

## REMOVING WIRELESS ARTEFACTS FROM THE TITANIC?

*“A company with rights to remove artefacts from the Titanic asks court to allow it to recover famous radio”*

This is the message that a member of the **Radio Officers Group** sent in **February 2020** to the RO internet closed users group (although I am not an RO, I was accepted as a member of the users group). It was referring to a CNN ‘telegram’ by Isabelle Lee, with the title: ”A JUDGE NEEDS MORE TIME TO DECIDE WHETHER A SALVAGE COMPANY CAN REMOVE THE RADIO USED TO CALL FOR HELP ON THE TITANIC” ( 1 ).

Here is part of the text:

...

*For the August planned expedition, RMS Titanic Inc. would need to obtain federal court approval to work inside the hull of the ship and remove the rust-covered radio apparatus, officials say.*

...

*The agency said intrusive recovery activity must be evaluated based on whether there is a justified educational, scientific or cultural interest.*

*RMS Titanic Inc. argued in a court document filed last year that little was known about the most famous radio in history and that the company wanted to recover it before conditions deteriorated further and the piece of history was lost.*

*The company cited a report conducted by Titanic expert **Parks Stephenson**, who visited the wreck in 2005, 2010 and 2019, saying that large sections of the deckhouse have collapsed since 2005.*

...

Soon after this message was published to the Radio-Officers Group, the following reaction was sent by a member:

*I do not know why someone would want to retrieve the radio equipment from the Titanic, being the ship is a few miles below the surface and the cost would be incredible. How much would be left of the equipment after 108 years under the ocean?*

*It's stupid. It should not even be attempted.*

It was soon followed by another one:

*To me, and maybe I am just old fashion, this should not happen. Just because the Titanic is famous, and has been down at the bottom of the sea for 108 years, does not change the fact that this a "live" maritime grave. And in my view, poking around in it, removing items from it amounts to grave robbery. Are not the photographs already collected not sufficient to document this spark transmitter? Once you start bending the rules for one ship, however old, however famous, you put at risk every wreck, even if it has become nothing but a mound of silt, sand and mud.*

*On land graves are protected, same should apply at sea!*

Following these messages, a long ‘justification’ was sent out by the above-mentioned **Parks Stephenson**, who happens also to be a member of the R-O list:

*I'm going to disagree with that sentiment, given that I am the one making the argument for retrieval.*

*Jim Cameron [a famous filmmaker: The Terminator 1 and 2, Aliens, Avatar 1 and 2 and 3,... and many others], surveyed the remains of the Marconi transmitting room (Silent Cabin) in 2001 and 2005. The operator's room, with all the receiving components, was destroyed during the sinking by the flow of water through the deckhouse. But the Silent Cabin had soundproofed walls, which withstood the rush of water and protected the transmitting apparatus within. Over the next century, the organisms that feed off the wreck ate away the wooden walls, revealing a beautifully complete and intact transmitting apparatus, the only surviving example of a Marconi 5-kW marine station in the world. It also happens to make up part of*

*what is arguably the most famous radio (telegraph, actually, but that's how the public sees it) in the world. I am the one who performed the analysis of Jim's dive imagery and reconstructed what was a unique station. Not even the Marconi Co. archives had any source material about Titanic's installation, given that they were always put together by the local Marconi engineer to fit the space allocated aboard each vessel. The transmitting apparatus has survived. The wood boxes that house the jigger, coils and ATI have certainly degraded, but the motor-generator set (which includes the first rotary discharger to go to sea) looks to be in good, maybe even restorable, condition. The switchboards and regulators, still mounted on the steel bars that handled their weight, still show the last operator settings of motor and alternator. The condenser bank and transformer are in galvanized steel tubs. Wall-mounted components still hang in space, held up by their connecting wires after the walls themselves were consumed.*

*This apparatus needs to be saved, as the deckhouse that has protected it until now is collapsing. I have noted the ongoing collapse of the roof of that deckhouse...I even saw it in person during my dive to the wreck last year (you can see the documentary, "Return to the Titanic," on Sunday 23 February 2020 at 9 PM (ET/PT) on the National Geographic Channel (in the USA; in the UK, on 14 April). It won't be long before the remains of the roof collapses on top of the apparatus, just like it did over Captain Smith's bathtub (which we noted for the first-time last year).*

*The wreck doesn't belong to us or this time. We are lucky to still have the wreck in explorable condition now... future generations won't have that luxury that we take for granted. They will want to connect to Titanic and any artefacts we rescue from the disintegrating wreck now will be their link to the ship and its story. I would think as radio men, you would want this piece of communications history preserved forever.*

More pro and contra messages with regards to a new expedition followed.

Each reader can make his own judgment; I am in the 'pro' camp.

On **3 March 2020** Parks came back on the issue (via the RO closed users group) with the following message: *I'm the guy who put forward the whole argument to recover the Marconi transmitting apparatus. It survived the sinking intact, is in relatively good condition after over a century underwater, but it is now threatened with extinction by a disintegrating deckhouse that no longer protects it from the relentless currents at that depth. In court documents, I described its worth as both the world's most famous "radio" (actually a wireless telegraph, but "radio" is more recognisable to laymen) and the sole surviving 5kW marine telegraph station in the world (the wreck of sister ship Britannic may still have hers but it has yet to be seen) and the rationale for recovery at this time.*

*This artefact has already, in images, taught us more than we knew about the apparatus that was used to transmit Titanic's death calls. Each Marconi telegraph installation was unique (the Marconi Co. archives had no information specific to Titanic) and Titanic was the first marine telegraph station to carry a rotary spark discharger, which made her signals stand out from all the others afloat at that time. The Marconi Room set made for the 1997 film "Titanic" was patterned after sister ship Olympic; therefore, it was a surprise when James Cameron explored the Marconi Room inside the Titanic wreck a few years later and found it different from Olympic. Today, the surviving components sit in about a foot or two of sediment...whatever might be buried underneath the accumulated silt (the telegraph key, perhaps?) cannot be determined through remote imaging alone. More importantly, though, it is certain to be lost to history if we do nothing while the structure around it continues to deteriorate. Over the past 20 years, I have monitored the degradation of the deckhouse in which it sits. I saw it with my own eyes during a dive to the wreck just last year. The roof that once protected the apparatus is about to cave in and bury the room underneath forever, just as it did the Captain's bathtub (which we saw for the first time this past year). I would hate to see that happen.*

*Why? Because we are privileged to live in a time when the wreck is explorable, where artefacts like the Marconi transmitter can be imaged and studied. Future generations of Titanic enthusiasts will not have that luxury as Titanic becomes more and more recycled back to Nature. What tangible link will be left for them to connect with the ship, her story and the histories of those 1500-some people who died during the disaster? I can think of no greater responsibility as someone who has been to and studied the wreck than to preserve some of it for the future. I coined the phrase, "voice of Titanic" in describing the apparatus. It*

*created, after all, the last messages the outside world heard from the ship as she lived her final moments. It was as much her voice as the texts sent from your smartphone is yours. I want to save that "voice" forever. For those who may not know, Titanic's transmitter did not actually transmit or receive voice messages, only telegraphic Morse code, so I use the term "voice" a bit dramatically.*

*It does not matter to me whether or not the apparatus can be restored to working condition, so that we could generate Titanic's "spark" again. If we don't save it now, the argument becomes moot, anyway. Can it be restored? I think so, after a complete rebuild of the working components. Or maybe we leave it as is or the moment. Future generations and technologies might someday be able to create wonders with the device that we cannot consider now. No one will ever know if we don't leave them that option.*

*That, in essence, describes my motivation behind arguing for its recovery. I am currently not involved in the physical recovery of the apparatus because I cannot endorse any plan that would cause an unacceptable amount of collateral damage. In that, I am in agreement with the Court's current ruling that favours responsible retrieval. Like the Court, I am waiting to see a plan that uses more laparoscopic methods of extraction, even if that means waiting a bit longer for the right technologies to be developed. We can't wait forever, though, because the wreck's biological clock is ticking.*

*Parks*

...HAS TO BE FOLLOWED UP...

Well, here is already a remarkable first 'follow-up' !

It was published by the [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) on 20 May 2020

## **Salvage Firm Can Cut into Titanic to Recover Telegraph, Judge Says**

**By Neil Vidgor and Sandra E. Garcia**

An underwater salvage company was granted approval this week to cut into the wreckage of the Titanic to try to recover a Marconi telegraph, rekindling a complex debate over access to the ship and maritime law.

The company, R.M.S. Titanic, persuaded a federal judge on Monday to allow it to conduct a salvage operation this summer in the wreckage of the ship, which sank during its maiden voyage across the Atlantic in 1912 after hitting an iceberg. More than 1,500 of the ship's passengers died, and about 700 survived.

The ruling, by Judge Rebecca Beach Smith of the U.S. District Court in Norfolk, Va., made changes to a 2000 court order that prohibited the company from cutting into the ship's hull to search for diamonds.

The company sought to loosen the restrictions so it could recover the Titanic's telegraph machine, which it contends could be lost forever because of the degradation of the ship. The radio transmitter could unlock some of the secrets about a missed warning message and distress calls sent from the ship, said the company, which obtained the salvage rights to the wreckage in the 1980s. The site is about 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland.

"The Marconi device has significant historical, educational, scientific and cultural value as the device used to make distress calls while the Titanic was sinking," Judge Smith wrote in her ruling. The company will be permitted to "minimally to cut into the wreck" so it can reach the telegraph room, Judge Smith wrote.

David Concannon, a lawyer for R.M.S. Titanic, said in an interview on Tuesday that the company would try to avoid cutting into the ship and that the ship's telegraph room could be reached through a skylight that was already open.

“It tells an important story,” Mr. Concannon said of the telegraph device. “It tells of the heroism of the operators that saved the lives of 705 people. They worked until water was lapping at their feet.”

In an interview on Tuesday, David Gallo, a consultant for R.M.S. Titanic and an oceanographer, characterized the recovery of the Marconi telegraph as a rescue operation.

“We need to honour the ship and the passengers that sailed on her,” he said.

Mr. Gallo said the company wanted to avoid damaging what remains of the Titanic.

“We may get out there and decide not to do it because it’s impossible to do it without destroying the ship,” he said. “We have plans to do it surgically with minimum damage. It’s not like we’re going to a field. It’s an expedition to almost another planet. A world we’re not familiar with.”

*...I'M SURE THAT MORE FOLLOW UPS WILL FOLLOW*

And yes, I could add here another and, alas, last one

On **4 June 2021** I received a reaction from Parks STEPHENSON upon my question “what is the latest status”.

Here is his answer:

“RMS Titanic, the company with salvor-in-possession rights and that petitioned the Court in Feb 2020 to retrieve the major Marconi transmitter components from the wreck, has cancelled those plans indefinitely. I know of no other plans or attempts to retrieve those artefacts.”

So this also means the end of my story here...

**But I have added below some more interesting information  
about Parks, photos, and the Marconi radio equipment!**

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **ADDENDUM**

What was striking to me was the fact that Parks Stephenson added a couple of pictures from inside the wreck.

I then wrote to him asking if I could publish them on my website and in my third book. I'm delighted to say that he immediately replied positively. You will discover them on the next page.

#### **About Parks STEPHENSON (2 and 3)**

A 1979 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Parks has qualified as both a submariner and naval flight officer (he flew with the famous E-2C Hawkey > it's more than worthwhile to do a Google search about this very special plane!..). After retiring from the Navy in 1995, Commander Stephenson joined the defence contracting industry. He also immersed himself completely into the Marconi system used into the Titanic; a research that went from hobby to more professional.

In 2001 he was employed by the very famous filmmaker James Cameron (who surveyed the remains of the Marconi transmitting room in 2001 and 2005) as a technical advisor for his documentary, "Ghosts of the

Abyss". Cameron brought him back in 2005 for the Discovery Channel/Earthship Productions-sponsored "Last Mysteries of the Titanic" expedition, where Parks fine-tuned the use of special models as forensic tools in the continuing exploration of the wreck's interior. He's also been a technical/historical advisor for both the History Channel and National Geographic Channel. Parks dived to the Titanic wreck in 2005, participated as part of the 'Lone Wolf Documentary Group' expedition crew during the 2006 and 2009 expeditions to the Britannic wreck, and was field producer for History during the 2010 'RMST/WHOI' Titanic Expedition.

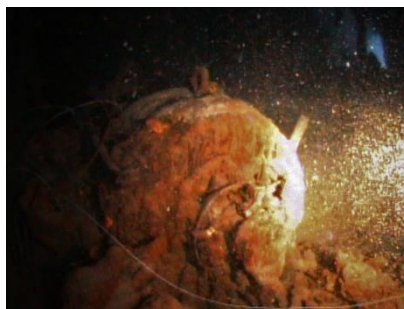
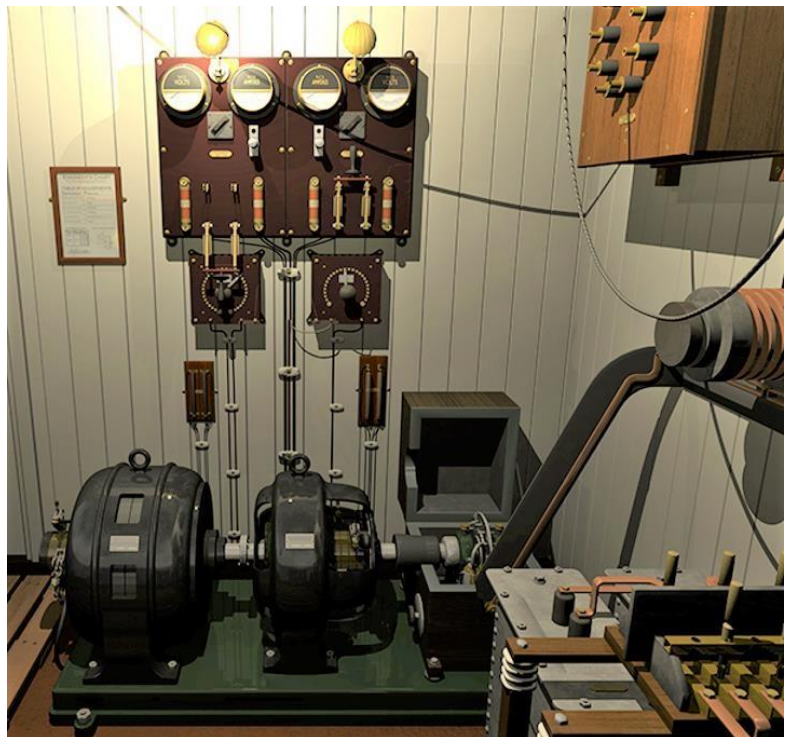
( 1 ) <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/19/us/salvage-company-titanic-radio/index.html>

( 2 ) Hear Parks Stephenson via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FENfUqB11gg> (

( 3 ) <https://www.facebook.com/sparks401/>

..).

Here are some pictures.



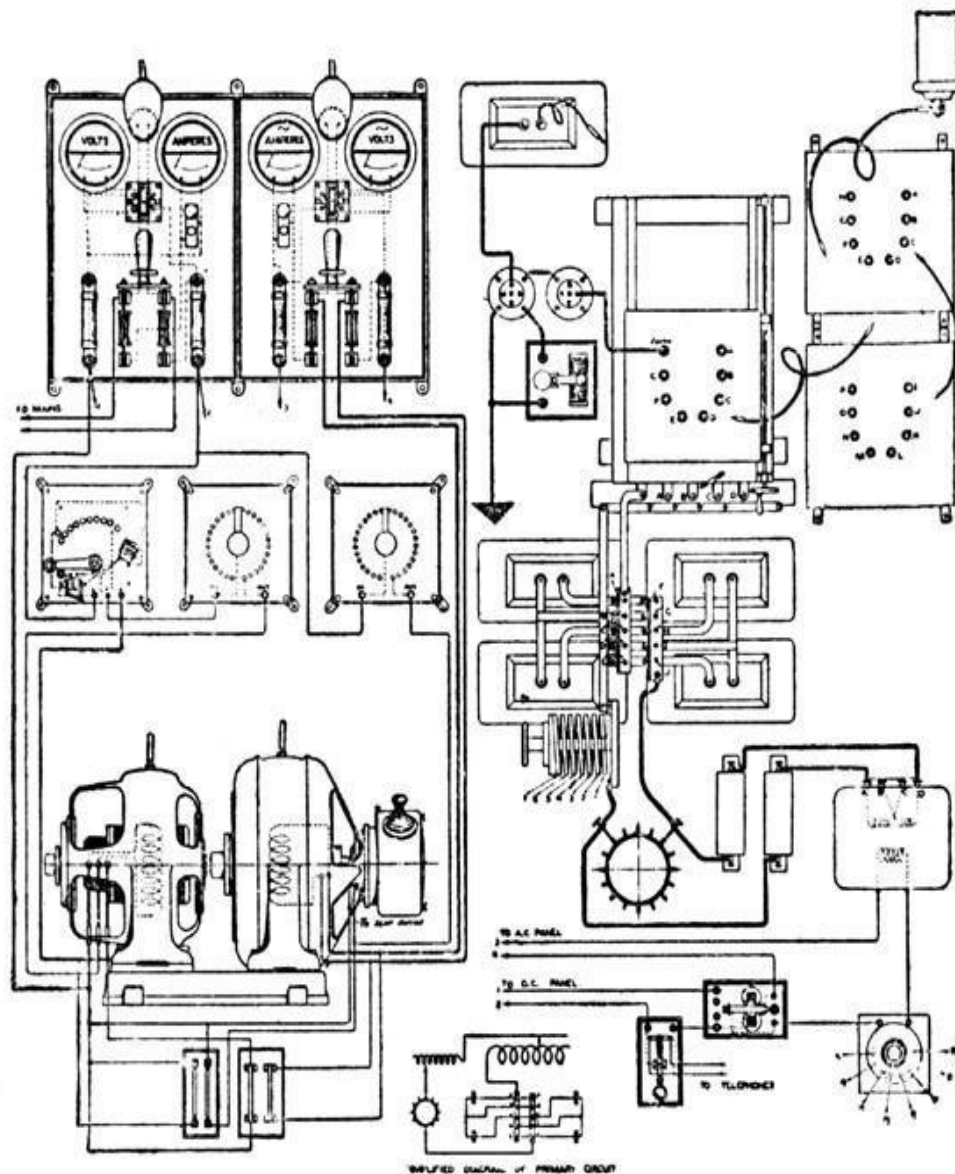
The images from inside the wreck are from **Earthship Productions**. The CGI image is from **Parks Stephenson**.

I am taking the opportunity here to tell a bit more about the radio apparatus that was in use on board the Titanic. (*next pages*)

### The transmitter

The **main** transmitter was a 5 kW synchronous rotary spark system, working at 600m 'long wave' (500 kHz) and 325m 'shortwave' (930 kHz). The 'musical signal' was 840 Hz.

The guaranteed range was minimum 250 miles by day (and, not guaranteed, 2000 by night)



5-Kw. Set Connections.

I have taken the above image and information out from  
 file:///C:/Users/Fons/Desktop/17%20TITANIC/TitanicRadio1%20Halifax.pdf  
 via [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com)

This is a PowerPoint type report containing 42 interesting pages

The **auxiliary** transmitter used a plain spark 10-inch induction coil (see my article 'MARCONI') connected to batteries (incl. a charger). Here the guaranteed range was 40 miles.

### The receiver

The essential parts of the **main** receiver were the Twin T type aerials, a Magnetic detector and a Multiple tuner (see my article 'MARCONI'), a Fleming valve detector and standard telephones.

The **auxiliary** receiver used a coherer (see my article 'MARCONI') and a Siemens style inker telegraph (see my article 'Werner SIEMENS').

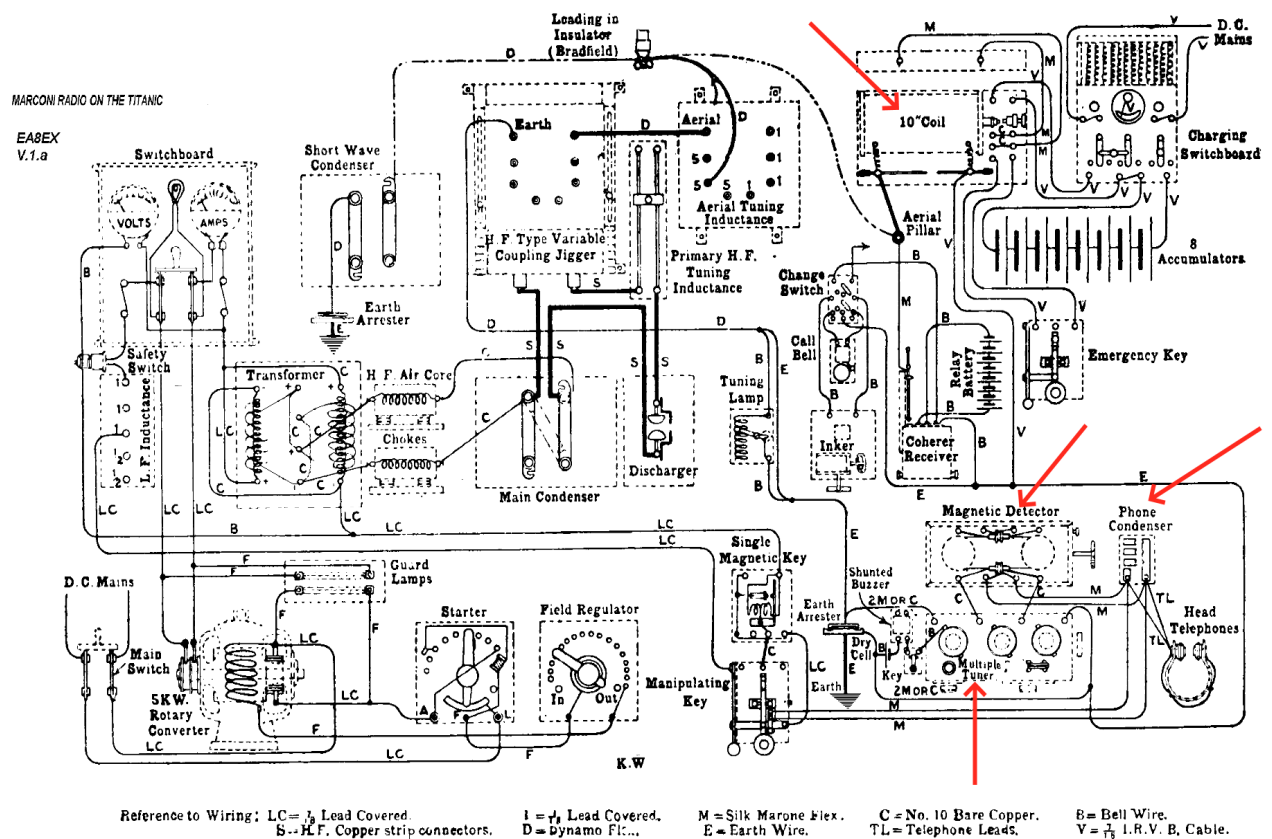


Fig. Connections of  $1\frac{1}{5}$ -kw. Marconi Converter Set.

### Credit:

I have taken the above image and information out from <file:///C:/Users/Fons/Desktop/17%20TITANIC/TitanicRadio1%20Halifax.pdf> via [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com)

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### THANK YOU!

Parks STEPHENSON, for the actual pictures of the Titanic.

Sam HALLAS, for having -again- corrected my 'Flemish English'