

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Californian Neglected its Duty

*News Report on Senate Findings of Why the Titanic Sank with Few Survivors*

By El Paso Herald  
1912

*The RMS Titanic was a passenger liner that sank on April 15, 1912, in the North Atlantic Ocean after crashing into an iceberg on its way to New York City. Out of the 2,224 passengers and crew aboard the ship, more than 1,500 died. A news report from the El Paso Herald discusses the role that the ship SS Californian played in the disaster, as well as the flaws in the Titanic's design that contributed to this tragedy. As you read, take notes on the causes and effects of the Titanic tragedy.*

### CALIFORNIAN NEGLECTED ITS DUTY

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***Might Have Saved All on Board  
Titanic—Report Condemns<sup>1</sup> Speed  
Mania.***

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***Crew Inefficient And All Untrained.***

[1] Washington, D.C., May 28.—Just before delivering his speech, senator Smith, chairman of the subcommittee which is investigating the Titanic wreck, submitted the committee's report and its conclusions. The report is largely a review of the evidence and contains recommendations for legislation. No particular person is named as being responsible, though attention is called to the fact that on the day of the disaster, three distinct<sup>2</sup> warnings of ice were sent to captain Smith. J. Bruce Ismay, managing director of the White Star line,<sup>3</sup> is not held responsible for the ship's high speed. In fact, he is barely mentioned in the report.

On the whole, the report is impassive<sup>4</sup> and senator Smith in his speech went more fully into a discussion of the causes of the disaster than does the committee.

The committee agreed upon these principal conclusions:

The supposedly water tight compartments of the Titanic were not water tight because of the non water tight condition of the decks where the transverse bulkheads<sup>5</sup> ended.

1. **Condemn (verb): to express complete disapproval of, typically in public**
2. **Distinct (adjective):** noticeably different
3. the British shipping company responsible for creating the Titanic
4. **Impassive (adjective):** not feeling or showing emotion
5. barriers that were intended to lower into place in the event of a breach and keep the ship afloat

- [5] “The Californian, [controlled] by the same concern as the Titanic, was nearer the Titanic than the 190 miles reported by her captain and her officers and crew saw the distress signals of the Titanic and failed to respond in accordance with the dictates<sup>6</sup> or humanity, international usage and the requirements of law.”

### ***Might Have Saved All.***

The committee concludes that the Californian might have saved all the lost passengers and crew of the ship that went down.

Eight ships, all equipped with wireless,<sup>7</sup> were in the vicinity<sup>8</sup> of the Titanic, the Olympic farthest away, 512 miles.

The mysterious lights on an unknown ship, seen by the passengers on the Titanic undoubtedly were on the Californian, 19 miles away. The full capacity of the Titanic’s lifeboats was not utilized because while only 706 persons were saved, the ships boats could have carried 1176.

No general alarm was sounded, no whistle blown and no systematic<sup>9</sup> warning was given to the endangered passengers, and it was 15 or 20 minutes after the collision before captain Smith ordered the Titanic’s wireless operator to send out a distress call.

- [10] The Titanic’s crew was only meagerly<sup>10</sup> acquainted with its positions and duties in case of accident and only one drill was held for the maiden trip.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of the crew joined the ship only a few hours before she sailed and were in ignorance of their positions until the following Friday.

“Ice positions so definitely reported to the Titanic.” says the report, “just preceding<sup>12</sup> the accident, located ice on both sides of the lane in which she was traveling. No discussion took place among the officers; no conference was called to consider these warnings; no heed<sup>13</sup> was given to them. The speed of the vessel was not relaxed; the lookout<sup>14</sup> was not increased.”

The committee concludes that the Titanic’s lights were visible to the Californian before she struck the iceberg and that the Californian must have seen the distress rockets fired from the bridge of the Titanic. ;

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6. **Dictate (noun):** an order or principle that must be obeyed
  7. Wireless technology allowed ships to communicate with one another from a great distance and without a physical connection.
  8. the area near or surrounding a particular place
  9. **Systematic (adjective):** done or acting according to a fixed plan or system
  10. **Meager (adjective):** inadequate
  11. the first journey made by a ship or aircraft
  12. before
  13. attention or notice
  14. the person who keeps watch of the ship

## ***The Report.***

The report says:

- [15] “The committee is forced to the inevitable conclusion that the Californian, [controlled] by the same company, was nearer the Titanic than the 190 miles reported by her captain, and that her officers and crew saw the distress signals of the Titanic and failed to respond to them in accordance with the dictates of humanity, international usage and the requirements of law. The only reply to the distress signals was a counter signal from a large white light which was flashed for nearly two hours from the mast of the Californian. In our opinion, such conduct, whether arising from indifference or gross carelessness, is most reprehensible,<sup>15</sup> and places on the commander of the Californian a grave responsibility.

## ***Wireless Operator Not Aroused.***

“The wireless operator of the Californian was not aroused<sup>16</sup> until 3:30 a.m. New York time on the morning of the 15th after considerable conversation between officers and members of the crew had taken place aboard that ship regarding the distress signals or rockets, and was directed by the chief officer to see what was the matter, as a ship had been firing rockets during the night. The inquiry thus set on foot at once disclosed the fact that the Titanic had sunk. Had assistance been promptly proffered,<sup>17</sup> or had the wireless operator of the Californian remained a few minutes longer at his post on Sunday evening that ship might have had the proud distinction of saving the lives of passengers and crew of the Titanic.”

## ***Could Have Saved More Lives.***

The committee believes many more lives could have been saved had the survivors been concentrated in a few lifeboats and had the boats thus released returned to the wreck for others.

The only mention of J. Bruce Ismay occurs in “a review of the messages to the White Star offices in New York, reporting the disaster. The first official information, the committee says, was the message from captain Haddock of the Olympic, received from the White Star liner at 6:16 p.m. Monday, April 15. Attention is called to the fact that in the face of this information a message reporting the Titanic being towed to Halifax<sup>18</sup> was sent to representative J. A. Hughes at Huntington, W. Va., at 7:51 p.m. that day. The message was delivered to the Western Union office in the same building as the White Star line offices.

“Whoever sent this message,” says the report, ‘under the circumstances is guilty of the most reprehensible conduct.’ ;

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15. **Reprehensible** (*adjective*): very bad; deserving strong criticism

16. **Arouse** (*verb*): to awaken someone from sleep

17. Another term for “offer”

18. an Atlantic Ocean port in eastern Canada

### ***Wireless Operator Not Vigilant.***<sup>19</sup>

- [20] The committee does not believe the wireless operator on the Carpathia was duly vigilant in handling his messages after the accident, and declared the practice of allowing wireless operators to sell their stories should be stopped.

It is recommended that all ships carrying more than 100 passengers have two searchlights; that a revision be made of steamship inspection laws of foreign countries to the standard proposed in the United States; that every ship be required to carry sufficient<sup>20</sup> lifeboats for all passengers and crews; that the use of wireless be regulated to prevent its use by amateurs<sup>21</sup> and that all ships have a wireless operator constantly on duty.

Detailed recommendations are made as to watertight bulkheads construction on ocean-going ships. Bulkheads should be so spaced that any two adjacent<sup>22</sup> compartments of a ship might be flooded without sinking. Transverse bulkheads forward and aft the machinery should be continued watertight to the uppermost continuous structural deck and this deck should be fitted watertight, the report says.

### ***Commends Rostron.***

The committee deems the course followed by captain Rostron of the Carpathia as deserving of the highest praise and worthy of especial recognition. His detailed instructions issued in anticipation of the rescue of the Titanic were “a marvel of systematic preparation and completeness, evincing<sup>23</sup> such solicitude<sup>24</sup> as call for the highest commendation.”

### ***Senator Smith Speaks.***

Senator William Alden Smith, of Michigan, submitted the report, a feature of which was the condemnation of the captain of the steamer Californian for not going to the aid of the sinking vessel. He delivered a speech in which he personally took much stronger ground in reviewing the disaster and introduced measures designed to safeguard<sup>25</sup> life in ocean traffic.

- [25] One of the most important recommendations was for stricter inspection of vessels by the federal steamboat inspection service and the meeting of all requirements of American navigation laws by every vessel clearing from an American port.

It was one of the noteworthy days of the present session of congress. Almost all of the senators were in their seats. The galleries were crowded.

### ***Give Medal to Carpathia Captain.***

The senate passed a joint resolution extending the thanks of congress and appropriating \$1000 for a medal to captain Arthur H. Rostron of the Carpathia and also a note of thanks to the Carpathia's crew.

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19. **Vigilant** (*adjective*): keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulty

20. **Sufficient** (*adjective*): having or providing as much as is needed

21. **Amateur** (*noun*): one lacking in experience and competence in something

22. next to or adjoining something else

23. to clearly show or prove

24. **Solicitude** (*noun*): care or concern for someone or something

25. to protect from harm or damage

The resolution was introduced by senator Smith. It was adopted immediately. Senator Rayner, of Maryland, in a speech arraigned<sup>26</sup> American navigation laws and drew lessons from the accident.

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26. to find fault with someone or something

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
  - A. While several variables resulted in the sinking of the Titanic, the Californian is held responsible for excessive loss of life as it failed to provide help when it was requested.
  - B. The Titanic's poorly built structure is what ultimately resulted in its sinking and the loss of life of its passengers.
  - C. If passengers and crew had been adequately prepared for an emergency, then most likely no one would have died on the Titanic.
  - D. The casualties of the Titanic would have been exceedingly worse if not for the intervention of captain Arthur H. Rostron.
  
2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "The supposedly water tight compartments of the Titanic were not water tight because of the non water tight condition of the decks where the transverse bulkheads ended." (Paragraph 4)
  - B. "No general alarm was sounded, no whistle blown and no systematic warning was given to the endangered passengers, and it was 15 or 20 minutes after the collision before captain Smith ordered the Titanic's wireless operator to send out a distress call." (Paragraph 9)
  - C. "Had assistance been promptly proffered, or had the wireless operator of the Californian remained a few minutes longer at his post on Sunday evening that ship might have had the proud distinction of saving the lives of passengers and crew of the Titanic." (Paragraph 16)
  - D. "The senate passed a joint resolution extending the thanks of congress and appropriating \$1000 for a medal to captain Arthur H. Rostron of the Carpathia" (Paragraph 27)
  
3. What does the word "commendation" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 23? [RI.4]
  - A. critique
  - B. honor
  - C. pass judgement
  - D. flatter
  
4. PART A: How does paragraph 15 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]
  - A. It shows that the Californian did offer some—though not enough—assistance to the Titanic.
  - B. It pardons the actions of the captain of the Californian.
  - C. It shows that the Californian was unable to offer assistance.
  - D. It proves that the Californian could have assisted the Titanic but chose not to.

5. PART B: Which quote from paragraph 15 best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
- A. "the Californian, [controlled] by the same company, was nearer the Titanic than the 190 miles reported by her captain,"
  - B. "her officers and crew saw the distress signals of the Titanic and failed to respond"
  - C. "the dictates of humanity, international usage and the requirements of law."
  - D. "The only reply to the distress signals was a counter signal from a large white light which was flashed for nearly two hours"

6. What changes to ships and traveling by sea does the article discuss in response to the [RI.3] sinking of the Titanic?

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In your opinion, why was the crew of the Titanic not properly prepared for an emergency?
2. In the context of the text, what can we learn from tragedy? What did the world learn from the sinking of the Titanic and the loss of life that resulted because of it? What was done to ensure that it would never happen again? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the text, what makes a hero? In the text, the actions of captain Arthur H. Rostron are praised – what about his actions were heroic? How did his actions compare to the actions of captain Smith and the captain of the Californian? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. In the context of the text, how does fear drive action? How can fear be used positively? Do you think the crew and passengers of the Titanic had a healthy amount of fear when they went out to sea? Why or why not? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.