



A69 **Surveying a Titan: An Argument for the Presence of Human Remains on the Wreck of the R.M.S. *Titanic***

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the events surrounding the sinking of the passenger liner R.M.S. *Titanic* along with possible unexplored locations within the wreck that may harbor human remains.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness of the necessity of including individuals trained in the identification and recovery of human remains when surveying shipwrecks and the importance of eyewitness accounts when reconstructing historical events.

The first highly publicized maritime disaster to result in a significant loss of human life occurred in the early morning hours of April 15, 1912. After colliding with an iceberg the night prior, the White Star liner, R.M.S. *Titanic*, sank in the icy north Atlantic, taking 1,523 of her passengers and crew with her. For the next 73 years, the wreck of the 882-foot-long ship lay undisturbed nearly 2.5 miles below the ocean surface. In 1985, the sunken ship was discovered and, in the ensuing years, multiple salvage expeditions have descended to the site. To date, no human remains have been recovered from the debris field that encircles *Titanic*'s fragmented hull.

In the years since she sank, *Titanic* has ceased to be merely a ship, instead approaching enigmatic status and her wreck remains one of the most visited wrecks in the world. However, no expeditions have journeyed deep enough into the liner's hull to definitively rule out the presence of human remains. Historical records and eyewitness accounts indicate that at least one area of the ship has the potential to reveal the remains of crew members trapped by the rising waters.

This area is the forward mail holds, located on G-deck. R.M.S. *Titanic*, as a Royal Mail Steamer, was in service to the British government to bring mail to and from America. This task was charged to five postal clerks, each of whom were contracted by the White Star Line. Minutes after her fatal collision with the iceberg, *Titanic* was fast taking on water and among the first to notice this were the mail clerks. Their desperate attempts to save the mail were in vain. As the vessel's bow sank deeper into the Atlantic, the mail clerks ran back and forth between the holds on G-deck and the empty state rooms on D-deck, trying to outpace the rising water. All five men perished in this endeavor.

In April 2015, *Titanic* will have lain on the ocean floor for 103 years. The standard argument against the presence of human remains on the wreck is that this length of time is sufficient to have allowed bacteria and deep-sea scavengers to remove all traces of organic matter. This line of thought fails to take into account the presence of organic matter in recessed areas of the hull that have escaped destruction. Remains of the victims of maritime disasters that occurred within a similar timeframe to *Titanic* have also been recorded.

The most well known of these analogous disasters was the 1914 sinking of the R.M.S. *Empress of Ireland*. After a collision with another vessel, the *Empress* sank with the loss of 1,012 lives. Resting in waters easily accessible by experienced divers, the liner has become well known for the skeletal remains of her victims that linger on the wreck.

The other flaw with the current party line about remains on the wreck of *Titanic* is that the principle players making this judgment are not experts in human anatomy. Robert Ballard, a noted oceanographer, and James Cameron, the Hollywood director, are titans in their respective fields and have well-deserved reputations as experts in those fields; however, neither has the training necessary to identify human skeletal remains, particularly fragmented remains.

It is entirely possible that no trace of human remains persist on the wreck of the former White Star Line flagship; however, it is argued that the presence of remains cannot be ruled out. By looking at the historical documentation of the last known locations of individuals during the sinking, notably the postal clerk staff, an argument is made that further exploration inside the wreck is warranted before a statement on the presence or lack of human remains can be made.

***Titanic*, Ocean, Historical**