

## Chapter XIV

### A TALE OF TWO SHIPS – PART 2: *ALMERIAN*

The Leyland liner *Almerian* departed Mobile, Alabama on April 3, 1912 with a cargo of cotton and lumber bound for Liverpool. She reached Liverpool on April 25. As we have seen, Captain Lord told the British Wreck Commission on May 14<sup>th</sup> that he had sighted an unidentified two-masted steamer with a pink funnel and black top on the morning of April 15. The funnel colors were those of the Leyland Line, but Captain Lord did not mention that particular detail at that time, or offer a name for this ship. Nor did he mention anything about seeing a small steamer near *Mount Temple* on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup> when he first testified before the US Senate investigation on April 26, 1912. Between his arrival at Liverpool on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May and appearing before the British Wreck Commission inquiry on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, Captain Lord had visited the Leyland Line's office in Liverpool to report to the line's Marine Superintendent Captain Fry.<sup>1</sup> It is entirely conceivable that during Lord's visit to the Leyland Line's office he may have been given information that the Leyland Line's SS *Almerian* had been close to the reported area where *Titanic* foundered on the morning of April 15, 1912.<sup>2</sup>

Before we continue, it should also be noted that on June 6, 1912, the Leyland Line received a letter from the Assistant Secretary of the Board of Trade's Marine Department asking them to identify any vessels that they owned that may have been in the vicinity of the *Titanic* disaster on April 14 or 15. An official reply was sent back to the Board of Trade on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1912 from the Leyland Line's Liverpool office. The reply read:

Sirs.

We are in receipt of your letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> instant, and in reply beg to inform you that the "Californian", and "Antillian" were the only vessels belonging to this organisation, which were in the vicinity of the "Titanic" about the 15th April last.

The movements of the first named steamer have been fully dealt with by the Board of Trade enquiry now proceeding, and therefore you will have all the information before you.

In reference to the "Antillian", as far as we can ascertain this vessel was outside the Ice region, saw no Ice, and had clear weather.

As can be seen above, the only vessels that the Leyland Line would admit to being anywhere near the area of the disaster were their SS *Californian* and their SS *Antillian*. But what about the whereabouts of *Almerian*?

A handwritten version of an unsigned document was discovered among the papers of *Californian*'s Captain Stanley Lord that formed part of the material assembled by him on or about May 21, 1912. It was unmistakably written by Captain Lord himself,<sup>3</sup> but the wording in the report makes it sound as if it came from *Almerian*'s Captain Richard Thomas.<sup>4</sup> The report was prepared as exhibit B on October 26, 1964 by Leslie Harrison, a friend and supporter of Captain Stanley Lord, while preparing a petition to the Board of Trade. (See Appendix Q for a complete transcript of this report.)

The report states that at about 3am on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1912, *Almerian* had come to a stop because of ice that was encountered in her path. On her port quarter was a steamer which they tried to communicate with, presumably by Morse lamp as *Almerian* did not carry a wireless installation. The only signals that they were able to make out were the letters

“OUNT.” At daylight, listed in the report as about 4am, they were able to see the full extent of the ice that was about, which included field ice and icebergs that extended from as far to northeast and south as they could see. *Almerian*, according to the report, then “proceeded at various speeds in a northerly direction on the western extremity of the icefield” seeking to find a way to get to clear water to the east of the field. It was also reported that the vessel seen at 3am on her port quarter was also steering in a northerly direction at this time. At some unspecified later time, they sighted a large four-masted steamer on the eastern extremity of the icefield about 6 to 6½ miles off. Shortly after that they sighted smoke ahead which turned out to be a Leyland Liner coming down from the north. At this time, according to the narrative in the report, the unidentified steamer that was first sighted at 3am, and now steering northward ahead of them, suddenly turned and headed to the northwest. As *Almerian* approached the Leyland Liner that was coming down the western side of the icefield, but before they could come close to it, they saw it turn eastward and steam through the ice toward the four-masted vessel that was on the other side. *Almerian* then continued on in a northerly direction, and to their “astonishment,” the unidentified vessel, that they had in sight all along since 3am, suddenly turned and headed to the east, coming close enough for her name to be read with the aid of glasses. It was identified as the SS “*Mount Temple*.” After reading her name, the vessel allegedly turned away and headed once again to the northwest while *Almerian* continued to go north until about 9:50am. *Almerian* then steamed slowly through the icefield which they said was cleared at 10:30am. After that, nothing more was seen of the other vessels that were mentioned.

The report also listed some specific navigational data:

3:05am	Stopped	41° 20'N, 50° 24'W
10:30am	Cleared ice	41° 48'N, 50° 24'W
Noon		41° 51'N, 50° 00'W

Also written in the report was *Mount Temple*'s turning point coordinates and time when she turned around for the SOS position that was given in evidence by Captain Moore at the US Senate investigation hearings back on April 27<sup>th</sup> 1912, “0.25am – 41.25 N, 51.14 W.”

There has been much speculation concerning this report. It has been said that the weakness of the report can be found in the navigational data. As we have seen, the report claimed that when *Almerian* had stopped, about 3am, a ship later identified as *Mount Temple* was seen off her port quarter. The location in the report was put down as 41° 20'N, 50° 24'W, a position that is 20 miles from any point on *Mount Temple*'s reported DR track to the SOS position. The report then had *Almerian* steaming northward about 4am, only to reach a position at 10:30am that was 28 miles due north of her 3am stopped location.

This account would have seemed reasonable back in 1912, given the general acceptance that *Titanic* foundered at the SOS position that was given in longitude 50° 14'W. A ship passing northward at longitude 50° 24'W would only have been a little over 7 miles west of *Carpathia*, and would have seen *Californian* steaming south ahead of them on the western side of the icefield as described. However, we now know that the SOS coordinates sent out by *Titanic* by wireless is not where *Titanic* foundered, and that *Carpathia* actually picked up *Titanic*'s lifeboats east of 50°W longitude, about 20 miles from any ship heading north on a longitude line of 50° 24'W. The report seems to fit with evidence presented at the US Senate hearings, and does not agree with the facts as we now know it to be. On the other hand, the evidence given by *Mount Temple*'s Captain Moore, that *Titanic* had to have foundered well east of 50° 09.5'W, was dismissed in 1912. The forensic evidence discovered 73 years later on the bottom of the Atlantic was to prove that Captain Moore was right.