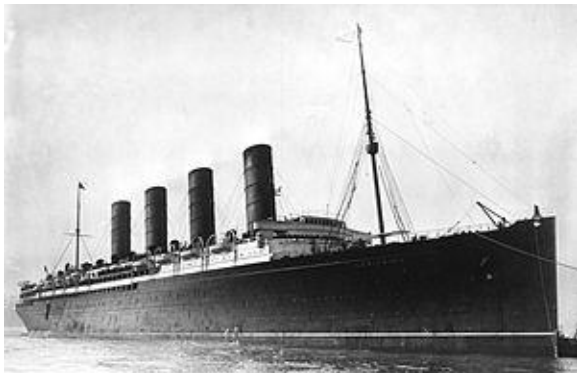


SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA

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RMS Lusitania: RMS *Lusitania* was a British ocean liner, constructed as part of the competition between the Cunard Line and other shipping lines, principally from Germany. The liners were built for the transatlantic passenger trade in the early years of the twentieth century.

Lusitania was built by John Brown & Co. of Clydebank, Scotland and launched 7 June 1906. Her maiden voyage commenced 7 November 1907.



RMS Lusitania

Lusitania and her sister ship *Mauretania* provided a regular express service between Britain and the United States until the intervention of the First World War. The two ships both held the "Blue Riband" speed record for a transatlantic crossing at different times in their careers.

At the time they were constructed the sister ships were the largest ever built and had 50% greater passenger space than their nearest rivals.

As part of an agreement with the British government *Lusitania* and the *Mauretania* were designed so that they might readily be converted to an auxiliary cruiser in times of war. The British government had

provided a loan of £2.6 million to finance the construction of both ships.

However, the ships proved to be impractical as armed cruisers. They had very high fuel consumption and were found to be too expensive for the Admiralty to operate. *Lusitania* and other express liners were released from the Royal Navy shortly after the commencement of the war with instructions to resume passenger services. *Mauretania* served as a troop ship.

Cunard expressed a desire to lay up *Lusitania* for the duration of the war, but under the terms of the subsidy contract it was required to make all its ships available for government use and to carry government cargoes.

The Sinking: On 4 February 1915 Germany declared the seas around the British Isles a war zone and from 18 February it announced that allied ships in the area would be sunk without warning.

Lusitania (Captain William Turner) departed New York on 1 May 1915.



Captain William Turner

SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA

Prior to her sailing, the Imperial German Embassy in the United States had placed the following warning in 50 American Newspapers.

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on the ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

*IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY
Washington, D.C. 22nd April
1915*

On 7 May *Lusitania* was making for the port of Queenstown, Ireland, when at 2:10 p.m. she crossed in front of *U-20* commanded by *Kapitänleutnant* Walther Schwieger. It was sheer chance that the liner became such a convenient target, since *U-20* could not have caught the fast liner otherwise. Schwieger fired a single torpedo. It hit under the bridge, blowing a hole in the side of the ship, and was followed by a much larger secondary explosion that blew out the starboard bow.



KptLt Walther Schwieger

The secondary explosion led to much speculation that *Lusitania* had been carrying a cargo of high explosives. Recent revelations following research on the wreck disprove this claim.

The ship quickly developed a severe list to starboard. Many lifeboats overturned while loading or lowering, spilling their passengers into the sea below. The lifeboats that were lowered tended to be overturned by the ship's motion when they hit the water. *Lusitania* had 48 lifeboats, more than enough for all the crew and passengers, but only six managed to get to the water and stay afloat.

Lusitania sank in 18 minutes at 2:28 pm, 11 miles (18 km) off the Old Head of Kinsale, killing 1,198 (including 128 US citizens) of the 1,959 people aboard, including almost a hundred children.

Contrary to popular belief, the *Lusitania* disaster was not the proximate cause of the United States entering the First World War. However, the sinking of the *Lusitania* is credited with turning the then-neutral American public opinion against Germany. Furthermore, Germany, fearing American wrath, restrained its submarine campaign for a time, which may have been its best chance of winning the war. Nonetheless, it was Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in early

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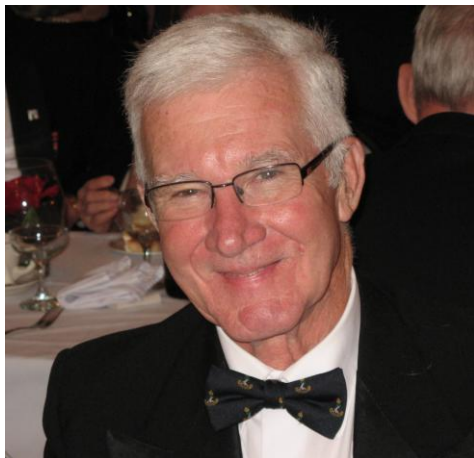
1917 that finally forced the United States to declare war.

Later in the war Schwieger was killed in action when, as commander of *U-88*, he was chased by HMS *Stonecrop*, hit a British mine, and sank on 5 September 1917. There were no survivors.

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