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SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter in the US in the year 1915. After reading the article on the sinking of the Lusitania, write and newspaper article on the event. Include what the Lusitania is, what happened, and what events will happen due to this event. Make your article exciting and informative so your newspaper's readers will read your story. The article needs to be at least 3 paragraphs long.

WWI MAP

(Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page)

The Sinking of the Lusitania, 1915

The *Lusitania* made her maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York in September 1907. Construction had begun in 1903 with the goal of building the fastest liner afloat. Her engines produced 68,000-horse power and pushed the giant through the water at an average speed over 25 knots. Dubbed the "Greyhound of the Seas" she soon captured the Blue Ribbon for the fastest Atlantic crossing.

The British Admiralty had secretly subsidized her construction and she was built to Admiralty specifications with the understanding that at the outbreak of war the ship would be consigned to government service. As war clouds gathered in 1913, the *Lusitania* quietly entered dry dock in Liverpool and was fitted for war service. This included the installation of ammunition magazines and gun mounts on her decks. The mounts, concealed under the teak deck, were ready for the addition of the guns when needed.

On May 1, 1915, the ship departed New York City bound for Liverpool. Unknown to her passengers but probably no secret to the Germans, almost all her hidden cargo consisted of munitions and contraband destined for the British war effort. As the fastest ship afloat, the luxurious liner felt secure in the belief she could easily outdistance any submarine. Nonetheless, the menace of submarine attack reduced her passenger list to only half her capacity.

On May 7, the ship neared the coast of Ireland. At 2:10 in the afternoon a torpedo fired by the German submarine U 20 slammed into her side. A mysterious second explosion ripped the liner apart. Chaos reigned. The ship listed so badly and quickly that lifeboats crashed into passengers crowded on deck, or dumped their loads into the water. Most passengers never had a chance. Within 18 minutes the giant ship slipped beneath the sea. One thousand one hundred nineteen of the 1,924 aboard died. The dead included 114 Americans.

Walter Schwieger was captain of the U-Boat that sank the *Lusitania*. He watched through his periscope as the torpedo exploded and noted the result in his log, "The ship stops immediately and heels over to starboard quickly, immersing simultaneously at the bow. It appears as if the ship were going to capsize very shortly. Great confusion is rife on board; the boats are made ready and some of them lowered into the water. In connection therewith great panic must have reigned; some boats, full to capacity are rushed from above, touch the water with either stem or stern first and founder immediately."

In the ship's nursery Alfred Vanderbilt, one of the world's richest men, and playwright Carl Frohman tied life jackets to wicker "Moses baskets" holding infants in an attempt to save them from going down with the ship. The rising water carried the baskets off the ship but none survived the turbulence created as the ship sank to the bottom. The sea also claimed Vanderbilt and Frohman.

The sinking enraged American public opinion. The political fallout was immediate. President Wilson protested strongly to the Germans. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, a pacifist, resigned. In September, the Germans announced that passenger ships would be sunk only with prior warning and appropriate safeguards for passengers. However, the seeds of American animosity towards Germany were sown. Within two years America declared war.

References:

Simpson, Colin, *The Lusitania* (1972); Hickey, Des & Smith, Gus, *Seven Days to Disaster* (1982).