

## FOREWORD

“It has long been an axiom of mine that  
the little things are infinitely the most important.”  
– Sherlock Holmes, *A Case of Identity*

Everyone familiar with the circumstances surrounding the loss of the passenger liner *Titanic* is aware that the lights of an unidentified ship were sighted by *Titanic*'s passengers and crewmen while their vessel lay dying in mid-Atlantic following her encounter with an iceberg. After assessing all the evidence gathered from all pertinent eyewitnesses, the British Inquiry into the disaster concluded that this unknown vessel was the Leyland liner *Californian* and that she had spent the night of April 14-15 not more than eight or ten miles from (and well within sight of) the sinking *Titanic*. Indeed, the *Californian*'s own watch officers admitted to having observed rockets in the distance that were identical in appearance to those which were sent up by the *Titanic*.

The *Californian*'s master, Captain Stanley Lord, always insisted that the above verdict was mistaken and that his ship had been much further away from the *Titanic* than eight or ten miles; specifically, Lord claimed that his vessel had been nineteen miles from (and well beyond visual range of) the disaster site.

In later years several people reviewed the British Inquiry's *Californian*-related evidence and convinced themselves that the findings of the 1912 Inquiry were in error. Indeed, a few of these people (popularly known as “Lordites”) even wrote revisionist books attempting to clear Captain Lord's name by pointing out certain discrepancies in the evidence that the 1912 Inquiry relied upon to reach its conclusions.

In an effort to resolve this long-standing disagreement about the *Californian*'s true location that night, in 1991 the British Department of Transport initiated a reappraisal of the pertinent evidence. Captain T.W. Barnett, formerly the Principal Nautical Surveyor in the Department of Transport Marine Survey Service, was appointed as Inspector in charge of reexamining this evidence, and his task was to try and determine the correct answers to four main questions pertaining to the *Californian* incident:

1. To establish the relative positions of *Californian* and *Titanic* while the latter was sinking, and to determine how far the two vessels were from each other.
2. To determine whether *Californian* could actually see the *Titanic* while the latter was sinking.
3. To determine whether *Californian* observed the *Titanic*'s distress signals and, if so, whether the proper action was taken.
4. To assess the action taken by the *Californian*'s captain during the night of April 14-15, 1912.

By mid-summer of 1991 Captain Barnett completed his thorough reassessment of the evidence pertaining to the *Californian* question, and his final report offered the following conclusions:

1. The *Californian* was only five to seven miles from the *Titanic* while the latter was sinking.
2. The *Californian* did indeed see the *Titanic* while the latter vessel was sinking.
3. The *Californian* did indeed see the *Titanic*'s distress signals.

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4. The *Californian's* response to *Titanic's* distress signals fell far short of what should have been done.

Curiously, when Captain Barnett filed his final report with Captain P.B. Marriott (Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents), the latter officer was dissatisfied with Barnett's carefully-formulated conclusions. Marriott wrote that he did "not fully agree" with the Inspector's findings and - in a totally unprecedented move - he dismissed Barnett's report as unsatisfactory. Marriott then instructed Deputy Chief Inspector J. de Coverley to undertake "some further examination" of the evidence, which resulted in a long delay while de Coverley reviewed the *Californian* evidence himself and formulated a modified report to submit to Captain Marriott. This modified report was accepted by Marriott and was published during the first week of April, 1992. Its conclusions were as follows:

1. The *Californian* was about eighteen miles from *Titanic* while the latter vessel was sinking.
2. The *Californian* might have seen *Titanic* at this distance (due to abnormal atmospheric refraction), but most likely did not.
3. The *Californian* did indeed see *Titanic's* distress rockets.
4. The *Californian's* response to *Titanic's* distress signals fell far short of what should have been done.

The reader will note that the verdict of the 1992 *Californian* Inquiry differed greatly from the inquiry's *original* findings that were arrived at by Captain Barnett in 1991. The reader must therefore decide for him/herself how much importance should be accorded to the report's final (revised) opinion.

Before coming to any conclusions, though, the reader should first ask him/herself why Captain Marriott discarded Captain Barnett's original condemnation of Captain Lord and substituted a secondary, revised verdict that coincided with the standard Lordite viewpoint. What evidence could possibly influence Captain Marriott so dramatically that he deliberately introduced a huge, disruptive irregularity into a straightforward investigation by ordering that it be redone?

In truth, the 1992 Department of Transport investigation itself was the direct result of determined lobbying by Lordite authors who hoped that selected bits of evidence would convince the Department of Transport to clear Captain Lord's reputation.

It seems apparent that the Department's Captain Marriott assumed (naturally enough) that all important *Californian* evidence had been culled from the 1912 Inquiry transcripts by Lordite authors whose books then presented that same information in an unbiased, straightforward manner. This supposition is supported by the fact that the modern Inquiry wound up reviewing and commenting on the very same testimony that all Lordite authors routinely rely upon in their rather standardized defense of Captain Lord.

But was Captain Marriott's assumption true? Was the evidence chosen by Lordite authors for inclusion in their books truly as complete and unbiased as Marriott believed it was?

In order to answer this question, it will be necessary for us to make occasional references to the work of the world's foremost Lordite researcher, the late Leslie Harrison. Mr. Harrison knew Captain Lord personally during the old seaman's twilight years, and in 1958 he became interested in Lord's claim that the *Californian* was nineteen miles from the *Titanic* while the latter vessel was sinking. Harrison eventually promised Captain Lord that he would take up the fight to prove Lord's innocence.

“It has become a moral crusade”, Harrison has been quoted as saying. “I promised him [Captain Lord] I would not let the matter drop... Unfortunately, I am the only one left with all the facts at my fingertips.”

Leslie Harrison’s book “A *Titanic* Myth” was a spirited defense of Captain Lord, but Harrison’s comments about a “moral crusade” make it clear that the book’s viewpoint is heavily biased in Lord’s favor. Indeed, the entire book is based on Captain Lord’s own version of events, and Harrison does his level best to dismiss as “unreliable” all evidence that runs counter to Lord’s viewpoint. As a result, any reader unlucky enough to base his/her opinion of the *Californian* incident solely on Harrison’s “sanctioned” evidence would be utterly and hopelessly converted to the Lordite cause by the (seemingly) overwhelming evidence supporting Captain Lord’s position.

Although our statement that the Lordite case utilizes cherry-picked evidence and excludes “unsanctioned” evidence might seem uncharitable toward Lordite authors, the statement is nevertheless accurate. The reader will almost certainly be surprised to learn that certain “unsanctioned” evidence contained in the official 1912 *Titanic* investigations indicates pretty clearly that *Californian* was indeed well within visual range of the *Titanic* throughout the entire time the latter vessel was sinking.

One wonders why Lordite authors neglect to mention Leslie Harrison’s “unsanctioned” evidence to their readers? Could myopic loyalty to Captain Lord have accidentally blinded the Lordites to any and all evidence that runs counter to their own opinions about the *Californian* issue? Frankly it’s difficult for us to believe that all such oversights were strictly accidental, especially since testimony of all the key players has been available in the Senate and British Inquiry transcripts for over a century. Let’s accept the charitable possibility that at least a few Lordite oversights in presenting key evidence might have occurred accidentally, but – if so – that suggests that such oversights actually reflect the Lordites’ failure to grasp the true significance of the evidence they’ve excluded from their own published works. (In other words, perhaps the Lordites have allowed a large number of individual trees to obscure their clear perception of the forest itself.) In any case, the Lordites’ tendency to present only “sanctioned” evidence causes the entire Lordite version of the *Californian* incident to be far from complete.

There is a second possible reason for the Lordites’ failure to draw their readers’ attention to certain crucial evidence that does not support Captain Lord’s version of events. As unlikely as it sounds, occasional Lordite partisans seem unwilling to deliberately weaken their own case by publicizing evidence that runs counter to their own opinions about the *Californian*. Indeed, Leslie Harrison himself was once described in a British newspaper as having fought against the publication of a certain book that presented the “anti-Lordite” viewpoint; when the book’s planned publication was canceled, Harrison publicly boasted that it was a “book we managed to kill before it came out.” (Although the book in question was finally published almost twenty years after the manuscript’s completion, its anti-Lordite author derived no sense of accomplishment from that achievement due to the fact that the book was published posthumously.)

In the end, the Lordite defense of the *Californian* always begins with the basic assumption that Captain Lord’s version of events is completely accurate and that his vessel was definitely nineteen miles north of the sinking *Titanic*. Once they establish these basic ground rules, the Lordites then proceed to marshal every scrap of information that seems to bolster their original premise. (In other words, the Lordites already “know the verdict” before they even begin to gather their evidence). Any eyewitness testimony that happens to cast doubt on Captain Lord’s version of events is then dealt with by the Lordites in several different ways:

The Lordites' first technique is to examine the evidence itself and point out any inconsistencies they observe. (This procedure is legitimate and is perfectly acceptable.)

The Lordites' second technique is to question the motives of anyone who gave evidence damaging to Captain Lord. An excellent example of this is the Lordites' criticism of the *Californian's* donkeyman Ernest Gill, who they accuse of fabricating testimony against Captain Lord in exchange for financial remuneration from the newspapers. Once again, this questioning of possible motives is perfectly legitimate -- as long as the Lordites do not object to having the motives of Captain Lord and their other star witnesses questioned in return. (As an exercise in fairness to Ernest Gill, perhaps the reader should now ask him/herself what motivated Captain Lord to insist to Boston newspaper reporters that nobody on the *Californian* saw any rockets or distress signals on the night the *Titanic* went down....)

The Lordites' third technique is to simply ignore the existence of evidence that is especially damaging to Captain Lord. For example, Lordite authors are not eager for their readers to know about testimony of the *Mt. Temple's* Captain Moore, who told the 1912 Senate inquiry that the *Californian* was within easy visual range of the *Carpathia* shortly after 6 a.m. on April 15<sup>th</sup> -- a time at which Captain Lord claimed his vessel was still far beyond visual range of the rescue ship. A second example is the way the testimony of *Californian's* own Third Officer Groves has been relegated almost to non-existence by Leslie Harrison's book, which "neglects" to point out precisely which ships Groves observed in *Californian's* immediate vicinity when he arrived on the latter vessel's bridge at 6:50 a.m. on the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to the Lordites' fundamental bias and selectivity in presenting evidence to defend the *Californian*, there is an additional huge shortcoming to their methodology. In order to account for all observations that took place while the *Titanic* was sinking, the Lordites have been forced to invent the existence of one (some Lordites have invented two) hypothetical unnamed "mystery ships" which they claim were situated somewhere between the *Californian* and the *Titanic* while the latter vessel was sinking. This reliance on the claimed existence of one or more phantom vessels is highly irregular, but utilizing this unorthodox methodology is the only way the Lordites are able to prop up their house-of-cards scenario and "prove" that the *Californian* herself was far beyond visual range of the sinking *Titanic*.

It's regrettable that the 1992 Department of Transport *Californian* inquiry was influenced so heavily by Lordite books and articles, because it's clear that Captain Marriott was so swayed by the Lordites' cherry-picked evidence that he rejected Captain Bartlett's original 1991 anti-Lord findings in favor of a substituted secondary verdict with which Marriott felt he could more "fully agree". Unfortunately, Marriott's pre-existing pro-Lord mind-set caused the revised 1992 *Californian* Inquiry to overlook crucial testimony that the Lordites themselves were either unaware or else deliberately downplayed or ignored. This meant that the 1992 Inquiry utilized less evidence than was utilized by the original British Inquiry when it reached its own conclusions in 1912, but it is precisely this "missing" evidence that reveals the true, fatal weakness of the Lordite case. (For example, the 1992 Department of Transport *Californian* Inquiry made absolutely no mention of Captain Moore's testimony that *Californian* was within easy visual range of the *Carpathia* shortly after 6 a.m. on April 15<sup>th</sup>.) It's truly surprising how our overall picture of the *Californian's* activities and movements changes when we scrutinize the "missing evidence" that the Lordites themselves either dismiss, ignore, suppress or pretend doesn't exist.

In the interest of fairness, it must be admitted that occasional proponents of the anti-Lordite viewpoint have sometimes had a tendency to adopt the same tactics used by the Lordites – that is, the cherry-picking of evidence and the downplaying or ignoring of other evidence that might counter their own position. To a certain extent this kind of thing is inevitable no matter which side of the *Californian* premise is being argued, because whenever individual eyewitnesses gave dozens of pages of testimony at the 1912 *Titanic* inquiries a certain number of ambiguities and even contradictions can sometimes force readers to make choices as to which information is truly important and which is merely of passing interest. Up to now, every previous book about the *Californian* controversy has consisted of detailed analysis of every word that was spoken by the eyewitnesses themselves in 1912. This type of analysis is of crucial importance, of course, but there has always been room for a completely different line of analysis as well.

Which brings us to the subject matter of the book you now hold in your hands – Sam Halpern’s “Strangers on the Horizon: *Titanic* and *Californian* – A Forensic Approach.” Mr. Halpern’s marvelous, meticulously-researched book will quickly demonstrate to all open-minded readers that the *Californian* controversy is not nearly as mysterious as the Lordites would have us believe. Halpern has carefully described the *Californian*’s actions and movements that morning by including the above-mentioned “missing evidence,” and he proves beyond all reasonable doubt that no serious historian needs to postulate the hypothetical presence of one or more unnamed “mystery ships” supposedly situated somewhere between the *Californian* and the sinking *Titanic*. Indeed, all events that took place near the disaster site on that fatal night can be satisfactorily accounted for by the single Leyland liner that is **known** to have been in the vicinity while the *Titanic* was sinking. No hypothetical, unnamed “mystery ships” need apply.

During recent years Lordite writers like Leslie Harrison and Senan Molony have already had their “day in court” and have expounded *ad nauseam* their own belief in the supposed presence of one or more hypothetical “mystery ships” near the sinking *Titanic*. The time has now come for interested readers to examine Sam Halpern’s brand-new, technical examination of the *Californian* question and pay close attention to his careful scrutiny of the evidence as well as his first-time-ever mathematical evaluation of that same evidence.

Sam Halpern’s book is significantly different from all previous treatments of the *Californian* controversy in that it does not try to simply interpret or reinterpret eyewitness testimony by analyzing every single word the person in question uttered in 1912. Instead, Mr. Halpern has taken what each eyewitness said, compared these statements to what others said, and then (wherever possible) has taken the novel approach of applying specific analytical and mathematical tests to those statements in order to see what kind of new revelations they might uncover. Halpern’s book does a superb job of comparing the 1912 eyewitness testimony with his own detailed mathematical analysis of distances, speeds, headings, drift rates, ranges of visibility and a great deal of other quantifiable information that has never before been examined in detail. In short, Sam Halpern’s book has taken a brand-new approach to investigating the *Californian* controversy that casts a bright new light on the entire subject.

Make no mistake – Sam Halpern’s book is not a light, easily-read volume intended to entertain casual *Titanic* buffs who have an hour or two to kill on a lazy Sunday afternoon. Instead, it is a highly-detailed, scientific examination of the existing evidence and is aimed at serious researchers for the purpose of dispelling the Lordite fantasies that have long obscured our understanding of what actually happened on board the *Californian* that night. Halpern’s book requires very close study, but readers who make the effort will find the experience very rewarding and will quickly appreciate the value of careful, detailed research

as opposed to casually allowing oneself to imagine the existence of hypothetical “mystery ships” based solely on cherry-picked evidence and promoted as a conspiracy theory in an ill-conceived attempt to alter the historical record.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading Sam Halpern’s “Strangers on the Horizon: *Titanic* and *Californian* – A Forensic Approach” and that you’ll study the book with the care and close attention it deserves. If you do, you’ll learn everything about the *Titanic* and the *Californian* that a serious researcher will ever need to know.

– George Behe  
Grand Rapids, Michigan