

Titanic discovered in North Atlantic

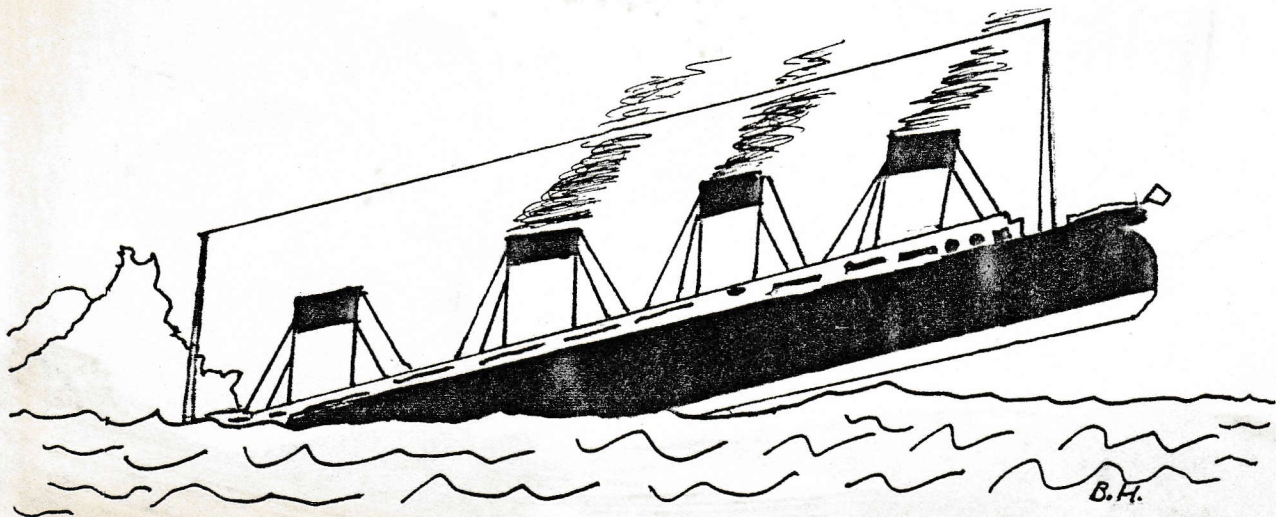
By Brian Higgins

"I cannot believe my eyes. From the abyss beneath the sea, the bow of a great vessel emerges in ghostly detail. I have never seen the ship - nor has anyone in seventy three years - yet I know almost every feature of her. She is the R.M.S. Titanic, the British luxury liner lost after a collision with an iceberg in 1912." With these words Robert D. Ballard led an expedition sponsored by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Team to find the Titanic. A little after 1:00 A.M. on September 1, 1985, the great ship was discovered lying two and one half miles under the waters of the North Atlantic.

The Titanic disaster has, in the seventy-three years since it occurred, been the topic of several movies and scores of books trying to piece together what took place on that fateful night. This coming summer researchers from the Woods Hole Institute plan to take a second look at her in an attempt to further understand this tragedy. A separate expedition is being funded by Texas millionaire Jack Grim who himself plans to visit the wreckage this summer.

The Titanic was on her way to New York from Southampton, England, on her maiden voyage. An iceberg was sighted dead ahead, but too late for the ship to avoid a collision. Four hours later she lay two and a half miles under water. The ship had been equipped with sixteen lifeboats, not nearly enough for the 2,207 people on board. As a result, 1,502 of the Titanic's passengers were drowned.

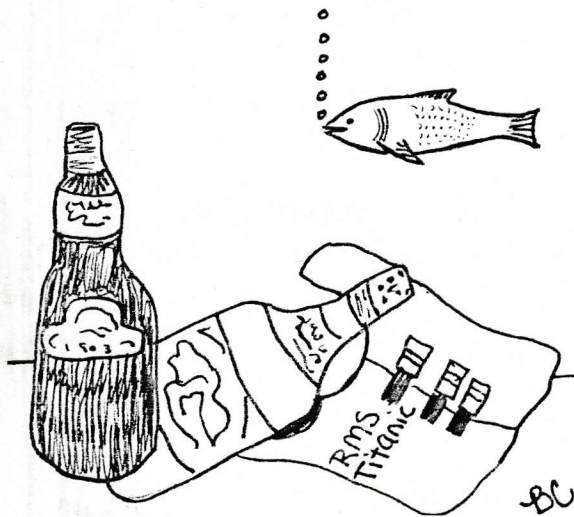
Recalling that fateful night, Ruth Blanchard of Santa Barbara, California, offered this interpretation, "Mother and I were awakened by a dead silence. The engines had stopped. We were afraid this meant the Titanic was in trouble since we were in mid-ocean on our way to New York. Mother got up and asked our steward 'What's the trouble?' He said, 'Put on your lifebelts immediately and go up to the boat deck.' Mother asked, 'Do we have time to dress?' He said, 'No, Madame, you have time for nothing. We've struck an iceberg!'"



In their original expedition, the Woods Hole team began "mowing the lawn," or systematically scanning the underwater depth of the 150 square mile target zone where the researchers believed the Titanic was lying. Using deep water sonar, the team found the wreckage after months of searching.

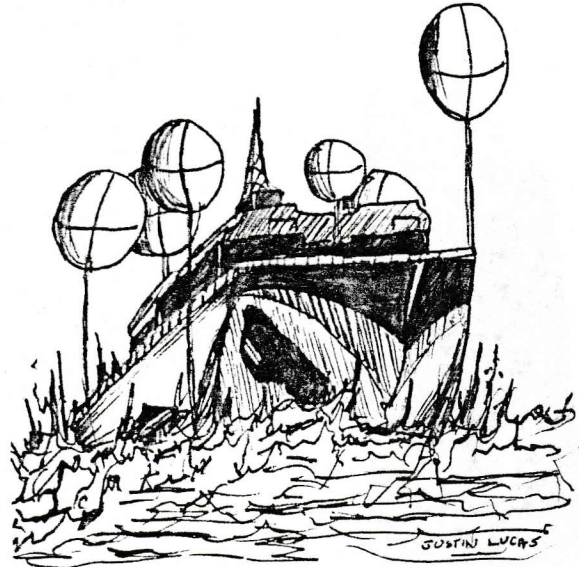
Ballard had speculated that the ice-cold water and darkness would help preserve the Titanic. Surprisingly, after lying in salt water for seventy-three years, the ship had less damage than some expected. Besides the original gash and the parted stern section, the first and fourth smoke-spurting funnels were the only major areas of damage.

Most of the valuables would be difficult to retrieve due to their location. But many things were discovered, like bedsprings, whole beds, chamber pots, stained glass and bottles of wine.



Still, with so many valuables on board, the question has surfaced: Should the Titanic be raised? One proposal suggests that slings be run underneath the Titanic's hull. Cables would then lift the wreck and move it to shallower water. There floatation devices would then be rigged bringing it to the surface. Due to the parted stern, this operation would have to be performed twice.

Another idea would be to use floatation "spheres", which are almost like giant balloons, but this operation would cost over \$100 million, a hefty price to pay for an old, broken wreck. In spite of the tremendous cost, some still believe the ship should be raised and studied for historical purposes.



These ambitious ideas are opposed by those who believe the Titanic should remain where it is to serve as a memorial to the 1,500 lives lost. Even though most of the skeletons would have decayed in this watery grave, survivor Ruth Blanchard feels strongly about leaving the ship undisturbed. "No, I sure don't think it should be raised. I think it should stay right down there because it's a graveyard for the people that died, and I think it should stay right where it is," explained the 85 year old Blanchard.

When asked if she opposed the expeditions to further investigate the wreckage of the Titanic, Blanchard said, "...if they want to, that's up to them. I don't think that's up to me, just so long as they leave it down there."

She was called "the ship that God himself couldn't sink." Yet on that terrible night in 1912 the Titanic sank, never to be seen again until 1985.