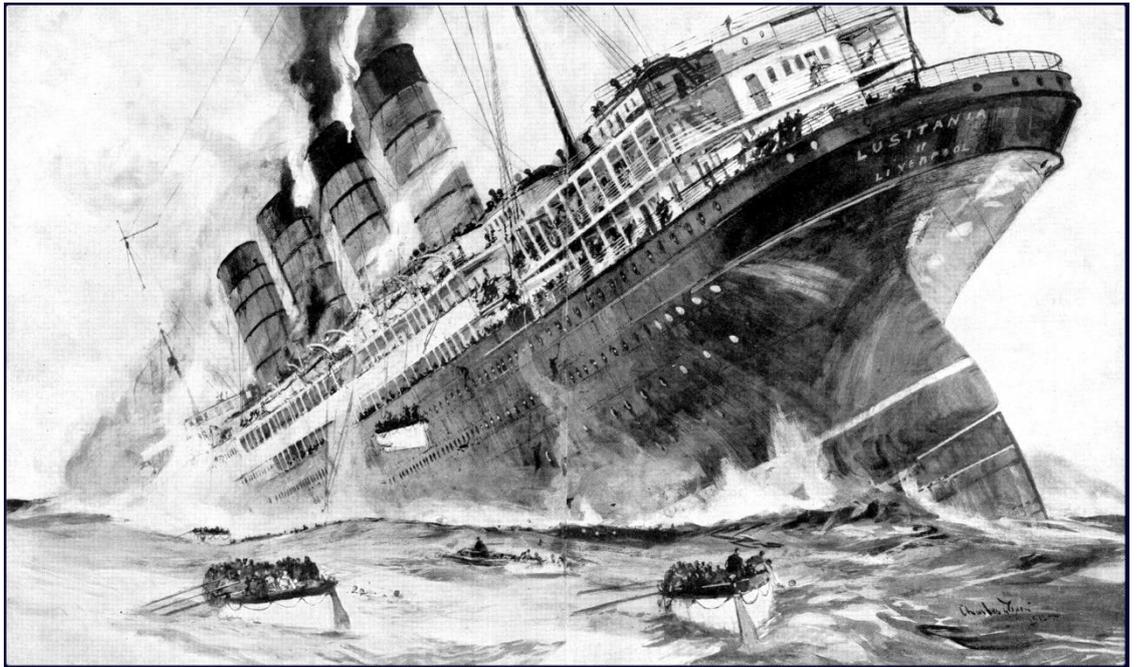


The Sinking of the Lusitania

On Saturday 1st May 1915 a luxury British liner, the *Lusitania*, left New York. The German Embassy had warned in February 1915 that any ship entering the 'war zone' around Britain or Ireland was liable to be sunk, and some passengers had received anonymous warnings not to sail. Yet the numbers of passengers was a record for the time of year. At 3.10 p.m. on 8th May the *Lusitania* was torpedoed by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland. The ship sank in just eight minutes, and 1198 passengers were drowned. The *Daily Express* claimed: 'It is simply an act of piracy. Nothing more.' The United States government was so shocked

(128 of the passengers were American) that it came near to declaring war on Germany. Had the Germans deliberately murdered innocent passengers? If so, why?



↑ **SOURCE A** - Artist's impression of the sinking of the 'Lusitania'.

SOURCE B - J. Hamer, 'The 20th Century', 1980.

The *Lusitania's* cargo:

- 4927 boxes of cartridges addressed to the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich.
- 1248 cases of shrapnel.
- 3863 boxes of cheese and 696 tubs of butter addressed to a box number in Liverpool. The box number was that used by the Naval Experimental Establishment.

SOURCE C - C. Simpson, 'Lusitania', 1972.

'Under strict secrecy the *Lusitania* entered dry-dock at Liverpool on 12th May 1913. The shelter deck was adapted to take four 6-inch guns on either side, making a total complement of 12 guns, each firing a shell containing high explosive.'

→ **SOURCE D** - Warning from the German Embassy printed in US newspapers beside Cunard's advertisement, Saturday 1st May 1915.

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 of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY,
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1915.

BRITISH AND AMERICAN BABIES MURDERED BY THE KAISER



↑ SOURCE E - 'Daily Mail' headline and photograph, Monday 10th May 1915

ACTIVITY

1. How accurate a picture of the sinking of the *Lusitania* do you think is given in Source A?
2. The British government claimed that the *Lusitania* was an unarmed passenger liner. Sources B and C suggest that this was not true.
 - a. Is there any reason to doubt either of the sources?
 - b. If Sources B and C are correct, does this mean that the British government was lying, or could it just have been mistaken?
3. 'Source D proves that the Germans intended to sink the *Lusitania*.' Explain whether you agree or disagree with this statement.
4. Sources E and F are both from newspapers.
 - a. Which of the two accounts is likely to be more accurate?
 - b. Are newspaper accounts reliable sources of historical evidence?
5. Do Sources A to G prove that the Germans had good reason to sink the *Lusitania*? Give reasons for your answer.

SOURCE F - *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 8th May 1915.

'Every human life is, of course, valuable and its loss is deplorable. But measured by the methods introduced by our enemies, forcing us to retaliatory measures in self-defence, the death of non-combatants is a matter of no consequence.'

SOURCE G - Official note sent to Germany by the US government.

'Whatever the facts regarding the *Lusitania*, the principle fact is that a great steamer, primarily and chiefly a conveyance for passengers, and carrying a thousand souls who had no part or lot in the conduct of the war, was torpedoed and sunk without so much as a challenge or warning and that men, women and children were sent to their death in circumstances unparalleled in modern warfare.'