

Before we leave the topic of the movements of *Californian* on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup> 1912, there is one additional issue that needs to be addressed. This is about some additional information that came from *Virginian*'s Captain Gambell after his vessel arrived in Liverpool on the morning of April 21<sup>st</sup> and was reported by the Press Association Special Telegram. In that report Gambell said:<sup>46</sup>

“At 5.45 a.m. I was in communication with the *Californian*, the Leyland Liner. He was 17 miles north of the *Titanic*, and had not heard anything of the disaster. I Marconied her as follows: – ‘*Titanic* struck iceberg. Wants assistance urgently. Ship sinking. Passengers in boats. His position latitude 41 46, longitude 50 14.’ Shortly after this I was in communications with the *Carpathia*, the *Frankfurt*, and the *Baltic*, all going to the *Titanic*. At 6.10 a.m. I Marconied the *Californian*: – ‘Kindly let me know condition of affairs when you get to *Titanic*.’ He at once replied: – ‘Can now see the *Carpathia* taking the passengers on board from small boats. The *Titanic* foundered about 2 a.m.’”

This story, which appeared in many newspapers around the world afterwards, has been cited by a number of people who were critical of *Californian* and her captain, Stanley Lord. Their claim is that Captain Gambell's account demonstrates that *Californian* could not have been as far away from *Titanic* as Captain Lord had claimed he was, because just 25 minutes after receiving word about *Titanic* from *Virginian*, *Californian* reported seeing *Carpathia* picking up survivors from *Titanic*'s lifeboats.

In Leslie Reade's book, *The Ship That Stood Still*, Reade brings attention to this message as some sort of proof that *Californian* was very close to *Carpathia* at 6:10am. Reade concluded that the distance between *Californian* and *Carpathia* had to be less than about 7.5 miles after applying the distance to the horizon formula from *Californian*'s upper bridge. (Reade also mentioned that the *NY Times* of April 23<sup>rd</sup> reported that the reply from *Californian* came at 6.14am, making it only 4 minutes after the request was sent.)<sup>47</sup> That argument would almost work except for the very critical detail that was included in *Californian*'s response message to *Virginian* telling her that *Titanic* foundered at 2am. *Californian* was not in communications with *Carpathia* until she got very close, and then it was by semaphore flag signals. Even *Carpathia*'s Captain Rostron said that *Californian* was first sighted by him about 8am when she was 5 to 6 miles away cutting through the ice. Wireless communications were first established with *Californian* at 8:35am *Californian* time when *Carpathia* sent out that “rescued 20 boatloads” message. The semaphore messages between *Californian* and *Carpathia* were exchanged only after *Californian* came very close, and according to Rostron, included notes about “*Titanic* going down,” that they picked up all survivors, and asked *Californian* to look around as he was not sure if all the boats were accounted for.<sup>48</sup> Rostron also said all passengers were picked up by 8:30, so this confirms that the messaging with *Californian* had to be soon after that. What this all means is that *Californian* would *not* have known that *Titanic* sank at 2am until after she got in communications with *Carpathia*. That being the case, it points to 6:10am as being the wrong time from Captain Gambell.

What all this points to are two possibilities:

1. 6:10am was the NY time of the message, not ship's time, or
2. 6:10am was actually 8:10am *Virginian* time, and Gambell's “8” may have looked like a “6” in his handwritten notes.



We know that *Virginian* time was 1 hour and 30 minutes ahead of NY time, while *Californian* time was 1 hour and 50 minutes ahead of NY time. That means that *Californian* time was 20 minutes ahead of *Virginian* time. If proposition No. 1 was correct, then the request message from *Virginian* to *Californian* came at 8:00am, when *Californian* was still about 5 to 6 miles from *Carpathia*. However, if proposition No. 2 was correct, then the message to *Californian* came at 8:30am *Californian* time, just about the time she arrived near *Carpathia*. In order to read semaphore flags, ships typically had to be within a mile or two of each other.

Captain Lord said he was asked to send information back to Gambell about an hour and a half after Gambell told him about *Titanic*, which was about 6am.<sup>49</sup> This too cannot be correct because that would make the request for information come at about 7:30am while *Californian* was still running down the west side of the pack ice.

Is there any other information we can use to determine the actual time that *Californian* reported back to *Virginian* that *Titanic* sank at 2am? According to what Charles Groves told the British Wreck Commission about the semaphore signaling exchange between *Californian* and *Carpathia*:

8362. Q. (The Commissioner.) Tell us shortly? – A. [Groves] He told us the “Titanic” had struck an iceberg at 12 o’clock and had sunk at 3, and they had 800 or 700 - I am not sure which - people on board, including Mr. Bruce Ismay. When we asked him if we could be of any assistance they said, no. And then Captain Lord suggested that we should search down to leeward.

As we have already seen, Groves also thought his vessel had reached *Carpathia* about 7:45am, but that was more likely the time that *Californian* had actually turned toward *Carpathia*, not when she came alongside. It seems that Charles Groves was also mistaken or had misread some of the details that were sent in the semaphore signals from *Carpathia* about the time that *Titanic* struck the iceberg and the time that she sank. Remember, Groves was being questioned weeks after these events actually took place. But the main point is that information about the time *Titanic* sank and the number of survivors picked up by *Carpathia* was sent to *Californian* when semaphore signals were being exchanged, information that also had to be given to Cyril Evans for him to send that wireless reply message to *Virginian*.

From all the considerations above, it seems that the message from *Virginian* to *Californian* requesting particulars of what was happening at the scene of the disaster was sent at 8:10am *Virginian* time (8:30am *Californian* time), not at 6:10am as stated by Captain Gambell to the press.

### **To the Wrong Place at the Right Time**

Until now we have concentrated on the positions and movements of the SS *Californian* up until the time she reached *Carpathia* on the morning of April 15, 1912. But what about *Carpathia*? How did she get to where she did?

The Cunard Liner *Carpathia* (Figure 9-04) was built in 1902 by C. S. Swan & Hunter, Wallsend-on-Tyne. She was a 13,555 gross ton vessel, 540 feet in length, 64.5 feet in beam, with one funnel, four masts, twin screws and a rated speed of 14 knots. She had accommodation for 204 second class and 1,500 third class passengers.

*Carpathia* departed New York harbor on Thursday, April 11, 1912, bound for the