

Directions: *Read the article below then write a diary account as though you are a passenger on the Lusitania. Write another from the perspective of a German crewman on the attacking U-boat.*

The Lusitania

On Saturday, May 1, 1915, the British passenger liner, *Lusitania*, set sail from Pier 54 in New York, headed for Liverpool, England. On board were 702 crew members, 1,257 passengers, and the captain, William Thomas Turner. Of the passengers, 159 were Americans and 168 were infants and children.

On board the *Lusitania* was the typical cargo carried on an ocean liner. Since the *Lusitania* was the largest passenger ship in the world, it could carry a great deal. Perhaps that is why it also carried something extra: 4,200 cases of small-caliber cartridges and other munitions.

The trip across the Atlantic was uneventful, despite the fact that New York reporters had called this the “Last Voyage of the *Lusitania*.” War had begun nine months ago among Britain, Germany, and many other nations. There were rumors that the Germans, in their new submarines called U-boats (short for *Unterseeboot*), were likely to torpedo any enemy ship. This was, in fact, quite true. German officers had orders to sink all ships because any ship might be carrying supplies to Britain. Even passenger ships might hold food for the soldiers, and the Germans wished to stop any advantage. In the recent weeks, they had torpedoed hundreds of merchant ships in these waters.

On Friday, May 7, the *Lusitania* neared the Irish coast, and everyone was relieved to think they had sailed the ocean without incident. However, it was troubling to discover that the waters were empty. Irish ships were scheduled to escort the *Lusitania* into shore, but they were nowhere to be found. Instead, a torpedo came hurtling through the water, fired from below the surface by a German U-boat. It tore a hole in the *Lusitania*, causing it to list drastically. Many people were killed instantly. Others tried to board and release the lifeboats. The listing ship tipped back and forth, causing the lifeboats to crash against its sides. Hundreds of evacuees were thrown into the water. In eighteen minutes, the *Lusitania*—which was supposed to be unsinkable—had sunk. The captain stayed until the end, eventually clinging to a floating chair for safety. The survivors of the attack held pieces of wood and other buoyant objects to keep themselves afloat. Six of the original forty-eight lifeboats made it safely to the water.

In all, more than 1,200 people died. Children and infants comprised about ten percent of that number, and Americans accounted for 128 of the dead.

President Wilson made a formal protest to the German government, which issued an apology for the error. However, many Americans were outraged, as were nations around the world. The sinking of the *Lusitania* became a rallying cry for troops everywhere, and eventually it became one of the catalysts for America’s entry into the Great War.