

The Truth of the Sinking of the Lusitania:
The British Admiralty and The American Entry into The First World War

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The Sinking of the Lusitania: An Introduction

On May 1, 1915, the famous British luxury liner *Lusitania*, headed by William Turner, sailed from New York to Liverpool. It was the fastest liner in service during World War 1.¹ The ship held 44,000 tons and could sustain 25 knots about 30 miles an hour. That a ship of such size could achieve so great a speed was considered one of the miracles of the modern age.² During the voyage to Liverpool, the *Lusitania* had nearly 2,000 passengers on board.³ It was, according to the *New York Times*, the greatest number of Europe-bound passengers on a single vessel since the year began.⁴ That same day the *Lusitania* left New York, a notice was placed in New York's newspapers by the German Embassy reminding citizens of the decree Germany published in February which declared the waters around Britain and Ireland to be a war zone and thus, highly dangerous for any boat, neutral or not,⁵ to be traveling through.⁶ In fact, the American oil Tanker, *Gulflight*, sailing in the same general vicinity *Lusitania* would be in, was attacked by a German U-boat the same day *Lusitania* left for Liverpool, thus demonstrating that Germany's threats were to be taken seriously.⁷ Despite these warnings, the *Lusitania* continued on with its voyage, with crew members trusting in the liner's ability to outrun any [war] ship.⁸ In fact, an

¹ Erik Larson, "Dead Wake," (New York: Crown Publishers, 2015), I.

² Ibid., 8. A passenger from Rhode Island told the Cunard Daily Bulletin that "The *Lusitania* is in itself a perfect epitome of all time that man knows or had discovered or invented up to this time." See *Cunard Daily Bulletin*, July 19, 1907, Merseyside.

³ "General Analysis of Passengers and Crew," R.M.S. *Lusitania*: Record of Passengers and Crew. SAS/29/6/18. Merseyside. From here forward, known as "General Analysis of Passengers and Crew."

⁴ *New York Times*, May 2, 1915.

⁵ Kurt Hyde, "Sinking of the *Lusitania*," *The New American*, vol. 31 (May 4, 2015): 3-4.

⁶ The notice forewarned that any boat with the British flag, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction and that any individual sailing on them do so at their own risk. See *New York Times*, May 1, 1915, 3,19.

⁷ Larson, 155.

⁸ The *Lusitania*'s manager responded to the warnings saying, "The truth is that the *Lusitania* is the safest boat on the sea. She is too fast for any submarine. No German war vessel can get her or near her." See Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 82. Moreover, American Consul Wesley Frost said "The reference to the *Lusitania* was obvious enough but personally it never entered my mind for a moment that the Germans would actually prepertrate an attack upon her. The culpability of such an act seemed too blatant and raw for an intelligent people to take upon themselves." See

earlier incident in times' past seemed to support this: another captain traveling the *Lusitania* was confronted by a submarine but was able to escape it by speeding away.⁹ On May 7, 1915, the *Lusitania* encountered exactly what Germany warned about, and consequently, was attacked by a German U-boat with a single torpedo, killing over 1,000 people, including 123 Americans.¹⁰ Germany, however, is not solely responsible for the consequences that befell the *Lusitania*. A fundamental cause of the *Lusitania*'s devastation was the pre-planned, secretive, illegal boarding of excessive explosive munitions and intentional lack of protection as on behalf of the British Admiralty which served to draw America into WWI.

Plans of Attack

Although a German U-boat attacked the *Lusitania*, the British also contributed a major part in this tragedy by purposely not providing protection for its voyage, as well as secretly and illegally placing explosive munitions on board to increase the chances of American passengers dying, so that the U.S. would be pushed into the Great War. While on board, passengers enjoyed the luxurious, joyful, relaxing and apparently safe atmosphere the *Lusitania*'s crew members ensured them of. But in six days (May 7, 1915), joy was turned into sorrow, when a German U-boat, headed by Walther Schweiger, fired a torpedo at the *Lusitania*, causing the death of over 1,000 people, including three German stowaways who were arrested on the morning the ship left and were kept in an improvised brig.¹¹ The *Lusitania* sank within 18 minutes.¹² But the damage done to the *Lusitania* was not just a cause-and-effect event in which the *Lusitania* went in the

Wesley Frost, *German Submarine Warfare: A Study of Its Methods and Spirit* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 2008), 186.

⁹ Larson, 2.

¹⁰ According to the final tally of the British Cruise company *Cunard* - the boat company *Lusitania* was registered under - out the 1,959 people on board, 1,198 died including 123 Americans (out of 160 total Americans on board - see second source cited in this footnote), six out of 33 infants survived, and over 600 passengers never found. See "General Analysis of Passengers and Crew." See also Hyde, 4.

¹¹ Larson, 283.

¹² *Ibid.*, 282.

area Germany warned not to go in and consequently was attacked. Rather, evidence suggests that the British planned in advanced ways of increasing the chances of American passengers dying and consequently provoking America to enter the war.

In the U.S. Justice Department's archives is an affidavit signed by Dr. E. W. Ritter von Rettegh, a chemist employed by Captain Guy Gaunt, the British naval attache in Washington. Rettegh stated that Gaunt called him to his office on April 26, 1915, and asked what the effect would be of sea water coming into contact with guncotton. The chemist explained that there were two types of guncotton--trinitro cellulose, which seawater would not affect, and pyroxyline, which sea water could cause to suddenly explode, as a result of chemical changes that he explained in technical detail. The following day, Gaunt visited the Du Pont munitions plant in Cristfield, New Jersey, and Du Pont thereupon shipped tons of pyroxyline, packaged in burlap, to the Cunard wharf in New York City, where it was loaded onto the *Lusitania*.¹³

The British not only secretly pre-planned ways to endanger American passengers, but even foretold of the *Lusitania*'s devastation to U.S. administrators, thereby demonstrating their own responsibility in its explosion, as well as attempted to indirectly pressure the U.S. to react in such a way that would result in entering the war.

On Friday morning [May 7, 1917] Edward Mandell House, President Wilson's alter ego, was preparing for an audience with King George V, a meeting that hinted of finalizing a plan to sacrifice the *Lusitania* in order to draw the United States into the war. As Simpson described it, House met first with Sir Edward Grey, who asked him, "What will America do if the Germans sink an ocean liner with American passengers on board?" House replied, "I believe that a flame of indignation would sweep the United States and that by itself would be sufficient to carry us into the war." King George V, when he met with House later that day, was more specific, asking, "Colonel, what will America do if the Germans sink the *Lusitania*?" Apparently House spent the whole day and into the evening with the British elites, as James Perloff reports in "False Flag at Sea--*Lusitania*": At evening, a splendid dinner was given honoring House; numerous British dignitaries attended, including Grey, and--at House's request--Lord Mersey, the Wreck Commissioner who would later oversee the inquiry regarding the *Lusitania*. During this dinner the news arrived of the great ship's sinking. House announced to the assembled guests that America would enter the war within the month.¹⁴

Because Germany created a blockade between the U.S. and Britain, thereby denying access to routes that were valuable to their trade relations, it is no wonder why Churchill was earnestly

¹³ Hyde, 5-6.

¹⁴ Hyde, 5.

seeking to get America involved in the war:¹⁵ so that trade relations could continue without any interruptions.¹⁶ Due to the blockade, trading was dangerous, but the U.S. and Great Britain attempted to bend the rules of trade because they were so money-hungry. But it came with a heavier cost than money: the cost of human life.

Munitions, Lies and Cover Ups

Not only did the British pre-plan ways of increasing the chances of American lives being taken, they also contributed to the sinking by planting explosive munitions on board and failing to provide protection for the *Lusitania* during its voyage. While the *Lusitania* was hit by a *single* torpedo, there were two explosions.¹⁷ The first explosion was caused by the torpedo itself, but the second is hotly debated and several theories have been suggested.¹⁸ However, explosive munitions that were on board the *Lusitania*, apparently en route for the British Army to help the war effort, is undeniable.¹⁹ The munitions consisted of 1,250 *filled* cases of shrapnel artillery

¹⁵ Churchill, in a letter to the head of England's Board of Trade, said "It is most important to attract neutral shipping to our shores, in the hopes especially of embroiling the U.S. with Germany." He further made note about the reduction in German submarine activity toward America saying, "For our part, we want the traffic - the more the better; and if some of it gets into trouble, better still." See Patrick Beesley, *Room 40: British Naval Intelligence, 1914-18* (United Kingdom: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, October 7, 1982), 90. See also David Ramsay, *Lusitania: Saga and Myth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, May 17, 2002), 202. See also Larson, 190.

¹⁶ If Great Britain could get America to fight with them against Germany, then that would increase the chances of Germany losing its power and consequently making the blockade nullified.

¹⁷ Schweiger's war log attests to the fact that he fired at the *Lusitania* "By means of one torpedo." and saw "an unusually great denomination followed with a strong explosive cloud. The explosion must have been accompanied by a second one (boiler or coal or powder)." See Ministry of Defence, DEFE/69270, National Archives UK. See also Walther Schweiger, *War Log*, May 7, 1915.

¹⁸ "The Second Explosion," *rmslusitania.info*, <http://www.rmslusitania.info/controversies/second-explosion/>.

¹⁹ "When reports appeared in the press suspecting the internal explosions were the real cause of the *Lusitania*'s sinking, President Wilson ordered Robert Lansing to find out if there was any contraband on board. Lansing had a detailed report in writing from [collector of customs, Dudley Field] Malone by noon, which stated that "practically all her cargo was contraband of some kind" and listed great quantities of munitions." See Hyde, 6. "The New York Times for May 8, in an article that was buried on page 6, had interviews with officers from the U.S. Navy in Washington, D.C.. 'It was pointed out, however, that inside explosions following the attack might have aided in the work of destruction, as the ship is understood to have carried a large amount of war material for the Allies, including ammunition. Such explosions might have ripped open several compartments and so weakened others that they gave way under the pressure of rushing water.'" See also Hyde, 1.

shells (a hotly debated issue²⁰), 4,200 cases of Remington rifle ammo,²¹ 50 barrels and 94 cases of highly explosive aluminum powder, 50 cases of highly explosive bronze powder,²² tons of nitrocellulose, an explosive known at the time as “gun cotton,” and 18 cases of artillery fuses.²³ Moreover, there were over 140 tons of *unrefrigerated* items listed as “butter,” “lard,” and “cheese.”²⁴ These were listed to be sent to the *Royal Navy's Weapons Testing Establishment* which *no one filed an insurance claim for* once they went missing after the sinking, all of which is to say they were most likely *munitions in disguise*.²⁵

Not only were the munitions a serious threat to those on board the *Lusitania*, but the mere presence of them on the same boat as civilians was a serious legal issue as well. Although America declared itself to be neutral during WWI, most likely because it carried on a large trade in peacetime with both the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey),²⁶ it secretly and *illegally*²⁷ supplied the British with munitions for the war, thereby violating neutrality laws at the expense of human life.

And American President Woodrow Wilson was the first to realize that if it became public that

²⁰ Larson, amongst others, suggests that the shells were *not* filled. See Larson, 182. However, the Royal Artillery Historical Trust in conjunction with three authors/researchers - Mitch Peeke, Steve Jones and Kevin Walsh-Johnson - discovered “that the shipping note, dated April 28, 1915, differed from the cargo’s manifest insofar that it shows ‘consignment number 23’ as being ‘1248 cases of three-inch calibre shrapnel shells, *filled*; four shells to each case.’” [My partial translation] See Michael Martin, *RMS Lusitania: It Wasn't & It Didn't* (Stroud, United Kingdom: The History Press, October 6, 2014), last page of Chapter 7 (page number not offered online), [books.google.com, https://books.google.com/books?id=W10TDQAAQBAJ&pg=PT56&lpg=PT56&dq=The+Royal+Artillery+Regiment+Historical+Trust+lusitania&source=bl&ots=elxoMDEH0t&sig=E_f5XiuTOrrUU6vhMIOiWRFKMgw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjQh_nYyIzXAhUB7oMKHa4TB6cQ6AEILTAB#v=onepage&q=The%20Royal%20Artillery%20Regiment%20Historical%20Trust%20lusitania&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=W10TDQAAQBAJ&pg=PT56&lpg=PT56&dq=The+Royal+Artillery+Regiment+Historical+Trust+lusitania&source=bl&ots=elxoMDEH0t&sig=E_f5XiuTOrrUU6vhMIOiWRFKMgw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjQh_nYyIzXAhUB7oMKHa4TB6cQ6AEILTAB#v=onepage&q=The%20Royal%20Artillery%20Regiment%20Historical%20Trust%20lusitania&f=false).

²¹ Larson, 182.

²² Ibid.,

²³ Brian Farmer, “America's Grand Entry into the Great War,” *The New American*, vol. 33 (July 24, 2017): 2.

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ Hyde, 5-6.

²⁶ Farmer, 1.

²⁷ According to numerous sources, there was absolutely *no* legality for such actions. Senator Robert La Follete of Wisconsin argued it was a violation of the Passenger Act of 1882 for a ship coming into or departing from a U.S. port to have both passengers and explosive cargo on board. Moreover, the German government on May 29 transmitted an official note to the U.S. government that attempted to have an official international investigation of the *Lusitania*’s sinking. The German note repeated previous assertions that the *Lusitania* had explosives *illegally* on board... and was using American citizens as protection. See Hyde, 7.

over one-hundred American lives had been lost because of the administration's lax interpretation of neutrality, it would be most unlikely for him to survive the inevitable political Holocaust.²⁸ In fact, when [on May 9, 1915] an official statement from the German government stated that the *Lusitania* was "naturally armed with guns...and she had a large cargo of war material."²⁹

President Wilson telephoned Robert Lansing demanding to know precisely what the *Lusitania* had been carrying. Lansing had a detailed report from Malone on his desk by noon. It stated that 'practically all of her cargo was contraband of some kind' with lists denoting great quantities of munitions. This was political dynamite of the most damning kind. Lansing and Wilson realised that if the public learned that over a hundred Americans had lost their lives because of their abuse of neutrality, they would not survive the inevitable backlash. [Consequently]... the official statement from the Collector of the Port of New York stated 'that Report is not correct. *The Lusitania* was inspected before sailing as customary. No guns were found.'³⁰

Although America was illegally and secretly supporting the British during the war via munitions, the blood of over 1,000 people, including their own citizens, is on their hands, regardless of the fact that America did not want to openly be an ally to the British which would have ruined trade relations with Germany.³¹ Great Britain on the other hand, carries the greatest responsibility of the *Lusitania*'s sinking.

Lack of Protection(s)

As this paper has already established, the British Admiralty should share culpability for the sinking of the *Lusitania* because of its pre-planned agenda to intentionally load onto the ship

²⁸ Hyde, 6.

²⁹ "The United States and War: President Wilson's Notes on the *Lusitania* and Germany's reply," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, vol. 30 (1915).

³⁰ Jim and Gerry, "Lusitania 8: The Anglo-American Collusion," *firstworldwarhiddenhistory.wordpress.com*, May 18, 2015, <https://firstworldwarhiddenhistory.wordpress.com/category/lusitania/>.

See also Colin Simpson, *Lusitania* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Press, October 16, 1972), 172-173. See also "The United States and War: President Wilson's Notes on the *Lusitania* and Germany's reply," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, vol. 30 (1915): 47.

³¹ It is most likely that the U.S. placed [explosive] munitions on the same boat as a passenger boat for the sole reason of making more money via trade. But the British placed excessive [explosive] munitions on board for the sole reason of causing a bigger explosion to increase the chances of Americans dying and consequently leading the U.S. to react by entering into the War. Thus, Britain is more responsible for the *Lusitania*'s sinking and the death of countless innocent people, while the U.S., although not intentionally attempting to kill its own to enter the War, as this would ruin trade relations with Germany, is partially responsible for illegal trade that consequently led to the death of many.

explosive munitions to ensure that America would join them in fighting during WWI.

Furthermore, the British Admiralty had also intentionally provided little-to-no protection for the *Lusitania*. German wireless messages were intercepted by Great Britain's code-breaking Room 40, which revealed information about the heavy submarine presence west of the West Coast of Ireland,³² as the *Lusitania* was en route for Liverpool. In fact, several boats were attacked by Schweiger's U-boat in the same general area the *Lusitania* would soon travel through.³³

The British Admiralty informed the *Lusitania* about these situations but did not send any destroyers to protect it such as in the case with Britain's largest warship, the HMS *Orion* which was travelling in the same vicinity as the *Lusitania*.³⁴ Admiralty Chief of Staff "Dummy" Oliver warned other war vessels such as the HMS *Gloucester* and HMS *Duke of Edinburgh* about these dangers too. He even redirected the HMS *Jupiter* to take the North Channel that was deemed to be much safer.³⁵ It is worth noting here that the North Channel was off limits to merchant ships. It was only to be used by war ships. However, Admiral Richard Webb, head of the Admiralty's Trade Division, received information on April 15 stating that the North Channel in fact now was open to *all* ships without discrimination. He did not tell Turner about this,³⁶ which suggests an intentional act to further endanger the *Lusitania* and sway America toward joining the British in WWI. Moreover, the British Admiralty not only intentionally slowed down the speed of the rescue boats,³⁷ but also recalled the warships they sent to protect the *Lusitania* when it was attacked because the Admiralty said it was too dangerous for them to go save lives.³⁸ This

³² Larson, 148-149.

³³ Larson, 189.

³⁴ Larson, 206-209. See also Telegram, Censor, Valencia to Admiralty, May 7, 1915, *Lusitania Various Papers*, Admiralty Papers, AMD 137/1058, National Archives UK.

³⁵ Beesly, 100. See also Ramsay, 246.

³⁶ Larson, 149. See also Beesly, 40, 96-97.

³⁷ Larson, 289.

³⁸ Larson, 280. See also Telegram, Admiralty to S.N.O. Queenstown, May 7, 1915, *Churchill Papers*, CHAR

rationale shows just how selfish the Admiralty truly was in valuing ships more than human life. The fact that the British Admiralty did not send naval escorts with the *Lusitania* but rather their own war ships, along with the failure to provide any directions on what to do if contact was made with the submarine, could potentially corroborate that the British Admiralty wanted to endanger the *Lusitania* to break America's neutrality.

Concluding Remarks

One might ask whether or not the *Lusitania* was capable of escaping its tragedy. Perhaps one may say Turner should have heeded the information from Germany and the British Admiralty about the presence of submarine activity. What is problematic about this, however, is that, aside from Turner conveying to his crew that they could outrun U-boats, the messages sent by the Admiralty provided only bare facts with no instructions or interpretation. Thus, the Admiralty had by no means done their full duty to him.³⁹ Moreover, thousands of people would not have died if the Admiralty had sent destroyers with the *Lusitania* or hastened the rescue boats.

The Admiralty argued that Turner could have zigzagged at the moment the torpedo was fired.⁴⁰ The problem with this argument is threefold. Firstly, Turner did not know about this tactic at the time. In fact, a prominent naval historian asserts that this tactic was not approved by Churchill until April 25 and distributed until May 13, which was far *after* the *Lusitania*'s departure.⁴¹ Secondly, Turner was not at the wheel to be able to control the ship's course while

13/64.

³⁹ Letter, Wesley Frost to William Jennings Bryan, May 11, 1915, *Lusitania Papers* 580, Roll 197, U.S. National Archives-College Park. See also Larson, 319.

⁴⁰ The British Admiralty claimed that "War experience has shown that fast steamers can considerably reduce the chance of successful surprise submarine attack by zigzagging..." Confidential Memorandum, April 16, 1915. Admiralty Papers, ADM1/8451/56, National Archives UK. See also "Answers of the Petitioner to the Interrogatories Propounded by May Davies Hopkins," Petition of the Cunard Steamship Company, April 15, 1918, U.S. National Archives, New York, 5-6.

⁴¹ Larson, 146.

the torpedo was fired.⁴² Thirdly, the likelihood of captains zigzagging a prominent merchant ship carrying civilians, especially first class citizens, would be highly frowned upon and would risk the future business of the ship's company.⁴³ The Admiralty's attempt to blame Turner was a way to deflect attention from itself for its own intentional failings, including the failure to protect the *Lusitania*, and suspicion of official connivance.⁴⁴

Overall, evidence strongly demonstrates and suggests that shortly after the outset of World War I, the British were desperate to get America to join the Allies, and they let a passenger liner be sunk to obtain that end⁴⁵ through various means, such as planning ways to contribute to its destruction, illegal trade, and lack of protections and support in its aftermath. As such, the end goal was to sway America toward becoming an ally with Great Britain, and that end was fully met on April 4, 1917, when President Wilson declared war on Germany. The Senate approved the declaration of war against the Central Powers by a vote of 82 to 6. On April 6, the House of Representatives approved it by a vote of 373 to 50.⁴⁶ The sinking of the *Lusitania* also shows how corrupt governments can work to sell lies in order to make an extra dollar at the end of the day, even at the expense of human life.

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⁴² Ibid., 248. See also Deposition, William Thomas Turner, May 15, 1915, Admiralty Papers, ADM 137/1058, National Archives UK.

⁴³ Larson, 147.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 319.

⁴⁵ Hyde, 1.

⁴⁶ Hyde, 6.

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