

## Chapter XVI

### BOSTON – A TANGLED WEB

*Californian* departed the scene of the wreckage at 11:20am, her time, Monday morning, April 15, 1912 on a heading of N59°W by compass to make 271° true. At local apparent noon, she was in 41° 33'N, 50° 09'W, having crossed about 5 miles of heavy pack ice at a speed of about 7 knots. Once on the western side of the icefield, *Californian*'s engine was ordered to full ahead. By 2:30pm, having traveled about 25 nautical miles since noon, the last of two icebergs were seen, and *Californian* was finally clear of all ice.<sup>1</sup>

During the remainder of her voyage to Boston, “practically everybody on the ship” was talking about this mysterious steamer that was seen to be throwing up rockets during the Middle Watch in the early morning hours of April 15. As explained by *Californian*'s wireless operator, Cyril Evans:<sup>2</sup>

“Nearly everybody on the ship has talked amongst themselves, and in front of the other members of the crew, about it...From people taking up the conversation I know it was said that rockets had been seen - had been fired. They did not know what rockets they were. I know they said that rockets had been fired off, and the captain had been roused...Three times, I think it was, sir...it has been talked about all the time since then... I remember the apprentice told me that he got the Morse lamp out and called up on that, sir. But he did not get any reply on that...Nobody specified any special direction where they came from. From the south they were.”

Evans had heard directly from Apprentice James Gibson about the rockets that Gibson personally witnessed from the upper bridge of *Californian* that night, and was told that Captain Lord was informed on three separate occasions.<sup>3</sup> This conversation took place before *Californian* had even reached the scene of the disaster that Monday morning.

About 3½ days after she departed the scene of the wreckage, *Californian* arrived off Boston Light at about 1 o'clock in the morning, Friday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of April. She then waited until daylight before arriving at the Clyde Street pier of the Boston and Albany docks around 7am in East Boston to an awaiting crowd of anxious people and reporters who heard that *Californian* had been near the scene of the disaster and had taken part in the search for survivors. It was *Californian*'s first trip to Boston, and also Captain Lord's. It was also Lord's first encounter with reporters who were eager for any details they could get about the role played by *Californian* and any other nearby vessels.

### Thirty Miles North – Three Hours Steaming – Three Hours Searching

The following excerpts were taken from the Boston press over the course of several days after *Californian*'s arrival.<sup>4</sup> They show how the story of *Californian*'s involvement in the events related to the *Titanic* disaster as presented by Captain Stanley Lord to the press kept changing in the days before he and Cyril Evens were summoned to testify down in Washington, DC before the US Senate subcommittee that was looking into the circumstances behind the *Titanic* disaster. Statements in quotation marks are attributed as coming directly from Captain Lord.

As reported in *The Boston Globe* on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April:

The *Californian* was “separated from the scene of the catastrophe by great masses of ice, including a number of large bergs and field ice, which in places was two miles wide... We set about reaching the scene of the accident as quickly as possible.

“At best however, it was slow going. At times, nervous and anxious as we were, we hardly seemed to be moving. We had to dodge the big bergs, skirt the massed field ice and plow through the line of least resistance. For three full hours we turned, twisted, doubled on our course - in short, maneuvered one way or another - through the winding channels of the ice...

“Of course the waters were pretty well littered with wreckage, but we were really a bit surprised, considering the size of the wreck, that there wasn’t more. We seamen would describe the amount of floating material as ‘scant wreckage’ but I suppose a landsman would have thought that the waters teemed with floating stuff. The wreckage consisted of cushions, chairs and similar things.”

As reported in *The Boston Traveller* on the same day:

#### LEYLAND LINER RUSHED TO SCENE OF *TITANIC* DISASTER BUT FOUND ONLY WRECKAGE

“My wireless operator, C. F. Evans, received the SOS message at 5:30 Monday morning when we were 30 miles north of the scene of the frightful disaster. This message was sent from the steamship *Virginian*. I do not know where the *Virginian* was at the time.

“Long before we got to the scene we saw the *Carpathia* picking up all the lifeboats from *Titanic*, and were close in when the last of the boats were hauled on board the Cunarder. We steamed as close to the spot as we could, but there was no sign of life about. For three hours I remained steaming about the spot, hoping to be able to pick up something, or recover some body, but we saw nothing.

“Running close to the *Carpathia*, the cries and wailings of the women and children could be heard in spite of the fact that they had been taken to the cabins and staterooms, where they were attended by those on board the rescue ship. The ocean was smooth and calm and the weather was fine, but there was a desolate aspect about the place that impressed us all on board the *Californian*. No other ship was in sight but the *Carpathia*. I do not know where the *Virginian* was then.

“At the end of three hours, our search having been without result, we put on steam and headed for Boston.”

According to *The Boston Traveller*, Captain Lord was also asked in what latitude and longitude he was at when he first received the SOS message from *Virginian*, and his reply was that he could not give out a “state secret” and that the question would have to be answered by those in his company’s office.

The story about not giving out a “state secret” was also confirmed by other newspapers. According to a reporter for *The Boston Evening Transcript*, reporters were