself as the shadowy scapegoat of the Titanic tragedy.

Stanley Lord cannot be reduced to the events of April 14-15, 1912. To gain a more accurate perspective, it is necessary to set the events of that night against the background of his life and career both before and after the Titanic incident.

Understanding Lord's career sheds light on the Californian's role that night. The notion that he willingly threw away a successful career he'd carefully spent a lifetime building, simply because he couldn't bother to get out of bed, does not fit the rest of the man's life. Indeed, as Captain Lord himself stated in a letter to the Asst. Secretary of the Board of Trade's Marine Department on August 10, 1912, *"I had everything to gain and nothing to lose [by going to the Titanic's rescue]."*

Stanley Lord was born on 13 September, 1877 in Bolton, Lancashire. He was the youngest of six surviving sons, a younger seventh brother having died at age seven. In 1891, when he was still not quite fourteen, Stanley first went to sea as an apprentice, indentured to J.B. Walmsley and Co. His parents did not approve of his choice of career, preferring that he become a businessman, as did his father and three of his older brothers. The young Lord was determined and persistent, and eventually, his father reluctantly signed his indenture papers.

Young Lord's first ship was the barque, Naiad, which traveled mainly to South American ports. During his time aboard the Naiad, he met then-fellow apprentice Ernest Shackleton and later, future Titanic First Officer William Murdoch. None of these men became friends as a result of those meetings.

In 1896, Lord attained his Second Mate's certificate and was transferred to the barque, Lurlei, as its 2nd officer. Lord's indenture ended in 1897, after which he attended navigation school and gained his First Mate's certificate. Future Titanic Chief Officer Henry T. Wilde was one of his fellow students. The two were acquainted.

First Mate's certificate in hand, Lord decided to switch to steam vessels. Accordingly, he applied for a position with West India & Pacific Steam Navigation Co. (This company was later taken over by the Leyland Line.) Lord was interviewed for employment by the company's Marine Superintendent, Captain J.M. Bridgewater who commented that Lord at age 20 was too young for an officer's position in the company. Lord replied that this was a problem that he was remedying "day by day." Bridgewater, obviously impressed by the quick-witted young man, hired him despite his misgivings.

Lord was assigned to the SS Barbadian as its 3rd officer. He also joined the Mercantile Marine Service Association (MMSA) at this time, a membership he maintained until his death in 1962. On August 7, 1899, a "failure to join" notation was placed on his record, normally a serious offense. Lord had broken his leg and was unable to report to the Barbadian when it sailed, thus prompting this comment on to be added to his record: "Satisfactory letter from owners produced 2 March, 1901."

Six weeks after this incident Lord was promoted to 2nd officer and transferred to the Jamaican. While aboard this ship, Stanley Lord participated in the Boer War. In 1901, he again attended navigation school, attaining his Master's certificate in February, and Extra Master's certificate in May.

At this time, he was offered a position with the White Star Line as a third or fourth officer. Lord turned it

down, feeling that he deserved better as a holder of an Extra Master's certificate. Leslie Reade, one of Captain Lord's foremost critics, later noted, "As a seaman, Lord earned, to the end of his professional career, the highest commendation from his different employers, and the chances are that had he joined the White Star at the outset of his career, he would have been regarded as among their best officers." (The Ship That Stood Still, p. 15)

Instead, he accepted a temporary assignment to the Bernard Hall as 2nd Officer. In July, he was promoted to Chief Officer and assigned to the Darien which happened to anchor in the Mississippi later that summer. The Darien's captain received word that another of the company's ships, the Atlantian was soon to pass. Lord was ordered to fire distress signals to honor the other ship. The Atlantian replied in kind, as was common practice at that time. This use of distress signals no doubt affected Stanley Lord's attitude toward Titanic's rockets on the night of April 14, 1912.

After a single voyage aboard Darien, he was appointed Chief Officer of the Colonian on its maiden voyage. Lord was then transferred to the Antillian in 1904. While Chief Officer aboard this ship, he participated in the seaborne invasion exercises, which included retrieving 1000 men from lifeboats.

In 1906, the Antillian's captain fell ill, and Lord was promoted to captain, at age 28. In July, when Captain Japha was able to resume his duties, the new Captain Lord was appointed Master of the Louisianian. As a new Leyland Line Master, Lord was most certainly made aware of the official Leyland Line safety policy, which read:

"Commanders must run no risk which might by any possibility result in accident to their ships....no precaution which ensures safe navigation is to be considered excessive."

On March 19, 1907, Stanley Lord was married to Mabel Tutton. They had met in 1901 while Lord was attending navigation school. Their son, Stanley Tutton Lord, was born on August 15, 1908.

Captain Lord was transferred to the William Cliff in 1909, and then to the Californian in 1911. The events surrounding the Titanic incident will not be detailed here as they have been well documented elsewhere. It is interesting to note, however, that while in Boston directly after the Titanic's sinking he formed a friendship with the Endicott family. The Endicott's had relatives aboard Titanic, but this friendship endured even after Lord's reputation had been questioned by both the U.S. and British investigations into the sinking.

After Lord testified at the British hearings, he was suspended as the Californian's master, put on inactive status, pending further developments. Lord spent the summer writing letters to various people, organizations, and newspapers, appealing for help with his case. In August, he was asked to resign from the Leyland Line at the urging of Sir Miles Mattinson, a member of the Leyland Line's Board of directors.
Captain

Stanley Lord reluctantly submitted his resignation on August 13, 1912.

On August 2nd, a letter in defense of Lord from Captain J. MacNab, a member of the Executive Council of the MMSA, appeared in the Liverpool Daily Post. It read in part:

"His past life and character go to prove that, had he realized this, he would have braved the ice dangers which beset his own ship, and gone to the rescue. But seamen are only mortals, and especially when wearied with long watching, liable like other people to temporary dullness of apprehension of matters happening outside the limits of their own charge."

Captain Lord passed all his Board of Trade examinations

most brilliantly before me, his testimonials for good conduct and ability at sea being invariably of the highest order. Since then I have heard him spoken of as a humane and clever officer and commander, as well as a kind husband, a loving father, and a high-principled gentleman."

This sentiment was echoed years later in Eaton and Haas' book, *Titanic: Destination Disaster*, 2nd edition (p. 151). "Nor is there any possible doubt as to how Captain Lord would have reacted or what actions he would have taken if he had been properly informed" [my emphasis]

After several fruitless months of job hunting following his departure from Leyland, Stanley Lord was hired by Lawther, Latta (Nitrate Producers Steam Ship Company) in early 1913, at the recommendation of Frank Strachan, American agent for the Leyland Line. Lord was provided with a favorable reference from the Leyland Line, which read, in part,

"We have always found Captain Lord a sober, industrious, and careful officer, good navigator and disciplinarian, and whilst he has been in command of our steamers, they have run free from accident."

In March, 1913, Captain Lord was appointed Master of the *Anglo Saxon*. During the early part of World War I, Lord supervised the transport of horses for the war effort between the US and France. He had gained experience in this type of transport years earlier during the Boer War. For his efforts, he was commended by both French and American authorities. In 1915, he was transferred to the command of the *Anglo Patagonian*.

Captain Lord went ashore in 1916, to supervise the construction and completion of Latta's newest ship, the *Anglo Chilean*. He was given command of the *Anglo Chilean* after its completion in 1917.

On May 13, 1917, while sailing in the Mediterranean, the *Anglo Chilean* exchanged fire with a German sub, possibly sinking the sub. In November of that same year, the *Anglo Chilean* acted as leader of a convoy of ships between New York and the UK.

The commodore of the convoy, Captain W.H. Owen, RNR, praised Lord in a letter he later wrote to John Latta.

After the war, the rest of Stanley Lord's years at sea passed uneventfully. One incident that stands out, occurred during his years on the *Anglo Chilean*. The apprentice, Frank John Goodchild, had fallen down into the hold where he became trapped. Lord himself went down and rescued the young man, which resulted in a lifetime friendship between the two.

Because of health problems and a comfortable personal financial situation, Stanley Lord retired in 1927, at the age of 50. At this time, Sir John Latta wrote Captain Lord a glowing reference:

"It gives us great pleasure to state that Captain Stanley Lord held command in this company from February 1913 until March, 1927, during the whole of which period he had our entire confidence, and we regard him as one of the most capable commanders we have ever had. It was a matter of much regret to us that he felt compelled to retire owing to indisposition. He carries with him our grateful appreciation of his excellent service and we earnestly hope that he will soon recover his wonted health."

In his book, *Titanic: the Death and Life of a Legend*, Michael Davie noted:

"It is difficult to imagine that Lord could have served a further fifteen years at sea, much of the time as a ship's captain, if he had himself believed that while in command of the he had failed, through negligence or cowardice, to save 1500 men and women from a terrible death.

At all events, he behaved after 1912 like a man who thinks he has been treated badly, not like a criminal."

Stanley Lord enjoyed a long, quiet retirement, which stretched to nearly 35 years. In 1958, the Titanic incident was brought back to his attention with the release of the movie, *A Night to Remember*, which painted an unflattering picture of his role in the incident. He engaged the services of Leslie Harrison of the MMSA to attempt to have his case reopened and his name cleared. Stanley Lord spent the rest of his life working with Mr. Harrison until his own death on January 24, 1962.

VI. Actual Transfers at Sea.

The following examples are offered for two reasons. One: In all three incidents, vastly more resources were available than the Californian could ever muster. Two: They illustrate the time involved in making transfers even under the best condition.

RMS Republic -- SS Florida

23 January 1909

461 Passengers

The White Star steamer RMS Republic was rammed by the liner SS Florida at approximately 5:40 a.m. The Republic was the most seriously damaged of the two, enough so that she eventually sank despite the best efforts to salvage her. At the Time of the collision, she had a total of 461 passengers aboard. It was not until approximately 7:30am that the transfer of passengers to the Florida began and the operation wasn't completed until 11:30am. A total of four hours!

SS Florida -- RMS Baltic

23 January 1909

Later that night, the decision was taken to remove both the Republics and the Florida's passengers to the RMS Baltic, which had arrived to lend assistance. The transfer started at 11:30pm and wasn't completed until 10:00am the following morning. It took ten and one half hours and 83 boatloads to accomplish this!

Andrea Doria vs. Stockholm

July 26, 1956

1706 Passengers & Crew

Within a few minutes of being rammed by the Stockholm, the Andrea Doria took on a 22 degree list to starboard. This had the effect of making the starboard boats difficult and dangerous to both load and launch. The portside lifeboats of the Andrea Doria were rendered completely useless. They eventually sank with the ship, still in their davits. The starboard boats that could be launched were capable of holding only 1,004 of the more than 2,000 people aboard.

It was not until 12:45am that the first boats left the Andrea Doria for the Stockholm, which was deemed

stable enough to accept survivors. In fact, the Stockholm dispatched her own boats to help in the evacuation. Ultimately the Stockholm took 570 survivors. Despite these efforts, the situation for the nearly 1,700 people still aboard the sinking liner looked grim. The ship appeared to be foundering faster than the lifeboats could shuttle survivors to safety.

The arrival of the French passenger liner Ile de France at 2:00am made the difference. This ship was far enough away from the disaster scene to have continued on its voyage, but elected to turn around. She took on over 700 people using primarily her own lifeboats. The remainder of the Andrea Doria's survivors were scattered among the other rescue ships which arrived on the scene. The bulk of the transfer was completed by 4:58am. A total of nearly four hours and thirteen minutes. It was not until 5:30am when the Andrea Doria's master and a few remaining crew members were finally removed from the ship.

Queen Elizabeth 2

01-04 April 1974

1638 passengers, 940 crew

This situation is interesting as the 1648 passengers aboard is close to the number actually trapped aboard the Titanic. The Queen Elizabeth 2 had suffered the loss of all three boilers after the feed water had been contaminated with fuel oil, and was unsuccessful in her attempts to correct the problem. While she was never in any danger of sinking, the ship was rapidly becoming uninhabitable. As such, it was decided to remove the passengers after 36 hours of work failed to correct the boiler casualty.

It was the M/V Sea Venture (Later to become famous as the Pacific Princess under new ownership) which was sent out from Bermuda after her own passengers were unceremoniously hustled ashore. She arrived on the scene at 3:00am on 4, April and stood off at 1000 yards until daybreak. That was when the actual evacuation began. Using the QE2's lifeboats was not possible as the ship's emergency generators could not produce sufficient power to recover them. Because of this, the task fell to four of the Sea Ventures tenders, each with a capacity of 70 persons. Each tender had to make six round trips in an operation which literally took all day long.

The Numbers

In the intership transfer examples cited, one of the common denominators were the ample resources which became immediately available. Resources which Captain Lord aboard Californian did not have. Mistakes were made. No doubt about it. But they were not made by a cowardly, mean, cold hearted, ruthless, incompetent, or selfish man. They were made by a Captain who had thousands of other things on his mind. Thousands of things that needed to go right in order for him to be the hero that everybody wants him to be.

A captain who followed his company's policy as well as his legal right not to move from his position. Although it seems likely that at least a few additional Titanic passengers could have been pulled from the water alive if Californian had made it to the wreck site before 2:45am, Captain Stanley Lord and the Californian could not have saved the 1500 remaining passengers from the sloping decks of Titanic. No Captain could.

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- 6) The Night Lives On by Walter Lord
- 7) Mr. George Behe, and his website Titanic Tidbits at

www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepage/Carpathia

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