

📄 Topic Page: [Lusitania \(Steamship\)](#)

Definition: **Lusitania** from *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase and Fable*

The Cunard liner made its last voyage on 1 May 1915, carrying 1959 passengers from Liverpool to New York, its regular run since 1907. Approaching the Irish coast the vessel was struck by two German torpedoes and sank in 18 minutes with the tragic loss of 1198 lives. Both the *Lusitania* and the Titanic became unforgettable symbols of maritime disaster.



Image from: [The New York Times reports the sinking of the... in Britain and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History](#)

Summary Article: **LUSITANIA**
from *Conspiracies and Secret Societies*

A number of historians still insist that the nearly 1,200 lives lost aboard the RMS Lusitania were sacrificed to the gods of war in an effort to embroil the United States in World War I.

The *Lusitania* was an ocean liner of the British Cunard Steamship Line that was torpedoed by a German U-boat on May 7, 1915, within sight of the southern coast of Ireland. The sinking of a passenger ship and the loss of 1,195 lives was instrumental in causing the United States to enter World War I and to declare war on Germany and its allies. For over ninety years, the question has been argued whether Winston Churchill, as Lord of the British Admiralty, manipulated events to arrange for the liner's sinking in order to create an incident that would convince the United States to participate in the conflict against Germany.

The *Lusitania* and its sister ship, the *Mauretania*, were considerably smaller and less luxurious than the *Olympic* and *Britannic* of the rival White Star Line, but they were much faster and enabled Cunard to provide a weekly transatlantic departure schedule with just two vessels. When the *Lusitania* sank, she was on her 202d crossing of the Atlantic.

Shortly after World War I began, the British established a blockade of Germany that was eventually responsible for the death by starvation, malnutrition, and disease of 750,000 Germans. Germany's only hope of destroying the blockade was to sink as many warships as possible, and the feared U-boats were very effective in striving to attain that goal. The *Lusitania*, a luxury passenger liner and cargo ship, was immune from attack, as were all passenger ships—unless they were suspected of violating the agreement that such vessels would not transport ammunition and explosives to Great Britain.

German intelligence had suspected the fast-moving ships of the Cunard Line of carrying contraband munitions, and the German embassy in the United States issued a public warning to travelers intending to embark for Great Britain that a state of war existed between Germany and its allies and Great Britain and its allies, and the “zone of war” included the waters adjacent to the British Isles. Vessels flying the British flag were “liable to destruction in those waters,” and passengers who chose to travel on the ships of Great Britain or its allies must “do so at their own risk.” It was later learned that some of the wealthiest and most influential passengers had been warned that a U-boat attack was likely against the *Lusitania*.

Captain Walther Schweiger, commander of submarine *U-20*, released one torpedo at a distance of

seven hundred yards and saw it strike the *Lusitania* and trigger a second violent explosion. Upon seeing the second explosion, Schweiger felt justified in torpedoing the passenger vessel, for it was obviously carrying munitions under assumed cargo designations. The *Lusitania* rolled over and sank in about eighteen minutes. Rescuers from Queenstown, Ireland, managed to save 734 from the cold seawater.

The Germans had guessed correctly, for the *Lusitania*, under the descriptions of bales of fur and boxes of cheese, carried in its hold millions of rounds of rifle ammunition, 1,250 cases of shrapnel shells, and forty-six tons of aluminum powder for the Woolrich Arsenal. The British and American governments accused the U-boat of having launched a second torpedo at the sinking passenger ship, but the Germans steadfastly denied doing so, claiming the munitions on board had caused the second explosion.

If Churchill had engineered the destruction of one of Britain's finest ships and of 1,195 lives (among them 128 Americans) in a sacrificial act intended to bring the United States into the war, he had succeeded, for the Yanks saw the sinking of the *Lusitania* as another barbaric attack by the "Huns."

Conspiracy theorists counter that the British Admiralty, under Churchill's direction, was well aware that the German U-boat command had issued a warning to all passenger ships that they must travel at their own risk. The Admiralty was also informed that the U-boat responsible for sinking two ships in recent days was still lurking in the waters off the southern coast of Ireland, the path the *Lusitania* was scheduled to travel. In spite of this knowledge, the Admiralty issued no special warnings to the *Lusitania*, offered no escort to port, and did not send any destroyers to search for the German submarine. It seems apparent to some researchers that there was a conspiracy to place the *Lusitania* in jeopardy in order to incite the Americans to enter the war.



The RMS Lusitania is shown here docked in New York City in 1910. Its sinking in 1915 by a German torpedo was a key event in convincing the United States to enter World War I. Some say Winston Churchill actually helped make the attack possible in order to bring America into the war.

However, U.S. isolationist policies continued to maintain their hold on Congress until February 1917, when the German admiral Alfred von Tirpitz announced that U-boats would begin attacking all shipping in the North Atlantic, regardless of national or political allegiance. On February 3 the U.S. broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. On that same day a U-boat sank the U.S. liner *Housatonic* off the coast of Sicily. On March 18, German submarines sank three U.S.-registered vessels, the *City of Memphis*, the *Vigilante*, and the *Illinois*, without giving any type of warning. On April 2 President Woodrow Wilson argued that the "world must be safe for democracy," and on April 6 Congress approved a declaration of war against Germany.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Lusitania. (2012). In B. Steiger, & S. Hansen Steiger, *Conspiracies and secret societies: the complete dossier* (2nd ed.). Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lusitania_steamship



Copyright © 2013 by Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger



Copyright © 2013 by Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger

APA

Lusitania. (2012). In B. Steiger, & S. Hansen Steiger, *Conspiracies and secret societies: the complete dossier* (2nd ed.). Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lusitania_steamship

Chicago

"Lusitania." In *Conspiracies and Secret Societies*, by Brad Steiger, and Sherry Hansen Steiger. 2nd ed. Visible Ink Press, 2012. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lusitania_steamship

Harvard

Lusitania. (2012). In B. Steiger & S. Hansen Steiger, *Conspiracies and secret societies: the complete dossier*. (2nd ed.). [Online]. Canton: Visible Ink Press. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lusitania_steamship [Accessed 24 May 2019].

MLA

"Lusitania." *Conspiracies and Secret Societies*, Brad Steiger, and Sherry Hansen Steiger, Visible Ink Press, 2nd edition, 2012. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/lusitania_steamship. Accessed 24 May 2019.