



Article:

The Wreck of the Titanic

During the night of August 31-September 1, 1985, in the North Atlantic Ocean near where the *Titanic* had sunk some 73 years earlier, an expedition was underway to find her wreck. The research vessel *Knorr* had been in the area since August 25, under the direction of Woods Hole Scientist Dr. Robert Ballard. So far, the expedition had turned up nothing. Nor had the first half of the expedition, aboard the French research vessel *Le Suroit*. Morale was low... there was not much time left before the expedition would have to return to port.

The watch changed at midnight, and the graveyard shift filed in. They knew that there had been a number of previous expeditions to find the wreck of the *Titanic*; all had been unsuccessful. Particularly prominent among these had been multi-millionaire Jack Grimm's expeditions - three, in total, beginning in 1980.

They must have wondered if they were going to end up like Grimm had.

Little did they know that they were not going to.

At 12:48 a.m., September 1, the first images of wreckage on the ocean floor began to appear on the television monitors. Within a few minutes, they had spotted an unmistakable image: that of a boiler. Excitement ran high; Ballard was called in to see for himself. Soon, it was clear that they had been successful.

During the remaining time on site, Ballard's team made a series of passes over the wreck, photographing it for posterity. It quickly became clear that the ship's stern had broken off as she had sunk, for the ship simply ended just forward of where the third funnel should have been.

The world went wild at the news of Ballard's discovery. People who had been interested in the ship devoured news on the subject, and eagerly looked through pictures taken of her wreck. Ballard himself was eager to explore her again - this time using a manned submarine and ROV, or Remotely Operated Vehicle.

In July of 1986, Ballard got his wish when he returned to the *Titanic* aboard the research vessel *Atlantis II*, the deep-diving submersible *Alvin*, and the ROV *Jason Junior*, or *JJ*. Highlights of this expedition included penetrating the interior of the vessel's First Class Grand Staircase with the ROV, revealing images of the interior that had not been seen since the night she sank.

On the last dive, when it was time to head for the surface, Ballard felt sure that he would never see the *Titanic* again with his own two eyes. He was saddened, almost like saying good-bye to an old friend, as the *Alvin* lifted off *Titanic's* deck, dropped its weights in the bottom sediment beside the hull, and began rising for the surface.

Almost at once, almost as if it had never existed, the *Titanic* disappeared into the darkness. She was once again alone - but this would not be the case for long.

Starting in 1987, a group of businessmen who eventually formed the company RMS Titanic, Inc., began making a series of expeditions to the wreck, during which they recovered many artifacts from the site. After restoration by trained conservators, many of these were put on display in traveling exhibits which brought the

Titanic - or at least portions of her - to the public around the world.

Millions of people happily paid for the experience, viewing objects and paraphernalia that gave a glimpse into the personal lives of many of those who were aboard the great ship when she sank.

A storm of controversy ensued from others who believed that the wreck should be left intact as a memorial. Everyone ended up falling on different lines of the issue, and the conflict embittered many former friends.

Less controversial were the 1995 and 2001 expeditions by Director James Cameron to the wreck for filming purposes. During his first expedition, he filmed the ship for his big-screen movie about the disaster, entitled *Titanic* and released on December 19, 1997 in the United States. His 2001 expedition, attended by *Titanic* historians Don Lynch and Ken Marschall, was for the purpose of making the IMAX film *Ghosts of the Abyss*, which was released in the spring of 2003. Using two very small ROV's, Cameron's expedition was able to go farther inside the *Titanic* than anyone else since 1912. Highlights included high-quality images from the First Class Reception Room and Dining Saloon, and many of the passenger cabins, as well as the Marconi room aft of the bridge on the Boat Deck.

Unfortunately, the expeditions to the wreck have confirmed that the *Titanic* is slowly deteriorating - evidence of this is very visible just between 1986 and today. One day, her broken wreck will collapse under her own weight, leaving very little behind to mark the spot where she came to rest.

She will then live on only through the pages of history, the most famous and perhaps the most remarkable of all the Atlantic liners.

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