

*On April 14, 1912, the passenger ship R.M.S. Titanic hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean and sank. Robert Ballard led a search for the sunken ship in 1985. At the beginning of this selection, Ballard and his team are nearing the end of their scheduled time at sea. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.*

## from **Exploring the Titanic**

by Robert D. Ballard

1 Then we had only five days left to go. The crunch had come. Suddenly the ocean seemed huge, and our doubts began to grow. Was the *Titanic* really in our carefully plotted search area? If so, surely something would have shown up on our monitor screens by now. Were we looking in the wrong place? Would we return empty-handed? I began to feel a rising panic.

2 In a last-ditch effort, we decided to check out a tiny portion of ocean bottom that Jean-Louis and his SAR sonar system had missed because of strong currents. We headed to that spot ten miles away.

3 But as we began to tow *Argo*<sup>1</sup> back and forth across the new search area, our hopes really began to fade. There was nothing down there. By now the routine inside our control room had become mind-numbing: hour after hour of staring at video images of flat bottom mud. On top of that, we were exhausted. The strain of it all was getting to us, and the boredom was becoming unbearable. Then, with a bad turn in the weather and only four days left, we reached our lowest point. I began to face total defeat.

4 Just after midnight, on September 1, I went to my bunk for some rest, and the night shift led by Jean-Louis manned their stations. About an hour into their watch, one of the team members asked the others, “What are we going to do to keep ourselves awake tonight?” All they’d seen so far was mud and more mud, endless miles of nothing. Stu Harris, who was busy flying *Argo*, didn’t answer. His eyes were glued to the *Argo* video monitor.

5 “There’s something,” he said, pointing to the screen. Suddenly every member of the sleepy watch was alive and alert. No one could believe it wasn’t just another



A photograph of the *Argo* as it works underwater

<sup>1</sup> *Argo* — the underwater vessel that contained a video camera

false alarm, or a joke. But, no, there on the screen were clear images of things man-made. Stu yelled, “Bingo!” The control room echoed with a loud “Yeah!” from the whole team, and then wild shrieks and war-whoops. All sorts of wreckage began to stream by on the screen. Then something different appeared — something large and perfectly round. Jean-Louis checked in a book of pictures of the *Titanic*. He came across a picture of the ship’s massive boilers, used to burn coal and drive the engines. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He looked from book to video screen and back again. Yes, it was the same kind of boiler!

6 I scrambled out of my bunk when I got the news and ran to the control room. We replayed the tape of the boiler. I didn’t know what to say. I turned to Jean-Louis. The look in his eyes said everything. The *Titanic* had been found. We’d been right all along. Then he said softly, “It was not luck. We earned it.”

7 Our hunt was almost over. Somewhere very near us lay the R.M.S. *Titanic*.

8 Word had spread throughout the ship. People were pouring into the control room. The place was becoming a madhouse. Everyone was shaking hands and hugging and slapping each other on the back.



Wreckage of the *Titanic*

9 It was now almost two in the morning, very close to the exact hour of the *Titanic*’s sinking. Someone pointed to the clock on the wall. All of a sudden the room became silent.

10 Here at the bottom of the ocean lay not only the graveyard of a great ship, but of more than 1,500 people who had gone down with her. And we were the very first people in seventy-three years to come to this spot to pay our respects. Images from the night of the disaster — a story I now knew by heart — flashed through my mind.

11 Out on the stern of the *Knorr*,<sup>2</sup> people had started to gather for a few moments of silence in memory of those who had died on the *Titanic*. The sky was filled with stars; the sea was calm. We raised the Harland & Wolff flag, the emblem of the shipyard in Belfast, Ireland, that had built the great liner. Except for the shining moon overhead, it was just like the night when the *Titanic* had gone down. I could see her as she slipped nose first into the glassy water. Around me were the ghostly shapes of lifeboats and the piercing shouts and screams of passengers and crew freezing to death in the water.

12 Our little memorial service lasted about ten minutes. Then I just said, “Thank you all. Now let’s get back to work.”

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<sup>2</sup> *Knorr* — the research ship used by Robert Ballard