



Going down: an artist's impression of the sinking of the Titanic

'Coward' captain to be cleared of Titanic slur

by Peter Johnson

A NIGHTMARE that has haunted the family of a sea captain ever since the Titanic sank is to be ended before the 80th anniversary of the disaster next month. Stanley Lord, described by friends as "a British mariner down to his boots", will be cleared by the government of standing idly by in another ship while 1,503 people drowned.

Lord was unjustly branded a coward after a judge's controversial condemnation in 1912. The slur followed him to the grave and seemed unsinkable. But defenders led by his only son claimed he was made the scapegoat for Britain's most infamous sea disaster



The news hits the streets in 1912

Lord was wrongly accused by Lord Mersey, presiding judge at the 1912 official inquiry.

Studying new evidence and the 1912 proceedings, Captain Thomas Barnett, a former principal nautical surveyor, completed his deliberations in eight months and sent his findings to the chief inspector of marine accidents.

Last week Parkinson queried the delay with his former department. "There is nothing sinister about it," he said. "The branch explained that it has been under tremendous pressure from current investigations and must attend to priorities. But the captain's son is not getting any younger, and this was a tremendous slur on his father: he was vilified.

"If a wrong was done it should be put right, or at least the case should be authoritatively summed up. I do not know what is in the report, but it will be nice to have it before the anniversary, when old allegations will be dragged up. Certainly the new evidence looks quite promising from Mr Lord's point of view."

At the core of Lord's 80-year "disgrace" was Mersey's insistence that the Californian, itself stopped by ice, was only eight to 10 miles from the stricken Titanic. Lord said he was 17 to 19 miles away — an assertion now supported by the discovery of the Titanic wreck.

ter and fought a 30-year campaign to clear his name. This weekend they scented victory.

A 20-month government inquiry into Lord's conduct as captain of the 6,225-ton Californian on April 14, 1912, when the 46,328-ton Titanic struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage to New York, is expected to exonerate him. The findings are based on new evidence of the ships' respective positions which came to light in 1985 when the wreck of the Titanic was found.

Lord's son, Stanley, an 83-year-old former banker, was not available for comment last week. But Leslie Harrison, 79, former general-secretary of the Mercantile Marine Association, said: "The case against Captain Lord never existed. Anyone who knew him knew he was incapable of the incompetence — and worse — of which he was accused. But this delay in completing the inquiry is hard to bear. There has been silence for nearly two years. Why?"

The Department of Transport's investigation was set up in July 1990 by Cecil Parkinson, then transport secretary. It aimed to discover whether

Mersey claimed that Lord failed to respond to rockets seen after the Titanic struck the iceberg at 11.40pm. Lord said he believed that flares seen by crew were "company signals" from another ship.

The Californian's radio was shut down to allow the only operator some rest — common shipping practice — and Lord first learnt about the disaster when his ship started receiving radio messages again at 5.40am. Nevertheless, Mersey said that after seeing the flares the Californian should have pushed through the ice to help the Titanic: "Had she done so, she might have saved many, if not all, of the lives lost."

Lord lived with the ignominy for more than 40 years. Hundreds of supporters rallied to his cause: they argued that he had been a scapegoat to cover up gaps in safety regulations. There were too few lifeboats, and the government feared the disaster would give Germany the lead in the transatlantic race.

Last week they were jubilant. "The authorities have stonewalled to the end," said Brian Ticehurst, of the 500-strong Titanic Association. "It was trial by innuendo," said John Booth, an expert on Titanic memorabilia.