

The conclusions of two separate inquiries held on different sides of the Atlantic with regard to what became known as the “the *Californian* affair” were strikingly similar in their condemnation of the role played by the SS *Californian* and her captain. However, both inquiries stopped short of calling for an official investigation to determine if Captain Stanley Lord was guilty of violating any of the regulations covered under the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1894 or 1906. He was only called to give evidence before the inquiries. While he was never tried or convicted of any offence, he was viewed publicly as a villain who failed to go to the aid of a vessel in distress. As a result, the Leyland Line dismissed Stanley Lord in August of that year. It was not until February 1913, that Lord found employment once again. With help from a director from the Leyland Line, who believed that he had been treated unfairly, Stanley Lord was hired by the Nitrate Producers Steamship Company, and remained with that company until March 1927, when he resigned for reasons of health.

The events of the night of April 14-15, 1912 would stalk Stanley Lord for the rest of his life. In 1958, following the release of the film *A Night to Remember*, based on a popular book that was published in 1955 of the same name,¹ Captain Stanley Lord felt the need to clear his name of any wrongdoing. In that same year, 1958, he contacted the Mercantile Marine Service Association (MMSA) in Liverpool and purportedly introduced himself with the words: “I am Lord of the *Californian*.” The association’s general secretary, Mr. Leslie Harrison, took up his cause and later petitioned the Board of Trade to re-examine the case. In June 1959, at the urging of Leslie Harrison, Stanley Lord wrote a detailed account of what transpired on the night of April 14th 1912 in the form of a signed affidavit (see Appendix F). He ended that account with the statement:

“Being desirous of avoiding undue publicity, which owing to my present age and failing health would undoubtedly have serious effects, I am making this sworn statement as a final truthful and authoritative record of what occurred when I was in command of the *Californian* on the night of 14th April, 1912.”

Despite this and the efforts of Leslie Harrison, a petition to the Board of Trade on his behalf was rejected in 1965, three years after his death, primarily because of the lack of any new evidence. In that same year, Peter Padfield came out with a book called *The Titanic and the Californian*, which was written in defense of Captain Lord. This was followed in 1968 by a second petition to the Board of Trade that was also rejected.

In 1990 the Secretary of State for Transport, The Right Honourable Cecil Parkinson MP, decided to re-examine the case as a consequence of the discovery of the *Titanic* wreck in 1985 that showed that *Titanic* actually sank some 13 miles east of the distress position that was universally accepted back in 1912. In 1992, despite differing views by the two investigators as to the issue of whether or not the two ships were in sight of each other, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) issued a report that concluded that *Californian* saw signals of distress from *Titanic* and failed to take proper actions.

Over the years many books and articles were written about the *Californian* affair, as well as websites created to deal with this highly inflammatory topic. Despite the 1992 findings of the MAIB, the topic is still far from being settled.

What is generally agreed upon is that both *Titanic* and *Californian* were stopped on the eastern side of a vast expanse of field ice that stretched from north to south across their respective routes of travel on the night of April 14, 1912. It is also agreed that *Titanic* sent up distress signals over the course of about an hour that night, that *Titanic* saw the lights of some mysterious vessel that did not bother to come to her aid while these signals were being sent up, and that *Californian* saw over the course of about an hour what was described as

white rockets coming from the direction of an unidentified steamer that had stopped southward of them.

Those who come to the defense of Captain Lord, referred to by some as Lordites, argue that *Californian* was not the mystery ship seen from *Titanic*. They argue that there were numerous discrepancies in the testimony from witnesses from both *Titanic* and *Californian* that were not thoroughly examined nor reconciled by the two inquiries that were held in 1912. Estimates of time, distances, bearings, lights, and other subjective data were inconsistent and inconclusive. They maintain that *Californian*, on a course for Boston, was too far away from *Titanic*, which was on a course for New York, to have been seen. They maintain that the ship seen on the horizon from *Titanic* was slowly moving while *Californian* was absolutely stationary, and that there might have been one or more ships between *Titanic* and *Californian*.

Those opposing the Lordite view, sometimes referred to as Anti-Lordites, contend that the two enquiries held in 1912 came essentially to the correct conclusion despite some discrepancies in eyewitness testimonies, and despite the acceptance of what we now know to be the wrong foundering location for *Titanic*. They believe that these particulars are inconsequential in comparison with the evidence regarding the distress signals seen that night. Estimates of time, distances, bearings and so forth were mostly subjective. The apparent movement of each ship can be easily reconciled by the fact that *Californian* and *Titanic* were both swinging around slowly, thus giving the illusion of motion to a stopped vessel. The supposed presence of a third or even a fourth ship on the scene is a manufactured mystery, and in reality, irrelevant compared to the sighting of distress rockets from *Californian*.

The discrepancies in testimony and various points of argument are numerous and take up the substance of many books, articles and website pages that have been written dealing with this affair. So why is there a need for yet another book dealing with this very touchy subject?

When one studies the work of others who have attempted to solve the question of *Californian*'s location with respect to *Titanic* that night, it can be seen that much reliance was placed on what was claimed by eyewitnesses from both vessels. In this particular case, it is very difficult to remain objective, and personal biases soon develop which tend to downplay some of the evidence while emphasizing some of the other. Some authors were notoriously selective in what they presented, willfully suppressing evidence that they considered to be unfavorable to their view. In some cases, greater weight was placed on the evidence given by someone of position or rank at the exclusion or downright rejection of evidence given by others. Others, who claimed to be objective, felt the need to find more and more extraneous examples to support their particular views and conclusions while attempting to argue against opposing views and conclusions as if they had something to prove to themselves.

In my opinion, what tends to be lacking in all the previous works dealing with the *Californian* affair is the systematic application of analytical methods that are essentially independent of subjective estimates or claims that come from a single uncorroborated source. Also lacking are results using different sets of analyses that may take what seem to be peripherally related data to produce mutually supporting results. If we can find and apply several independent methods that produce more or less consistent results as to the distance between these vessels that night, then and only then, can we ask the question as to how could that have come about? Once that issue is worked out, we can then explore and deal with some of the more perplexing observations and enigmas of what was seen that night by various eyewitnesses.