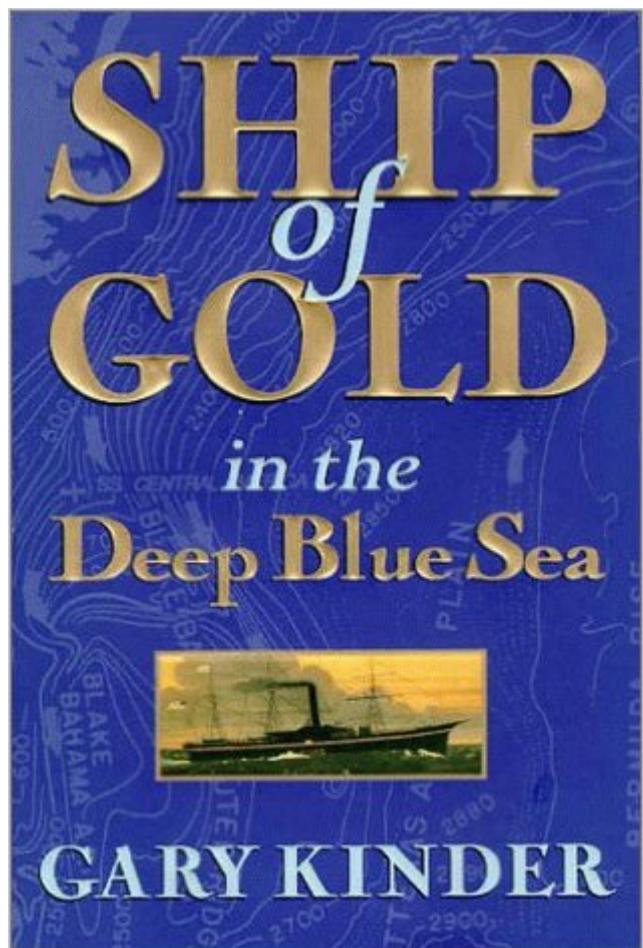


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# Ship Of Gold In The Deep Blue Sea



## **Synopsis**

In 1857, the "SS Central America," a side-wheel steamer carrying nearly six hundred passengers returning from the California Gold Rush, foundered in a hurricane and sank off the Carolina coast. Over four hundred lives and twenty-one tons of gold were lost. In the 1980s, a young engineer from Ohio set out to do what no one, not even the U.S. Navy, had been able to do: establish a working presence on the deep-ocean floor and open it to scientific discovery. After years of intensive effort, Tommy Thompson and the Columbus-America Discovery Group found the "Central-America" in eight thousand feet of water, and in October of 1989 they sailed into Norfolk with her recovered treasure. Here is the story of both the victims and heroes of the disaster, and the visionary team that opened Earth's last frontier.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Gary Kinder tells three spell-binding narratives as he describes the search for the SS Central America, a sidewheel steamer which left Panama in 1857 and went down in the Atlantic while carrying gold from California (then valued at over \$2 million). First person accounts by some of the survivors tell of the ship's journey, the hurricane which suddenly arose in the Atlantic, and the frantic efforts of crew and passengers to keep the engines fired and the ship afloat. Touching love stories revealed in these accounts give human faces to the drama, as women and children were put into lifeboats while their husbands stayed with the ship. These survivor accounts alternate with the narrative of the life of young Tommy Thompson, a phenomenally inventive child who grew up in Ohio, studied engineering, became fascinated by the challenges of underwater engineering, and

eventually worked for famed treasure hunter Mel Fisher, learning what kind of underwater equipment was needed but not available. In the early 1980s, Thompson, more interested in research than in treasure, decided to search for the SS Central America, with the backing of a group he convinced to underwrite his expedition. As the ship was thought to be in eight thousand feet of water, deeper than had ever been explored, Thompson would succeed only if he could design the necessary equipment. The third story describes the search for the ship itself, a search which had two false starts before the site was finally located. Kinder develops almost unbearable tension as he describes how Thompson has to fend off rivals who are "treasure hunters," rather than scientists.

This well-research and generally well-written book tells two very different and equally fascinating tales, the sinking of the Steamship Central America in deep water off the Carolinas in 1857, and the efforts by Tommy Thompson to locate and salvage the vessel in 1989. Both stories are skillfully told, and for a book whose outcome is known by reading the book jacket, the suspense remains high. First, the shipwreck. Anyone who, like myself, had ever visited the U.S. Naval Academy and watched plebes hopelessly trying to climb the impressive Herndon Monument will appreciate the true story of Capt. Herndon and his gallantry aboard the Central America, as he supervised rescue efforts to incredibly save the women and children in the deep Atlantic while valiantly remaining with his ship, laden with Gold Rush loot. The other half of the story focuses on Thompson, a skilled engineer who managed to do something the United States Navy was unsuccessful doing, namely designing and building a workable, unmanned, deep sea salvage vessel. When one fully learns the difficulties presented in this task, and the monumental odds of even locating the Central America, the achievement becomes truly remarkable. The book is not without its faults however. First, even though the salvage efforts struck gold in 1989, there were no photographs at all. I would've loved to have at least gotten a glimpse of the treasures brought from the ocean floor. (I understand Thompson has now written a "coffee table" book which might be read as a companion to Kinder's book, complete with wonderful pictures).

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