

The Middle Watch

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ET Research

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WHAT follows is the complete text of a near-mystical document composed by the Third Officer of the *Californian* in April 1957, exactly 45 years after the *Titanic* disaster, describing the events of that night.

After the text will follow a commentary by this contributor, who has been in possession of a carbon copy of these five-page typewritten notes for some years.

It should be noted that Groves' manuscript was extremely poorly punctuated, and that some punctuation has been inserted for ease of comprehension. This includes extensive use of commas to create sub-clauses, and the making of new paragraphs where large single paragraphs may previously have existed.

No words have been added or taken away from the original, although full stops or periods have been removed from after the word 'Mr' as in 'Mr. Groves.' Other minor grammatical errors have been corrected, although many have been allowed to stand in order to convey the sprawling sense of the original.

Spelling mistakes or typographical errors have, on the whole, been left as in the original. So has some wrong punctuation where it was decided that it did not conflict unduly with the run of a sentence. Hyphens and colons omitted by Groves have not been restored. Any material in square brackets, such as [sic], is an interpolation by the contributor. Italics have been inserted for ship names, where the author instead used roman in inverted commas.

Occasional strange capitalisation of words, such as 'Apprentice' in the middle of a sentence has gone uncorrected, but Groves' use of capitals plus full points to convey morning and afternoon times has been altered to the less glaring 'am' and 'pm,' and a consistency introduced which is lacking in the MS.

Finally it should be noted that Groves uses the anachronisms "shew" and "shewed" where today we would say "show" and "showed."

The Middle Watch - April 15th, 1912.

[By Charles Victor Groves]

The *Californian*, owned by the Leyland Line was a four masted steamship with a gross tonnage of 6,223 and a maximum [sic] speed of about 14 knots. She had accommodation for 50 passengers and carried a crew of 55 all told.

Leaving London on Good Friday April 5th. 1912 bound for

Boston, U.S.A. with a full cargo but no passengers, she was commanded by Captain Stanley Lord, a tall lean man who spent some twenty years at sea much of which time had been in the North Atlantic trade.

He was an austere type, utterly devoid of humour and even more reserved than is usual with those who occupy similar positions. Owing to a certain concatenation of circumstances he had obtained command somewhat earlier than was usual.

The Chief Officer was G. F. Stewart, a competent and experienced seaman nearing middle age, who was well versed in the ways of the Western Ocean and was a certificated Master.

H. Stone, the Second Officer, had been some eight years at sea, the whole of which period had been spent in the North Atlantic and West Indian trades. He was a stolid, unimaginative type, and possessed little self confidence. He held a certificate as First Mate.

The Third Officer was C. V. Groves who had followed the sea as a career for six years and was in possession of a Second Mate's certificate. For three years his voyages had taken him mainly to South America and the Mediterranean. Latterly he had been engaged as a junior officer in the Indian and Colonial trades. Signalling was a strong point with him, for which he held the Board of Trade's special certificate, and he had made some progress as an amateur in wireless telegraphy.

Californian carried one Apprentice and this was J. Gibson who had completed three years of his indentures with the Leyland Line, the whole of which time had been spent on the North Atlantic and West Indian run. He was a bright lad, keen on his profession and one who shewed every sign that he would make headway in it.

The voyage proceeded normally until the afternoon of Sunday April 14th [1912], when, at a few minutes before 6pm, Mr Groves went on to the bridge to relieve the Chief Officer for dinner. The sky was cloudless, the sea smooth, and there was a light westerly breeze.

Away to the southward and some five miles distant were three large flat topped icebergs. Nothing else was in sight and the ship was making eleven knots through the water. Captain Lord was on the bridge talking to the Chief Officer as they scanned the horizon. A few minutes later they both went below for their meal, after which Mr Stewart returned and relieved the Third Officer [Groves].

Mr Groves went on watch again at eight o'clock to take over until midnight and was told by the Chief Officer that wireless messages had been received giving warning of ice ahead and shortly after [he, the Chief Officer] went below.

Almost immediately Captain Lord came up with similar information telling him to keep a sharp lookout for this ice. The night was dark, brilliantly clear, with not a breath of wind and the sea shewed no sign of movement with the horizon only discernible by the fact that the stars could be seen disappearing below it.

The lookout had been doubled, there being a sailor on the fore-castle head and another in the crow's nest. The Captain remained on the bridge, with the ship proceeding at full speed when suddenly the Third Officer perceived several white patches in the water ahead, which he took to be a school of porpoises crossing the bows.

Captain Lord evidently saw this at the same moment and, as he was standing alongside the engine room telegraph, he at once rang the engines full speed astern. In a very short space of time, and before the ship had run her way off, she was surrounded by light field ice. This was about 10.30pm.

Despite the clarity of the atmosphere this ice was not sighted at a distance of more than 400 yards, nor was it seen by the lookouts before it was seen from the bridge.

Captain Lord went below shortly after the ship had lost her way through the water, leaving instructions that he had to be called if anything was sighted. Absolute peace and quietness now prevailed save for brief snatches of "Annie Laurie" from an Irish voice, which floated up through a stokehold ventilator.

At 11.15pm a light was observed three points abaft the starboard beam, of which the Captain was immediately advised, and his reply to the information that it was a passenger ship was: "That will be the *Titanic*" on her maiden voyage.

This light was some ten miles distant, but he did not go up to look at it. Mr Groves kept the ship under close observation and at 11.40pm he saw her stop and then her deck lights were extinguished, or so it appeared to him.

The time of the stopping of the ship is accurately fixed by the fact that at that moment *Californian's* bell was struck once in order to call the men who were to take over the middle watch.

The dowsing of the lights caused no surprise to the Third Officer because for the two preceding [sic] years he had sailed in large ships where it was customary to put the lights out at midnight to discourage the passengers from staying on deck too late.

Captain Lord was told of the ship having stopped and at a few minutes before the close of the watch he went up on the bridge and after looking at the distant ship observed "That's not a passenger ship" to which the Third Officer replied "It is, sir. When she stopped she put all her lights out." The Captain then left the bridge saying that he must be told if that ship made a move or if anything else hove into sight. The ship remained stationary. The drama had commenced.

At midnight Mr. Groves was relieved by Mr Stone, to whom the Captain's orders were passed. The two young officers chatted for a while until the newcomer's eyes had got accustomed to the darkness when Mr. Groves bade him "Good night" and then walked along the boat deck in order, as was his wont, to have a yarn with the sole Marconi Operator, Mr Evans, before turning in.

The Operator lay in his bunk asleep with a magazine in his hands. His visitor woke him up with the query "What ships have you got Sparks?" Dreamily he replied "Only the *Titanic*." He was then told that she was in sight on the starboard beam.

Almost mechanically the Third Officer picked up the wireless 'phones which lay on the operating table and placed them on his head to listen to what the ether might convey. He heard no sound for he had failed to notice that the clockwork of the magnetic detector had run down, thus no signals could be received until it had been wound up. He could read wireless signals when sent slowly.

Mr Evans had dropped off to sleep again and the 'phones were replaced on the table. The Third Officer closed the door and went to his room to turn in. The time was then 12.25am and that was ten minutes after *Titanic* had commenced to send her messages of distress.

Californian's operator slept peacefully. *Titanic* realised she was doomed and was lowering her lifeboats and fifteen hundred souls had seen their last sunrise.

About 6.45am that Monday morning the Third Officer was awakened by hearing ropes being thrown on to the boat deck above his head and he realised that the boats were being

prepared for swinging out. Almost immediately Mr Stewart came into his room to tell him to turn out as *Titanic* has sunk and her passengers are in her boats ahead of us.

Jumping from his bunk Mr Groves went across the alleyway to the Second Officer's room and asked if the news was true and received the reply "Yes, I saw her firing rockets in my watch."

Amazed at hearing this he went up on the bridge and found it to be a brilliantly fine morning with a light breeze and slight sea. There were more than fifty icebergs large and small in sight, and the ship was making slow way through the water.

Some five miles distant a four masted steamship with one funnel was observed and she proved to be the Cunarder *Carpathia*. She lay motionless with her house flag flying at half mast. *Californian* arrived alongside her at about 7.30am and semaphore signals were exchanged when it was learned that *Titanic* had struck an iceberg at 11.40pm the previous night and sunk two and a half hours later.

Some 720 of her passengers had been rescued and *Carpathia* was returning to New York forthwith. Would *Californian* search the vicinity for further possible survivors? *Carpathia* then got under way, by which time it was nine o'clock and less than twenty minutes later disappeared from view hidden by the icebergs.

The sea was covered by a large number of deck chairs, planks and light wreckage. *Californian* steamed close alongside all the lifeboats which *Carpathia* had left floating and it was particularly noted that they were empty.

Scanning the sea with his binoculars the Third Officer noticed a large icefloe a mile or so distant on which he saw figures moving, and drawing Captain Lord's attention to it, remarked that they might be human beings [but] was told that they were seals.

Californian now made one complete turn to starboard followed by one to port and then resumed her passage to Boston passing the Canadian Pacific steamship *Mount Temple* and another steamship of unknown nationality.

Before noon *Californian* had cleared all the ice, and amongst many wireless messages [sic] she intercepted was one addressed to Mr. W.T. Stead, a passenger who was with those lost in *Titanic*, offering him a dollar a word for his story of the casualty. It was sent by a well known New York newspaper.

The New England coast was approached in a dense fog, out of which loomed a tugboat containing a number of American newspaper men expecting to obtain a story. Their journey was a vain one.

What was the complete story of events aboard *Californian* during the middle watch of that fateful morning of April 15th? The passage of time has not dulled the recollections of all who were in any way concerned.

Mr Stone and the apprentice Gibson saw the ship, which Mr Groves had reported as being a passenger ship, fire eight rockets; the first of which was seen at 1.10am.

This is the number which *Titanic* is believed to have sent up between 1am and 2am, and at 2.20am Mr Stone reported to Captain Lord that the distant ship had "disappeared" and it is known that *Titanic* foundered at that time.

Officers of *Titanic* and many others aboard her reported having seen the lights of a ship which was stopped a few

miles away from her, and passengers on the ill fated vessel were reassured on being told by the officers that this ship would soon come to their assistance.

All that middle watch *Californian* remained stationary, for news of the rockets being seen did not stir her Captain into action and Mr Stone lacked the necessary initiative to insist upon his coming to the bridge to investigate things for himself and it did not occur to him to call the Chief Officer when he realised the apathy of the Captain, who apparently slept peacefully whilst this drama was being enacted.

Mr Stewart relieved the bridge at 4am, when the events of the watch were related to him. Half an hour later he roused Captain Lord, and when told about the rockets which had been fired, he replied to the effect that he knew all about them.

Shortly before 6am Mr Stewart was instructed to call the wireless operator to sea [sic] if any information could be obtained regarding the distress signals, when advice was received from several ships of the sinking of *Titanic*. Slowly at first, but eventually at full speed, *Californian* got under way until she arrived at the scene or the disaster.

Many questions will forever remain unanswered concerning the failure of *Californian* to render assistance to the stricken ship. Mr Stone knew without a shadow of doubt that there was trouble aboard the vessel from which the distress signals had been fired but he failed to convince his Captain; but did Captain Lord need any convincing? Was Mr Stone afraid that if he was too insistent he would arouse the wrath of his superior?

Why did Captain Lord take no efficient steps to render assistance before 6 o'clock? Did he consider problematical damage to his ship was of more importance than the saving of lives?

Many times the question of Captain Lord's sobriety on that occasion has been raised, but it cannot be too strongly asserted that he was a most temperate man and that alcohol played no part in the matter.

Does an experienced shipmaster lay down fully clothed and in such circumstances sleep so heavily as he said he did on that night? Surely, surely that is open to the very gravest of doubts.

Probably it would not be far from the mark if it is stated that the fate of those fifteen hundred lost souls hinged on the fact that Mr Groves failed to notice that the magnetic detector was not functioning when he placed the 'phones on his head in the wireless office at which time the ether was being rent by calls of distress which he would not have failed to recognize.

And what of those figures on the ice floe? Were they only seals as the Captain asserted? It has already been stated that all *Titanic's* lifeboats which were left afloat were closely examined and found to contain no occupants.

A month later, in almost the same spot, the White Star liner *Majestic* [actually the *Oceanic*] picked up one of these boats and in it were found the bodies of passengers who had evidently died of starvation, for the ship's doctor who examined them reported the men's mouths contained fragments of cork from the lifebelts. Had these passengers escaped from the sea on to the ice floe and then eventually got into the boat as it drifted past?

What is the probable explanation of her deck lights appearing to go out when it is beyond dispute that they burned right to the moment when *Titanic* sank? She was approaching *Californian* obliquely and when she stopped she put her helm hard over and thus foreshortened her perspective, thereby giving the

appearance of the extinction of her lights.

The whole unfortunate occurrence was a combination of circumstances the like of which may never again be seen and a middle watch which will not soon be forgotten.

The first thing to be said about Groves' script, 'The Middle Watch,' is that he had, in fact, nothing to do with the middle watch! His watch was from 8pm to midnight. Yet the manuscript is full of the doings of the Third Officer, Groves himself.

The significance of Groves' own watch will be examined during this commentary, which dissects his 'Middle Watch.' Initially we can say that the *Californian* never made 14 knots in her service history, had a certificate for 47 passengers, not 50, and for the voyage in question had a crew of 47, not "55 all told."

Groves, of course, was writing when he was aged 69. At this advanced age he says that Captain Lord was "an austere type, utterly devoid of humour" and "even more reserved than usual," adding uncharitably that owing to a series of events that Lord had obtained command somewhat earlier than was usual.



Stanley Lord

Lord was 26 when he obtained his first command. He was 35 to Groves' 24 at the time of the *Titanic* event, and Groves would not go on to command until the late 1920s.

It might be important here to note that Leslie Reade, author of *The Ship That Stood Still*, who was in possession of Groves' MS, cites it as the basis (p. 16, line 15) for a claim that Captain Lord was "devoid of humour, domineering, with a high opinion of himself, and would rarely speak, even when spoken to."

None of the latter material appears in Groves' 'Middle Watch', and Reade, who also mentions "press descriptions" in a footnote, does not cite any newspapers or dates. The contributor has yet to see press descriptions from 1912 that use these adjectives and epithets, yet others cited by Reade in another context refer to Lord being "agreeable" and of "mighty good seamanship."

Whatever about 'high opinions of oneself,' Groves seemed to like Chief Officer Stewart from his MS description. The elderly Groves writes however that Herbert Stone (Groves' senior as Second Officer) was "stolid, unimaginative... and possessed little self confidence."

Groves, on the other hand, despite holding an inferior cert to Stone, was "strong" on signalling, and had made "progress" in wireless telegraphy – but not sufficient progress, as it turned out, to know when a set was on or off.



Turning to the fateful Sunday, it is noticeable that Groves puts himself on the bridge at 6pm when "away to the southward and some five miles distant were three large flat-topped icebergs."

The *Californian* later (at 7.30pm ship's time) informed all shipping that it had seen these three bergs at 6.30pm, not 6pm, as Groves now says.

In May 1912, (Br 8122), Groves told the London Inquiry that he had seen these bergs at 5.20pm, a time when he was not on duty. But he also claimed that this was the time he relieved Mr Stewart for his tea.

What is indisputable is that the *Californian* wireless transmission of April 14, 1912, received by the *Titanic* among other vessels, said these bergs had been seen while the *Californian* was in a latitude of 42° 05'. This is a line 22 miles north of the latitude of the *Titanic* wreck site today.

If Groves was on the bridge when the bergs were seen, it appears he had no difficulty with the report of where they were. Certainly he did not disagree with ANY of the *Californian* positions, including the stop position, at the British Inquiry. (Groves did not give evidence in America.)

Groves went on duty as the Officer of the Watch again “at eight o'clock to take over until midnight.” This, of itself, is incredibly important. Groves now had sole charge of the navigation of the vessel, although no OOW would deviate without good cause from the course laid down.

The point here is that Chief Officer Stewart would have told Groves of the plotted course. And the course was due west. *Californian*, having turned the corner, was on the direct track to Boston, naturally substantially north of the New York track and the RMS *Titanic*.



**C. V. Groves on
*Californian***

Thus Groves took the *Californian* due west during his trick, and **knew** he was doing so. The reader is here referred here to an earlier Titanic Research Article “*Mystery Ship Made Simple*” which makes it abundantly clear that the *Californian* would have had to change course dramatically to the south in order to be the *Titanic*'s Mystery Ship.

Groves knew, because he was in operational charge at the relevant time, that no such change of course took place. If there had been a change, Groves would have told the British Inquiry, as he told them much else.

He agreed, after all, with his own ship's stop position. And Groves naturally agreed too that if the *Titanic* had been in the general position she said in her distress messages, then neither ship could have seen the other. (Br 8445, 8446)

The corollary, then, is that because Groves claimed the ship which he had seen approach his own was the *Titanic*, it must have been the *Titanic* that was massively off course. Groves knew that he himself had been holding the *Californian*'s course!

Br. 8445 (Mr Robertson Dunlop) You will appreciate, M. Groves, that if the latitudes are right it follows that your opinion must be wrong? — If the latitudes are right, then of course I am wrong

Br. 8446 If the latitude of your ship and that of the *Titanic* are anything approximately right, it follows that the vessel which you saw could not have been the *Titanic*? — Certainly not.

Of course, we know today from the wreck site (actually a few miles south of the New York track) that the *Titanic* had been on her proper route for Sandy Hook. She was not off course, and neither was the *Californian*. Groves had seen that it was so.

Groves next says that Captain Lord joined him on the bridge during his watch, having doubled the lookout, because of the wireless warnings of ice ahead.

“*Suddenly the Third Officer perceived several white patches in the water ahead, which he took to be a school of porpoises crossing the bows.*”

Groves did not mention this in evidence. It would certainly be an unusual sight in this part of the North

Atlantic, given what is known about porpoise and dolphin distribution and migrations. But that is what he initially thought he perceived, he writes in 1957, when he was actually seeing ice. He is entitled to it.

“Captain Lord evidently saw this at the same moment...”

Captain Lord’s evidence to both Inquiries suggests he saw the ice shelf first, taking action without any warning having been given by anyone else. Groves says the ship then stopped “about 10.30pm,” but Lord made it 10.21pm.

Despite the clarity of the atmosphere this ice was not sighted at a distance of more than 400 yards, nor was it seen by the lookouts before it was seen from the bridge.

Leaving aside the question of who on the bridge saw the ice first, this statement is notable in that it makes clear that the “brilliant clear” night did not, after all, make for perfect conditions for seeing ice. This anomaly may have also affected the *Titanic* lookout.

At 11.15pm a light was observed three points abaft the starboard beam

Groves in his initial evidence in Britain said 11.10pm, and may have said 11.15pm in his proof, because he was questioned on the anomaly. It was ‘about’ this time, rather than ‘at’ this time, he indicated.

He also said initially (Br 8156) that the light was three and a half points abaft the star beam, not three points.

There is a relatively minor difference in 1957, but as Groves pointed out in 1912:

Br. 8157 - “We were heading N(orth)E(ast) and she was three points abaft the beam.”

8158. Your beam would be? — S(outh)E(ast).

8159. That would bring her about south? — S(outh), or S(outh) by W(est) — S(outh) by W(est).

These are absolute points of the compass. Groves’ ship was coming out of the south, or south and a little to the west.

The *Titanic* was proceeding from east (Europe) to west (United States). She was not sailing from the south, or from the south and a little west.

If Groves’ ship approached as he described, then she was emphatically not the *Titanic*.

...the Captain was immediately advised...

Groves did not immediately advise the Captain by his sworn evidence of 1912.

Br 8169: “When I went down to him (Captain Lord) it would be as near as I could judge about 11.30.”

His reply to the information that it was a passenger ship was: “That will be the Titanic on her maiden voyage.”

For the record, Captain Lord denied in evidence that Groves told him that the approaching light was a passenger ship. He “never heard that,” and furthermore had no recollection of Groves visiting him at this time.

Lord says the two men only discussed the ship when Lord came onto the bridge at 11.45pm.

Br. 6831. And did you say to him (Groves) “The only passenger steamer near us is the *Titanic*? — Lord: I might have said that with regard to the steamer, but he did not say the steamer was a passenger steamer.

“This light was some ten miles distant”

At Br 8160, Groves said the light was “ten to twelve miles away” when he noticed it first. But when she stopped, he said (Br 8385) she was “about five to seven miles off.”

As in his 1912 evidence, Groves repeats in ‘The Middle Watch’ that at 11.40pm *Californian* time he saw her stop.

Thus, in 1912, in the half hour from 11.10 to 11.40 when she stopped, Groves’ ship has made five miles (10-12 less 5-7), or a speed of 10 knots (nautical miles per hour).

The *Titanic*, travelling out of the east, not the south, was going at a speed of 22 knots.

In his 1957 account, Groves noticeably does not give the distance off when the ship stopped. He allows the suggestion of “some ten miles distant” to remain throughout.

“Mr Groves kept the ship under close observation”

But Mr Groves stated in 1912 “when I saw her first I did not pay particular attention to her,” and “[I] took no actual bearing of her.” He did not contend at any stage, for instance, that he had used glasses on the light or the ship that emerged from the light.

“I took no notice of the course she was making except that she was coming up obliquely to us.” (Groves, Br 8466).

Groves said the deck lights on the visitor were extinguished at 11.40pm, but this “caused no surprise” as in large ships it was customary to put the lights out at midnight. The surprise might have been that they were put out 20 minutes early?

Groves later agreed with a suggestion that if that ship had been the *Titanic*, and if she had turned, it might account for lights appearing to go out, whereas *Titanic* lights blazed until the last.

And yet Groves saw no turn, had always said the ship was approaching obliquely (from the south at ten knots!) and he could not see anything between him and that vessel to cause her to turn.

To finally kill off this *Titanic*-turn scenario (and leaving aside the fact that the *Titanic* subsequently resumed her course for up to ten minutes following the collision, according to some of her witnesses), one should say that 11.40pm *Titanic* time does not equate to 11.40pm *Californian* time.

The *Californian* sailed five days earlier than the *Titanic* to make North America. Ship times are set at noon. There would have been a large gap between the two ships in their longitude at noon, because the *Californian* was further west than the *Titanic*, which speedily ate up the separation on the east-west axis in the hours that followed. But the clock difference remained. There was no similarity in local ship time (AST).

Captain Lord observed: “That’s not a passenger ship” to which the Third Officer replied “It is, sir. When she stopped she put all her lights out.”

Lord disavows that a conversation took place in this format, but agrees he might have said when looking at this vessel that the only passenger ship in the vicinity was the *Titanic*.

It is more noteworthy perhaps that the reason Groves gives for her being a passenger ship is that she has merely put her lights out (and earlier than passenger ships did from his experience).

In his 1912 evidence, Groves admitted he could not tell the height or length of the steamer, nor the distance between her masts, and judged her a passenger steamer only from her lights. He never once gave an estimate of size. His estimates of speed instead put her on a par with a tramp like the *Californian*, which had been doing 11 knots.

Groves next goes off duty and walked along the boat deck in order to have a yarn with Marconi operator Evans. The ‘Sparks’ was asleep, but Groves “woke him up” to ask what ships had been in communication. When Evans mentioned the *Titanic*, Groves told him she was “in sight on the starboard beam.”

Evan’s radio shack was on the boat deck. He had turned in at 11.30pm, having earlier been rebuffed by the *Titanic* with his message about *Californian* being stopped and surrounded by ice. He didn’t get up and walk a few paces to have a look at the maiden voyager... because Groves didn’t tell him about it!



**Wireless
Operator Evans**

This is Evans in evidence:

Br. 9044. Did anything more happen then? — I do not remember Mr Groves picking the phones up, but Mr Groves says so.

9045. That he picked them up and put them into his ears? — Yes; of course, I was half asleep.

9046. Did he tell you, as far as you recollect, then at a quarter-past twelve of anything that he had seen since the ship (*Californian*) had stopped? — **No.**

Evans said he only told Groves what ships he had got and then went to sleep. “He (Groves) switched out the light and shut the door.”

Evans does not remember that “*the Third Officer picked up the wireless 'phones which lay on the operating table and placed them on his head to listen to what the ether might convey.*”

Even allowing that this happened nonetheless, Evans made no mention whatever of Groves’ assertion that he had told the wireless man that the *Titanic* was in sight!

One might have expected such dramatic news to stick in Evans’ mind, particularly since it was a much bigger tidbit than any news Evans could give Groves.

This is what Groves said in evidence:

8282 You asked him what ships he had got. What did he say? — Only the *Titanic*.

8283 Did you take his instruments and put them to your ears? — Yes.

He does not state, unlike in 1957, that he told Evans the *Titanic* was in sight on the starboard side.

How, in any case, would Groves know this?

All he thinks he knows is that there is a ‘passenger steamer,’ having approached from the south at ten knots, then stopped and put out her lights, some miles off.

How does he know she is the *Titanic*?

He has had no communication with the visitor. Just before his watch ended, he tried to Morse the stranger, an attempt he said was ‘ineffectual.’ He thus did not know her identity.

The time was then 12.25am and that was ten minutes after Titanic had commenced to send her messages of distress.

Groves, of all people, should know that his ship did not have the same time as *Titanic*.

He has chosen, in 1957, to perpetuate an untruth constructed for a particular purpose in 1912.

[Even if they were the same - Evans, in his evidence, has Groves visiting at 12.15am. His account is of a conversation of only a minute or two before he fell asleep.

Groves was separately asked:

Br. 8286 How long did you listen? — I do not suppose it would be more than 15 seconds at the outside—well, 15 to 30 seconds. I did it almost mechanically.

In these circumstances, Groves, who at Br. 8250 said he was “on the bridge till something between 12.10 and 12.15” has left the wireless shack by 12.20am.

Indeed, Groves himself wraps it all up at Br 8289 in response to Lord Mersey:

What time was it you were talking to this man whom you call Sparks? — “As near as I can judge it would be between 12.15 and 12.20.”]

About 6.45am that Monday morning the Third Officer was awakened...

Br 8290. What time did you turn out again in the morning?

Groves — About 6.40. I did not notice the time particularly.

Mr Groves went.. to the Second Officer's room... and received the reply “Yes, I saw her firing rockets in my watch.”

Groves in 1957 slyly suggests that Stone was looking at the *Titanic* ("I saw her") rather than a tramp in the direction of which low-lying rockets appeared over the horizon, which is what Stone actually testified.

Once more Groves' 1957 revisionism is contradicted by his own evidence in 1912:

8304 Now, did he tell you anything had happened in his watch? — Yes, he [Stone] told me he had seen rockets.

8305 Did he say where the rockets were, or what sort of rockets, or anything of that sort? — As far as my recollection goes all he said was he had seen rockets in his watch, but at that time I did not pay particular attention to what he said, except that he had mentioned rockets.

8306 You do not remember more than that he mentioned rockets ? — No, nothing more.

Amazed at hearing this he went up on the bridge

Groves estimated (Br 8321) that at the time he got on the bridge it was 6.50am. He had to have a conversation with Stewart, then a lively conversation with Stone about rockets in the night, then return to his cabin and get dressed before appearing on the bridge.

“Some five miles distant a four masted steamship with one funnel was observed and she proved to be the Cunarder Carpathia.”

Groves also gave this evidence in 1912, in Qs 8321 to 8336.

But he doesn't mention in 1957 what was drawn out from him in 1912:

Br. 8339 Did you see any other vessel? — Yes, I saw two other vessels

8341. At this time? — Yes I fancy one of them was in sight at the same time as I noticed this four-master (later identified by him as *Carpathia*).

8341 Do you know what they were? — I know what one of them was

8342 What was it? — The *Mount Temple*.

8343 Where was she? — She was ahead, a little on our starboard side when I saw her first.

8344 Before you changed your course? — Before we headed for the *Carpathia*.

Groves agreed (8346) that the *Mount Temple* was much nearer to them than the *Carpathia*, and only about a mile and a half off.

But Captain Lord said he passed the *Mount Temple* at 7.30am (Br 7014), and Captain Moore of the *Mount Temple* himself says (Br 9244) that it was shortly before 8am when he had sight of both the *Carpathia* and the *Californian*.

It will be noted that Captain Rostron said he did not see the *Californian* until 8am, telling Senator Smith “At 8 o'clock in the morning he hove in sight.”

Thus these three Captains agree, and Third Officer Groves is out of step.

Californian arrived alongside her at about 7.30am...”

Captains Rostron and Lord agree that the *Californian*, picking her way through the icefield from the ‘wrong’ side after seeing the Cunarder, only came together at 8.30am. There is an hour difference with Groves, whose timings are consistently unreliable.

“Semaphore signals were exchanged when it was learned that Titanic had struck an iceberg... Carpathia then got under way, by which time it was nine o'clock”

Groves would have it take an hour and a half for the *Californian* and *Carpathia* to exchange signals before the latter departed. The others said half an hour.

“The sea was covered by a large number of deck chairs, planks and light wreckage.”

Both Lord and Rostron contradicted that the sea was covered with a large number of pieces of wreckage. They insisted that there was scant wreckage to be seen.

Scanning the sea with his binoculars the Third Officer noticed a large icefloe a mile or so distant on which he saw figures moving, and drawing Captain Lord's attention to it, remarked that they might be human beings [but] was told that they were seals.

Groves did not mention the possibility of survivors existing on an icefloe in his 1912 evidence, and nor did anyone else mention this incident. In that respect, the seals inhabit the same world as the porpoises.

The New England coast was approached in a dense fog, out of which loomed a tugboat containing a number of American newspaper men expecting to obtain a story. Their journey was a vain one.

Carpathia was met by at least two New York press boats. The *Californian* was



Lining up
against
Groves:



C. V. Groves in later life

not met by any newspaper boat. Groves is giving his vessel the sensational welcome afforded to Captain Rostron's Cunarder.



“Mr Stone and the apprentice Gibson saw the ship, which Mr Groves had reported as being a passenger ship,”

Stone, “stolid and unimaginative,” and the apprentice Gibson saw only a ‘smallish’ or ‘small to medium’ steamer which they both believed to be a tramp. Groves does not mention these contrary opinions, given in evidence by both men.

[They saw her] fire eight rockets... This is the number which Titanic is believed to have sent up between 1am and 2am...

There is no denying that the *Californian* saw *Titanic* rockets. Groves is copying Lord Mersey's final report, which actually spoke of “at least” eight rockets. In fact many *Titanic* witnesses spoke of many more (See *Titanic* Research Article: *Titanic's Rockets*), the implication being that the *Californian* did not see all rockets fired.

At 2.20am Mr Stone reported to Captain Lord that the distant ship had “disappeared” and it is known that Titanic foundered at that time.

As previously outlined, *Californian* and *Titanic* ship times were not the same. Stone said (Br 7957) he saw “a gradual disappearing of all her lights, which would be perfectly natural with a ship steaming away from us.” The departing vessel changed

her bearing and “gradually faded as if the steamer was steaming away from us.” Not by any means did it appear to be a foundering, Stone said.

Nor is Groves' timing, once again, reliable:

Br 7976. Stone: “About **2.40**, by means of the whistle tube, I blew down again to the Master; he came and answered it, and asked what it was. I told him the ship from the direction of which we had seen the rockets coming had disappeared, bearing S.W. to half W. the last I had seen of the light.”

Mr Stone lacked the necessary initiative to insist upon [Captain Lord] coming to the bridge to investigate things for himself and it did not occur to him to call the Chief Officer when he realised the apathy of the Captain, who apparently slept peacefully whilst this drama was being enacted.

This does not chime with Stone's response to the question as to why he had made the 2.40am report:

Br. 7978. (Lord Mersey) But why could not have you told him in the morning? Why wake up the poor man?

Stone — Because it was my duty to do so, and it was his duty to listen to it.

It appears Stone would have known where his duty and that of the Master lay in the case of a nearby shipwreck with human life in the balance. What he told the British Inquiry was that he had seen the visitor steaming away

Br. 7981. Were you anxious about her? Stone — **No.**

“Mr Stone knew without a shadow of doubt that there was trouble aboard the vessel”

Mr Stone repeatedly denied in evidence that he had concerns about the safety of the nearby tramp that he had been monitoring in the Middle Watch.

“from which the distress signals had been fired but he failed to convince his Captain;”

Stone in evidence:

7856A. Did you think that they were distress signals? — No.

7857. Didn't that occur to you? — It did not occur to me at the time.

7858. When did it occur to you? Did it occur at some later time to you? — Yes.

7859. When? — After I had heard about the *Titanic* going down.

Did Captain Lord need any convincing? Was Mr Stone afraid that if he was too insistent he would arouse the wrath of his superior?

No, he did not need convincing, because Stone himself – who knew his own mind better than Groves did – was not convinced of any peril.

Was Stone afraid? – No, he knew what his duty was in a particular circumstance.

Why did Captain Lord take no efficient steps to render assistance before 6 o'clock?

Because he had no reason to believe assistance was required by anyone.

Did he consider problematical damage to his ship was of more importance than the saving of lives?

This is a rather unworthy question of any seafarer, irrespective of honour, who might be at any time in the same position. As a matter of fact, Lord twice threw his ship into the icefield the next morning, the second time at full speed.

Many times the question of Captain Lord's sobriety on that occasion has been raised, but it cannot be too strongly asserted that he was a most temperate man and that alcohol played no part in the matter.

How generous. Mere sober callousness and cruelty, then.

Does an experienced shipmaster lay down fully clothed and in such circumstances sleep so heavily as he said he did on that night? Surely, surely that is open to the very gravest of doubts.

Captain Lord had been up since 4am the previous morning. He was asleep after midnight, fully clothed, that he might be roused at any time. His sleep was indeed interrupted during that short night, and he was back on duty at 4.30am.

Probably it would not be far from the mark if it is stated that the fate of those fifteen hundred lost souls hinged on the fact that Mr Groves failed to notice that the magnetic detector was not functioning when he placed the 'phones on his head in the wireless office at which time the ether was being rent by calls of distress which he would not have failed to recognize.

No comment necessary.

And what of those figures on the ice floe? Were they only seals as the Captain asserted?

Groves suggests in 1957 that Captain Lord knowingly abandoned survivors.

A month later, in almost the same spot, the White Star liner Majestic picked up one of these boats and in it were found the bodies of passengers who had evidently died of starvation, for the ship's doctor who

examined them reported the men's mouths contained fragments of cork from the lifebelts. Had these passengers escaped from the sea on to the ice floe and then eventually got into the boat as it drifted past?

The *Oceanic* found three bodies which, already being dead, had been abandoned to the wallowing Collapsible A in the early morning of April 15. They thus did not die of starvation. Fragments of cork in the mouth lodged there from the action of the water. *Titanic's* refrigerating plant, which likely exploded, was insulated in a large amount of red cork.

What is the probable explanation of her deck lights appearing to go out when it is beyond dispute that they burned right to the moment when Titanic sank? She was approaching Californian obliquely and when she stopped she put her helm hard over and thus foreshortened her perspective, thereby giving the appearance of the extinction of her lights.

Groves equates the *Californian's* nearby vessel with the *Titanic*, which his senior officers did not.

Groves did not see the visiting ship "put her helm hard over" and did not say so to the British Inquiry.

Think about it: any ship approaching obliquely that puts its helm hard over, will actually be displaying more of her shape thereafter, not less.

And her perspective could not have been hugely foreshortened, as Groves noted in evidence that he could see the stopped stranger's red sidelight on her port side. Such sighting, confirmed by Stones and Gibson, gives substantial broadside.

The whole unfortunate occurrence was a combination of circumstances the like of which may never again be seen and a middle watch which will not soon be forgotten.

If only Groves' heroic efforts to listen to the *Titanic* distress signals - while all around him slept - had been successful!

If only they had listened to him, they might have saved those poor half-men half-seals abandoned to the icefloe!

If only Groves had actually been on the Middle Watch, and not the "unimaginative" Stone...

But he tried his imaginative best to recover lost ground in London, and succeeded in putting himself centre-stage once more in 1957.

LESLIE READE, author of the book *The Ship That Stood Still*, quotes Groves' manuscript misleadingly.

Reade, in his veiled references to Groves' slapdash few pages, thereby created the perception in the *Titanic* community that 'The Middle Watch' was a closely-guarded treasure trove, akin to the Third Secret of Fatima or at least a Dead Sea Scroll.

We can see it now for what it is. Yet it is Captain Lord who is said, in an unsubstantiated reference, to have had a "high opinion of himself."



Leslie Reade

In Reade's book, which is poisonous about Lord throughout, Third Officer Groves is contrastingly described as "concerned," "enthusiastic," "compassionate" (!), "respected", "merciful," "judicial," possessed of "moral and mental toughness," "rather shy," "admired greatly," and of "sound judgement" and "considerable achievement."

And that's just page 372.

Reade could obviously have included 'The Middle Watch' as an appendix to his highly-selective, distorting, and illogical book. He carefully chose not to do so. It is hoped that the readers of *Encyclopedia Titanica* can now see why.

For anyone further interested in this topic, the work '[*A Ship Accused - The Case of The Californian Re-Examined*](#)' by this contributor is available from the TitanicBookSite.

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