

**The American Press and the Sinking of the Lusitania**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Lusitania

Timothy Joseph McDonough, Master of Arts, 1986

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**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of the study was to analyze to what degree the sinking of the R.M.S. Lusitania swayed editorial opinion against Germany in seven representative United States newspapers.

**Procedures:** Seven newspapers were chosen for this study, based on their geographic location and political prominence: the New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Examiner, Washington Post, Kansas City Star, and the Milwaukee Journal. The historical record of U.S. foreign policy prior to World War I, and the political viewpoint of each newspaper was reviewed by way of introduction. The papers were examined for news and editorial content. Items studied included: the first seven pages of each newspaper, the unsigned editorials expressing the view of the editorial staff, and letters to the editor that dealt with the sinking. Each paper was studied six months prior to the sinking, during the crisis (including the exchange of diplomatic notes between the United States and Germany), and six months after the answer to Wilson's final Lusitania note.

**Conclusion:** The study found that the sinking of the Lusitania did not sway editorial opinion against Germany in

the selected newspapers.

To my Father, my Mother,  
and to Max  
an old friend who missed my last all-nighter ...

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study of the American press and the sinking of the Lusitania represents a group effort as much as the work of any one researcher. I owe special thanks to Maurine Beasley for her patient help and guidance. There were times when it seemed we would both "go down with the ship," but her constructive criticism kept the project afloat. Special mention must also go to Carl Stepp and Ben Holman, whose probing questions helped to strengthen and focus my research.

I don't want this to get out of hand, but I must mention the faculty and staff of the College of Journalism- particularly Katie Theus and Reese Cleghorn. Since 1983 the College has been my second home, a steadfast source of guidance and encouragement. To be recognized and awarded a masters degree from such fine people has made the effort well worthwhile.

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strange boarder into their home who used colorful computer language. To my brother Jim, for his sense of humor and last minute publishing help (Go Navy!). Jack, Jane, Debbie - and even "the kids" - all helped me keep my final goal in perspective.

A project like this really lets you know who your friends are - and I have the best. These brave souls stood by me as I descended into "the bunker" - incommunicado - for ten weeks. Special thanks to: Mike Cartier, my agent and publisher, Pat Shannon, my legal counsel, and to Kevin Power, for winter baseball talk and biblical references.

Last, but not least, I must thank the staff at The Library of Congress, McKeldin Library, Hornbake Library, and Lauinger Library at Georgetown University. Superior resources make a superior product.

Now I know why Academy Award winners give such long speeches. This project is over, but the learning continues. I owe a debt to my Father, who pushed me forward when I thought I hadn't the strength. I will always tag along in his enormous footsteps.

T.J. McD.  
Rockville, Maryland  
December, 1986

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## CHAPTER ONE: THE LOSS OF AN ATLANTIC GREYHOUND

### The Lusitania: Queen of the Atlantic Run

The sealanes of the North Atlantic are the most dangerous and heavily traveled in the world. First used by the Vikings, methods of navigating the routes between Europe and North America had changed little by the turn of the 20th Century.

The maritime hazards of the North Atlantic are legend. The spring thaw brings icebergs broken from northern glaciers. One such iceberg in 1912 claimed the Titanic on its maiden voyage. The summer and early fall bring the hurricanes spawned in the Caribbean. The winter, as mentioned, brings seas as tall as buildings. And all year long the fog lays in thick blankets, especially off the Grand Banks.

The North Atlantic route has been used since the days of the 13 British colonies in North America, but the first technological boost came in 1820, when the Savannah became the first steamship to make the crossing. Advances followed, but it was the industrialization of the late 19th Century that brought on the steamship boom. The timely exchange of industrial raw materials between countries became vital. And with the growing world economy came people traveling to oversee their business interests abroad. The immigrants too



were a large group, always seeking safer and cheaper passage from the old world to the new.

Like the race for the moon in the 1960's, the quest for speed in the North Atlantic became a matter of national pride. Germany, England, France, and to a lesser extent - the United States - all sought a share in the passenger trade. And like the race for the moon, the quest for larger and faster passenger steamers increased technology by leaps and bounds.

Though Britannia had always ruled the waves, the market leader at the turn of the century was Germany. Germany was building ships so large and so fast that, for awhile, German shipping lines were competing only with themselves. Until the turn-of-the-century German liners such as the Kaiser Wilhelm II and Deutschland, it was traditional to have passenger accommodations as rough as the voyage itself. The Germans were the first to sumptuously decorate their ships, taking as their inspiration "castles on the Rhine."<sup>1</sup> Speed and luxury were now taken together, and it was the German ships that gained praise as well as the coveted Blue Riband award for Atlantic speed.

But for all the technology, size, and speed, sailing the North Atlantic had changed little since the days of canvas. Compass, charts, and sextants were still the

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<sup>1</sup>. John M Brinnin, The Sway of the Grand Saloon: A Social History of the North Atlantic, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), p. 338.

captain's only tools - the Marconi wireless radio was added during the late 1890's. In the days without radar, sonar, or satellite communications and tracking, captains were sailing these ocean behemoths by the seat of their pants. That is probably why the Titanic disaster is so firmly ingrained in the public mind. It exemplified Nature still claiming dominion over wealth and technology.

The 1912 loss of the Titanic would forever change North Atlantic passenger service, but the circumstances remain incredible to this day. As if driving on a night highway without headlights, the White Star liner was traveling at 22.5 knots (a knot equals 1.15 land miles per hour), at night, through an area filled with icebergs. Though repeatedly warned by wireless of icebergs in the area - some of them hundreds of feet high - Captain E.J. Smith was determined to have an Atlantic speed record on the liner's maiden voyage. When lookouts spotted the fateful iceberg, the captain discovered too late how difficult it was to stop, or maneuver, a 882-foot - 46,000-ton ship. Though it might have withstood a head-on impact, the glancing blow of the iceberg sliced and buckled a 100 yard gash below the waterline along the starboard side (starboard=right, port=left). Doomed, the Titanic disappeared beneath the surface some three hours later, with the loss of 1,513 lives. The "unsinkable" ship had become "the most imposing mausoleum that ever housed the bones of



men since the Pyramids rose from the desert sands."<sup>2</sup> The board of inquiry later exonerated the captain - who went down with his ship.

The Titanic disaster pointed up several safety flaws, corrected on all later passenger liners. Double hulls, adequate control of watertight compartments, improved bulkhead (wall) construction, and adequate lifeboats and safety equipment were all mandated after the disaster.

But such safety features were already a part of the Cunard Company's entry in the North Atlantic races - the 785-foot, 30,396-ton Lusitania.<sup>3</sup> Completed in 1907, with her sister ship, the Mauretania, the Lusitania was designed to wrest the Blue Riband from the Germans and set new standards of ocean-going luxury. Though destiny would part the two sisters, known affectionately as "Lucy" and "Mary," the Mauretania remained in service until retiring in late 1934 - after holding the Atlantic speed record for 20 straight years.<sup>4</sup>

The Lusitania was launched first, and epitomized the Cunard Company motto of "Speed, Comfort, and Safety." She was built for Cunard by John Brown and Company of Clydebank, Scotland. Five years before the loss of the Titanic, the

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2. Ibid., p. 367.

3. See Appendix, p. 217.

4. John Maxtone-Graham, The Only Way to Cross, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 43.

Lusitania had a unique double-hull construction. The space between the hulls was made up of watertight, longitudinal bunkers used for coal storage - an effective collision barrier. The ship itself was divided by eleven, transverse watertight bulkheads - designed not to "spill over" one into another should the ship take on water.<sup>5</sup> Extra lifeboats, life rafts, and safety equipment were added after the Titanic disaster. Despite all these safety features, however, Cunard never claimed the Lusitania was "unsinkable."

Her speed was due to steam-powered, low-turbine engines - never before used on a ship of that size. Twenty-five coal-fired boilers powered the turbines, which drove four propellers (or "screws") at up to 20,000 horsepower each. John Brinnin captured in words the engineering breakthrough:

The Lusitania was the first of the great sister ships to be launched, and thus the first to demonstrate that the still-new turbine engine could make a racer out of a marine mastodon. With full steam up, the Lusitania's 3,000,000 individual turbine blades generated a force of 70,000 horsepower. On her trial runs, in spite of the fact that her bottom was heavily coated with the chemically-saturated, mud of the river Clyde' [where she was launched], she reached a speed of 25 knots. She was also the first great ship to employ electricity to operate her steering apparatus, to close and open her 175 watertight compartments, to detect fire, and to control her lifeboat davits.

To see that she was prepared to sail from

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<sup>5</sup>. Colin Simpson, The Lusitania, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), p. 19.



Liverpool, 22 trains, hauling 300 tons of coal each, had to chug into port and empty their loads into her bunkers. Her waterworks could have served to supply the needs of a city as big as London: just to cool the spent steam from her engines, 65,000 gallons of sea water per minute were driven through her stills. From stem to stern, her form ran in one continuous curve. Her fine bow, her long forecastle that extended far back into the superstructure, her graceful stern and the heavy rake of her four huge funnels made her the apotheosis of speed, might, and sea-going efficiency.<sup>6</sup>

The Lusitania was named for an ancient Roman province that is now Spain and Portugal, and her size rivaled any monument in Rome. Though almost 100 feet shorter than the Titanic, the Lusitania was taller on a more narrow beam (width of 88 feet) - thus giving the illusion of a much larger ship. Still, at 785-feet long, and 216-feet high, she was taller and longer than the Capitol Building in Washington.<sup>7</sup> The ship rose a total of nine decks - her bridge was as high as a six-story building. Her height, narrow width, and rakish tilt of the four funnels earned her the nickname "the Greyhound of the Seas."

The ship's luxurious appointments matched her size and speed. Designed to be as tasteful as an English manor house, Cunard hoped the Lusitania would make her German rivals appear ostentatious:

Her decorative and architectural features compared with those of the world's finest hotels - lofty domes, fashioned and painted by expert

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<sup>6</sup>. Brinnin, Sway of the Grand Saloon, p. 342.

<sup>7</sup>. Simpson, The Lusitania, p. 23.

decorators, panels prepared by skilled workers, handsome tapestries, curtains and carpets. The First Class Dining Saloon was a vision in white and gold. The style was Louis Seize, and the predominating color was vieux rose. The magnificent mahogany sideboard, with its gilt metal ornaments, was the admiration of all who saw it, while high above towered the wonderful dome with painted panels after Boucher. The Lounge was decorated in late Georgian period, and the fine inlaid mahogany panels, richly modeled dome ceiling and marble mantelpieces constituted a luxurious ensemble. Harmony and refinement was the motif of the Writing Room, Library and Smoke Room. In addition to these various Public Rooms, there were Regal Suites, comprising Dining Room, Drawing Room, two Bedrooms, Bath and Toilet Rooms, with adjoining rooms for maid or valet. The accommodation for Second Class passengers was also upon a luxurious scale, and the Public Rooms included Dining Room, Smoking Room Library and Lounge. Ample provision had also been made for those travelling Third Class.<sup>8</sup>

The Lusitania was a floating hotel with accommodation for 2,300 passengers and a staff of 900.

On her second westbound voyage in 1907, the Lusitania captured the Blue Riband of the Atlantic with an average speed of 23.10 knots. This speed exceeded the prior records of the German liners Kronprinz Wilhelm, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and Kronprinzessin Cecilia. Later that same year, the Mauretania captured the record with an average speed of 23.69 knots. In 1908, "Mary" broke her own record, while that same year, "Lucy" took it back with a record speed of 25.01 knots - an incredible average speed for the North Atlantic at that time. The Mauretania, slightly longer and

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<sup>8</sup>. Ibid., p. 7.



heavier, was generally the faster of the two sisters, however.<sup>9</sup>

Yet this speed had another purpose besides convenient travel, for both the Lusitania and Mauretania were designed as British warships. This was the result of a deal between Cunard and the British Admiralty. The English were concerned about the German dominance of Atlantic passenger service--Cunard needed faster, more luxurious ships, but lacked the capital to build them. The Admiralty was worried that the large and speedy liners of her German rivals might be converted into armed wartime commerce raiders (the Germans had such plans).

The deal struck between the Admiralty and Cunard resulted in the Cunard Agreement of 1903 - which was debated and approved by Parliament. Under the agreement, the government would lend Cunard 2,600,000 pounds at 2.75 percent interest for the construction of the Lusitania and Mauretania (the going interest rate at that time was five percent). The life of the loan was 20 years, one-twentieth to be repaid annually, beginning with each ship's maiden voyage. The British government would also annually pay Cunard 150,000 pounds to maintain both liners in war readiness, and 68,000 pounds to carry British mail (hence

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<sup>9</sup>. Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy, (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 9.

the designation R.M.S - "Royal Mail Ship").<sup>10</sup>

In return for the money, both ships could be taken over by the Admiralty at its discretion. All the ships' officers, and half their crews, were required to belong to the Royal Navy Reserve or Royal Naval Fleet Reserve. Under the agreement, Cunard would have to pay monetary penalties if it failed to live up to these requirements. The agreement also provided a formula for the Admiralty to commandeer other Cunard vessels during wartime. Cunard would get the desired oceangoing speed of 24-25 knots, but the Admiralty would design the ships:

Especially significant were the published Admiralty specifications for arming both the Lusitania and Mauretania. Both were to be so constructed, with such arrangements for 'pillars and supports,' as would permit the strategic emplacement in wartime of twelve 6-inch quick-firing guns, 'within the shelter of heavy shell plating,' that is, small gun shields. This was powerful armament, comparable to that of 'armoured cruisers of the County Class,' thus making the two Cunarders 'effective additions to any fighting squadron.'

Additionally the engine rooms and boiler rooms of both vessels were placed as far as feasible below the water line for protection against enemy gunfire, as were the rudder and steering gear. The coal bunkers were likewise located deep on the sides, thus serving as a shield for the vital parts. Clearly the two Cunarders were designed for conventional surface warfare against armed merchant ships, not for action against submarines. The Admiralty decision to provide the ships with the necessary 'pillars and supports' for twelve 6-inch guns was a lingering manifestation of 19th Century naval strategy, which had attached considerable

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<sup>10</sup>. Ibid., p. 5.



value to the merchant-raider.<sup>11</sup>

Both the Lusitania and Mauretania were of dubious value as British warships. Though their guns would be armored, if installed, their hulls were not - the steel skin was no more than an inch thick, and in some places even less. Even a lightly armored ship would be more than a match for each liner. Six-inch guns were large and formidable if slugging it out with another warship, but smaller 4-inch guns fired faster, and were better suited for U-boats-smaller, more elusive targets. As events of the war itself dictated, British commerce raiders were of little use since most German liners and merchant ships were blockaded in neutral ports by the British Navy. The Mauretania was one of nine British passenger liners called to duty by the Admiralty. The Lusitania, though initially included on the list, remained in commercial service. The other liners, including her sister, were armed for military transport soon after England entered World War I. However, two scholars, Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, point out:

At the time the Lusitania met her doom in 1915, she was in commercial service, although subject to the operational control of the Admiralty, which could arbitrarily change her routing at any time. Moreover, the London government was not only subsidizing the company for her maintenance and mail service but owned more than half the vessel. There were still about twelve more years to run on the twenty-year loan. Along with other British liners of 18 knots and over, a silhouette of the Lusitania

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

appeared in Jane's Fighting Ships for 1914 for identification purposes. Brassey's The Naval Annual, 1914, categorized both the Lusitania and the Mauretania as 'Royal Naval Reserved Merchant Cruisers,' which meant that they were subject to call-up at the pleasure of the Admiralty in wartime, as were numerous other fast merchant ships<sup>12</sup> [every German U-boat carried these annuals on board].

### The Lusitania: Final Voyage

May 1, 1915, dawned with gray rainy skies - the war in Europe was almost ten months old. The Lusitania sat quietly at Pier 54 while the bustle of embarkation occurred all around her. The light rain seemed to make her more brilliant against the gray sky - highlighting the glistening black hull, gleaming white superstructure, and tall black funnels (the normal scarlet and black of Cunard covered over for wartime). Her length stretched beyond the pier, and the stern jutted into the Hudson River. There was more activity than usual on Pier 54 that morning - including the hustle of reporters and newsreel photographers - because a warning had been published in several New York papers:

#### 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

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<sup>12</sup>. Ibid., p. 6.



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.<sup>13</sup>

The notice had been prepared by Count Johann Bernstorff, Germany's ambassador in Washington. It was an attempt to appeal to the American people over the heads of the Wilson Administration. The administration was allowing Americans to travel on British vessels, even though those vessels often carried ammunition, cannons and rifles, or Canadian reservists headed for England. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan sought to persuade Wilson to warn Americans away from such ships, but Wilson and his other advisors favored the British in the war, and felt Americans could travel as they pleased. Bernstorff had planned to publish the warning in selected east coast newspapers by April 24, and on two subsequent Saturdays. But production delays caused the warning to first appear on May 1.<sup>14</sup>

The Lusitania was not the only passenger liner to depart for England that day. The American Line's New York was scheduled to leave at noon - counting among her passengers actress Isadora Duncan. But the Lusitania was larger and faster, and would save passengers two days sailing time. Besides, President Woodrow Wilson had warned

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<sup>13</sup>. Donald B. Chidsey, The Day They Sank the Lusitania, (New York: Award Books, 1967), pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup>. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, pp. 74-76.

Germany would be held to a "strict accountability" for the loss of American ships and lives to the U-boat campaign. Thus the 197 Americans embarking on the Lusitania that morning were confident their government protected them. The New York was slower and dowdier, the Lusitania was for 1915's "in" crowd.

The German warning caused some passengers, however, to cancel their bookings on the Lusitania, transferring to the New York or waiting for a later trip. Many passengers-especially the prominent - received anonymous telegrams warning them not to sail on the doomed liner - some of these telegrams were signed "Morte," Latin for death. Still, 1,257 passengers climbed the Lusitania's gangway. Prominent Americans included millionaire playboy Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, Broadway producer Charles Frohman, and the country philosopher and author from East Aurora, New York, Elbert Hubbard - author of the inspirational "A Message to Garcia," which sold 40 million copies. The most notable Britons aboard were Welsh industrialist D.A. Thomas and his suffragette daughter Margaret - Lady Mackworth. Cunard had recently dropped its trans-Atlantic fares, so more middle-class passengers were aboard than usual.

But the German warning, seemingly directed specifically at the Lusitania, brought out reporters and curious onlookers. One newsreel photographer joked, "We'll title this 'The Last Voyage of the Lusitania!'" Another

photographer remarked to Charles Frohman, "Well if anything happens, at least we have your picture." A Cunard spokesman on the pier told reporters, "There's no risk to anyone, I can assure you, gentlemen. Everybody's safe on this crossing." Junior Third Officer Albert Bestic told a worried passenger, "I believe it's bluff. There's no submarine that can catch the Lusitania."<sup>15</sup>

But what many passengers did not know was that the "Greyhound of the Seas" would be sailing at reduced speed. As an economy measure, Cunard shut down six of the Lusitania's 25 boilers (or Boiler Room Number 4).<sup>16</sup> This reduced the ship's maximum speed from 25 to 21 knots. Since surfaced U-boats traveled at a maximum of 15 knots, and submerged at 9 knots, Cunard felt the margin of safety more than enough.

Captain William Turner accepted this loss of speed, but he was not particularly pleased about it. He was also annoyed by the German warning and the nosy reporters that accompanied it. Turner was a gruff and crusty veteran of the days of sail, and was usually annoyed with everything unless he was on his bridge - in command, and at sea. He received no special sailing orders from Cunard on the day of the ship's departure.

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<sup>15</sup>. Des Hickey and Gus Smith, Seven Days to Disaster: The Sinking of the Lusitania, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid., p. 57.



Turner was especially angry at the two and half hour delay of his ship's launching time. At the last minute, some forty passengers were transferred to the Lusitania from the British Anchor Line steamer Cameronia. That morning, the Cameronia had been commandeered by the Admiralty for wartime service. Historians like to point out that had it not been for this two-hour delay, the Lusitania would have missed its fateful rendezvous with the U-20.<sup>17</sup>

At 12:30 P.M., May 1, 1915, the Lusitania cast off her mooring lines in New York for the last time. Tugboats gently nosed the liner's bow into the midstream of the Hudson, beginning what was to be the ship's 202nd Atlantic crossing. Carrying the largest passenger list since the war's outbreak - 1,257 passengers (including those from the Cameronia), and 702 crew members - it was still almost 1,000 spaces short of capacity.

The day before the Lusitania's New York departure, the U-20, commanded by Kapitänleutnant Walther Schwieger, sailed from the German naval base of Emden - on the North Sea. The U-20 was ordered to travel around northern Scotland and western Ireland into the Irish Sea. The U-boat's destination was the busy waters off the Mersey River bar leading to Liverpool - a total round trip of some 3,000 miles.<sup>18</sup>

The 30 year old Schwieger came from an old Berlin

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17. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 91.

18. See Appendix, p. 218.

family, and was well liked by his crew. He kept three pet dachshunds on board the U-20 as mascots. Schwieger was a veteran of several patrols, and carried out his orders to the letter. Though not the most humane U-boat commander, Schwieger was not the most ruthless either. He was never accused of such atrocities as machine-gunning lifeboats. In February, 1915, however, Schwieger and the U-20 attacked a British hospital ship - thinking it a British merchant ship. The mistake was realized, and luckily the torpedo missed its mark. On this May 1915 cruise, Schwieger was ordered to sink, with or without warning, all enemy ships and those disguised as neutral vessels. Schwieger was inclined to shoot first and ask questions later.

A successful U-boat attack often involved as much luck as skill. Due to mechanical problems, the failure rate for 1915 German torpedoes was 60 percent.<sup>19</sup> Launching torpedoes in rough weather was impossible, and the periscopes used to aim them would often jam, fog up, or allow only obscured vision due to passing surface waves. U-boats were extremely slow under water, and on the surface they risked attack (the British government had ordered its merchant ships to resist by gunfire or ramming). Since a U-boat commander had to "lead" his target to fire a torpedo (aim ahead of it), a zigzagging merchant ship greatly reduced the chance for a successful attack - the slow-moving U-boat could not

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<sup>19</sup>. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 115.



maneuver fast enough for a moving target. Despite such odds, Schwieger was considered a successful U-boat "ace," and when he was killed in his submarine in 1917, ranked seventh on a list of U-boat commanders who had sunk tons of Allied shipping. He personally was credited with sinking over 100,000 tons.<sup>20</sup>

As Schwieger and the U-20 began the hazardous journey through the British Navy toward the south coast of Ireland, the Lusitania was making good time in fine weather. A lifeboat muster was held daily at either Number 13 on the starboard side, or lifeboat Number 14 on the port side—depending on the wind. In either case, the ship's whistle would blow and eight crewmen and an officer would appear on deck. To the amusement of watching passengers, the eight men would get into the lifeboat, tie on life jackets, pick up their oars, and then get out again. The boats were never swung out over the rail, nor were they lowered to the water. There is evidence that though required to lower the boats the day before departure in New York harbor, this was not done because coal ships were along side.<sup>21</sup> Many passengers felt these daily drills were not enough, and that the crew that took part looked unprofessional.

The passengers were not the only ones who noticed the

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<sup>20</sup>. Edwyn Gray, The Killing Time: The U-Boat War, 1914-18, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 268.

<sup>21</sup>. Simpson, The Lusitania, pp. 102-103.



crew of the Lusitania. Captain Turner too did not like what he saw. But a war was raging in Europe, and Britain needed almost every able-bodied seaman it could get. Turner had to be satisfied with a few regulars and many with little sailing experience. Some of the coal stokers and stewards had never been on a ship before. They had signed up in New York to work their way across the Atlantic. The Lusitania was almost 200 crew members short of her peacetime complement of 900, but her passenger list on this trip was smaller than usual.

Turner also resented the group of wealthy gentlemen from first class who requested he improve the boat drills. If Cunard found it satisfactory, so did he. Neither Cunard, nor the set-in-his-old-salt ways Turner were prepared for wartime passenger travel. Turner told the men he would speak to the First Officer about their requests, but the drill remained the same. Crew members had lifeboat assignments, but passengers did not. There were no public demonstrations on how to put on a life jacket, and there were no smaller life vests for the children. Turner, with no stomach for the public relations aspects of his job, considered his wealthy passengers "bloody monkeys."<sup>22</sup>

Turner did order all 22 lifeboats uncovered and swung out over the rails during the early morning hours of May 6, as the ship approached the Irish coast. At night, passengers

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<sup>22</sup>. Hickey and Smith, Seven Days to Disaster, p. 47.

on board were ordered to extinguish all unnecessary lights, and a partial blackout was observed.

All British merchant captains were issued wartime sailing instructions on February 10, 1915, and again on April 16. They included:

1. Preserve wireless silence within 100 miles of land, except in grave emergencies.
2. Keep extra sharp lookouts.
3. Maintain boats ready and provisioned.
4. Keep on move outside ports like Liverpool.
5. Avoid headlands [prominent landmarks], near which submarines routinely lurked and found their best hunting.
6. Steer a midchannel course [in the Irish Channel].
7. Operate at 'full speed' off harbors, such as Queenstown.
8. Steer a zigzag course.<sup>23</sup>

The way Captain Turner would interpret these instructions would play a critical role in the events of May 7. Though instructed, Turner was an old dog who refused to learn new tricks. He had been at sea all his life, and the Admiralty bureaucrats in London were not going to question his knowledge or his sense of safety.

Meanwhile, Captain Schwieger was disappointed with his hunting off the Irish coast. After maneuvering through the minefields north of Scotland, and eluding destroyers off the north coast of Ireland, he had rounded the southern tip of the Emerald Isle with an air of expectation. But the U-20 failed in its attacks on three steamers, bearing neutral markings, but suspected to be disguised British merchantmen.

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23. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, pp. 141-142.



In all three cases Schwieger fired his torpedoes without warning, or without a close inspection to determine nationality. Six days out of Emden, the only kill he logged was the 132-ton British schooner Earl of Lathom. Schwieger had surfaced, ordered the five-man crew of the small sailing ship to evacuate, and sank her with twelve shots from the U-20's deck gun. Schwieger sank the Earl of Lathom ten miles south of the Old Head of Kinsale, a large hill topped with a 200-foot black and white striped lighthouse - a prominent landmark for navigation.

The hunting picked up on May 6, when Schwieger sank two sister ships from the same British shipping line. Some 13 miles south of the Coningbeg Lightship, an area east of the Old Head of Kinsale, the U-20 encountered the 5,858-ton Candidate in the fog. Schwieger approached on the surface, firing his deck gun without warning. Once the crew made for the lifeboats, a torpedo caused the ship to sink by the stern. Later that afternoon Schwieger sunk the 5,945-ton Centurion, the Candidate's sister ship in the British Harrison Line. Seventeen miles south of the lightship, Schwieger again attacked without warning - sinking the Centurion with two torpedoes while the crew escaped in lifeboats. The U-20 was operating in an area just ahead of the east-bound Lusitania.

The British Admiralty was aware of this submarine activity off the south coast of Ireland. Wireless warnings

were sent, addressed to "all British ships," though much of the information applied only to ships heading for Ireland's south coast - particularly the Lusitania. Between the evening of May 6, and the morning of May 7, the Lusitania received and acknowledged a total of ten wireless submarine warnings from the Admiralty. Though phrased in general terms to avoid aiding the Germans, the Admiralty warnings were clearly directed at the course the Lusitania would take around Ireland to Liverpool.<sup>24</sup> The first message read "Submarines active off the south coast of Ireland."<sup>25</sup> Another warned of U-boats operating off Fastnet Rock, the first landmark the Lusitania would encounter. Another message warned of submarine activity off Coningbeg Lightship, though it did not mention that the Candidate and Centurion had been sunk. Of the ten messages, one was repeated six times. It included: "Take Liverpool pilot at bar. Avoid headlands; pass harbours at full speed; steer mid-channel course."<sup>26</sup>

Many historians have argued that the warnings that Turner received were ambiguous and confusing, but it seems clear that repeated warnings should dictate extra vigilance on the part of any sea captain - unfortunately for his ship,

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24. See Appendix, p. 219.

25. Simpson, The Lusitania, p. 144.

26. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 135.



Turner did not heed them. A veteran peacetime merchant captain, Turner was skeptical of Admiralty instructions for wartime - after all, the German U-boat blockade had only been announced three months earlier - on February 4, 1915. Though skeptical, Turner did follow the first four instructions mentioned earlier.

The Lusitania did maintain wireless silence. No messages were broadcast, and the Admiralty warnings were acknowledged in code. Turner doubled his lookouts from four to eight - particularly in the area of the bow. Though there was some later questions about the provisioning of the lifeboats, Turner had ordered them uncovered and swung out on their davits as he neared Ireland. Finally, Turner had no plans to dawdle outside Liverpool. The shallows - "bar" - at the entrance to the Mersey River could only be crossed at high tide - around dawn on May 8. To miss the tide meant circling until the next tide - making the ship a perfect target. Turner was planning to enter the Mersey at dawn, without stopping for a harbor pilot, and thus save time.

But these first four instructions did not challenge Turner's seafaring experience - the way North Atlantic passenger liners had always traveled before. The others did; Turner ignored them, and it cost him his ship. As ships had done since the days of sail, the Lusitania was cruising within sight of the major headlands on the southern Irish coast - Brow Head, Galley Head, and the Old Head of Kinsale.

Mariners had always hugged the coast to guide their navigation; when torpedoed, the Lusitania had just completed a four-point bearing on the Old Head of Kinsale - requiring it to cruise a straight course toward the landmark for about forty minutes. Neglecting the headland instruction, Turner also failed to keep a midchannel course. Though authors have argued there is no "channel" off that part of Ireland, maps and most naval historians say that there is - at that point 140-miles separate Kinsale and the southern tip of England. Traditionally, ships had sailed only two miles from the Old Head of Kinsale. At the inquiry following the sinking, Turner said he thought his distance of twelve miles was sufficient, whereas midchannel actually meant some 60 miles off the Irish coast. Turner also did not pass Queenstown harbor at full-speed. Instead he slowed his ocean greyhound to 18 knots - in U-boat active waters - to make the high tide on the Mersey exactly at dawn. Finally, Turner failed to zigzag - the Lusitania sailed a straight course when she was torpedoed. Turner said at the inquiry he thought he was supposed to zigzag only after a U-boat was sighted.

The passengers on board the Lusitania were not aware of their captain's neglect. May 7, was bright, warm, and sunny after an early morning fog. Passengers strolled the promenade deck and opened their portholes. Lunch was ready in all the dining saloons. The portholes, though ordered closed by Turner, were opened by passengers and stewards to



allow in the fresh spring breeze. There were some 500 of these 18-inch portholes on each side of the ship - most were open. It has been estimated that in four minutes, 24 such open ports would allow 360 tons of water to enter a sinking ship.<sup>27</sup>

Schwieger and the U-20 had meanwhile decided to call it quits. With only three torpedoes, and two-fifths of his diesel fuel left, he decided to start the long voyage back around the west coast of Ireland to Germany. May 7 was a fine day, so he decided to cruise on the surface. Schwieger's log is as graphic as it is succinct (the German time of the log is one hour later than the British time in the area):

2:20 P.M. Directly in front of us I sighted four funnels and the masts of a passenger steamer at right angles to our course coming from the SW and going towards Galley Head ... [the U-20 submerges].

2:25 P.M. Have advanced eleven meters towards the steamer in hope it will change its course along the Irish coast.

2:35 P.M. Steamer turns [starboard, after completing the four point bearing off the Old Head], takes direction to Queenstown, and thereby makes it possible for us to approach for a shot. We proceed at high speed in order to reach correct firing position.

3:10 P.M. Torpedo shot at distance of 700 meters, going three meters below the surface.<sup>28</sup>

At lookout on the Lusitania's starboard bow was 18-year-old Leslie Morton, who signed on in New York with his

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27. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 302.

28. Edwyn Gray, The Killing Time, pp. 13-17.

brother for their first Atlantic crossing on the Lusitania. Morton spotted the torpedo, yelled to the bridge, and ran below to wake up his sleeping brother. He was not heard on the bridge, however. If he had been, the Lusitania - agile for her size - could have turned hard to starboard and averted disaster. The second shouted warning from a lookout - "Here's a torpedo!" - came too late.<sup>29</sup> American businessman James Brooks saw the approaching torpedo from the promenade deck:

I had just finished a run on deck, when I glanced out over the water. It was perfectly smooth. My eyes alighted on a white streak making its way with lightning-like rapidity towards the ship. I was so high in that position above the surface of the water that I could make out the outline of a torpedo. It appeared to be about twelve feet long, and came along possibly three feet below the surface, its sides white with bubbles of foam. I watched its passage, fascinated, until it passed out of sight behind the bridge, and in another moment came the explosion. The ship, recoiling under the force of the blow, was jarred and lifted, as if it had struck an immovable object. A column of water shot up to the bridge deck, carrying with it a lot of debris, and, despite the fact that I must have been twenty yards from the spot at which the torpedo struck, I was knocked off my feet. Before I could recover myself, the iron forepart of the ship was enveloped in a blinding cloud of steam, due, not, I think, to the explosion of a second torpedo ...<sup>30</sup>

Looking through his periscope, Schwieger saw his normally unreliable torpedo strike home just below the Lusitania's bridge:

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<sup>29</sup>. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, pp. 148-149.

<sup>30</sup>. Brinnin, Sway of the Grand Saloon, p. 416.



An unusually heavy explosion takes place with a very strong explosion cloud (cloud reaches far beyond front funnel). The explosion of the torpedo must have been followed by a second one (boiler or coal or powder?). The superstructure right above the point of impact and the bridge are torn asunder, fire breaks out, and smoke envelops the high bridge. The ship stops immediately and heels over to starboard very quickly, immersing simultaneously at the bow. It appears as if the ship were going to capsize very shortly. Great confusion ensues on board; the boats are made clear and some of them are lowered to the water. In doing so great confusion must have reigned; some boats, full to capacity, are lowered, rushed from above, touch the water with either stem or stern first and founder immediately. On the port side fewer boats are made clear than on the starboard side on account of the ship's list. The ship blows off [steam]; on the bow the name 'Lusitania' becomes visible in golden letters. The funnels were painted black, no flag was set astern. Ship was running twenty knots [actually 18]. Since it seems as if the steamer will keep above water only a short time, we dived to a depth of twenty-four meters and ran out to sea. It would have been impossible for me, anyhow, to fire a second torpedo into this crowd of people struggling to save their lives.<sup>31</sup>

"COME AT ONCE. STRONG LIST. POSITION 10 MILES SOUTH KINSALE," was the frantic SOS sent over and over from the Lusitania's radio shack. In less than ten minutes, Turner knew his ship was doomed. The electricity was knocked out with the first explosion - the ship's steering, watertight doors, and fire detection equipment were unusable. Water was streaming through the open portholes. Turner had immediately ordered "Hard-a-port!" when the torpedo was spotted, but now the Lusitania was locked into that steering position. Like a

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31. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 150.

wounded animal, the Lusitania traced a helpless arc to port - at first facing the Irish coast, then slowly turning away from it. All the while the bow disappeared before her captain's eyes. The ship was still moving at 18 knots initially, slowing in her semicircle to eventually allow the boats to be launched without being swept under by the wake. The ship was sinking so fast, panic erupted on deck - it became "every man for himself." Many were killed in the mad rush for the few lifeboats that could be launched from the starboard side.

The water ten miles off the Old Head of Kinsale is 315 feet deep, the sinking Lusitania - 785 feet long - soon struck the bottom. As her bow hit the ocean floor her stern section rose almost vertically in the sky. Those in the water could see the propellers still spinning in the afternoon sun. With "a long, low moan," the Lusitania disappeared from sight - eighteen minutes after being hit by one torpedo. Of the 1,959 passengers and crew aboard, 1,198 died. Of the 197 Americans on board, 128 died. One horrifying statistic points out that 35 of the 39 infants on board were killed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>. Ibid., p. 193.



## CHAPTER TWO: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Purpose and Method

Scholars whose research has focused on the Lusitania and American public opinion have said that though the sinking caused a wave of indignation in the United States, it did not result in a clamor for war against Germany. It was only one link in a chain of events leading to U.S. belligerency in World War I. This study will test this view in a way never done before, with an examination of seven representative newspapers of 1915. Specifically, this study will analyze to what degree the sinking of the Lusitania swayed editorial opinion against Germany in seven representative U.S. newspapers. The study uses newspapers as a gauge, since they are the best sources of public opinion existing from 1915.

Seven newspapers were chosen for this study based on their geographic location and political prominence: the New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Examiner, Washington Post, Kansas City Star, and Milwaukee Journal. The Times was chosen for its reputation as a paper of record, and because New York marked the Lusitania's last point of departure. The Constitution was chosen as one of the most prominent and respected dailies of the south. The Tribune was selected not only as a prominent

mid-western paper, but as one of the most notorious American dailies favoring the Republican Party - a paper opposing the policies of Woodrow Wilson. The Examiner was used as a representative from the west coast, and as a paper owned by William Randolph Hearst - a man with an enormous affect on the journalism of this period. The Post was selected because of the importance of Washington in the foreign policy process. The Star was selected because of its prominence in the western farm states - "America's Heartland." The Journal was chosen because the majority of its city's population was made up of German immigrants. The author felt that these papers represented most political shades of opinion in the United States of 1915. Thus a firm foundation for a study of this type.

Each paper was studied before, during, and after the crisis, in order to determine any change in editorial policy or outlook. The papers were examined six months prior to the sinking of the Lusitania, that is, the first week in November, 1914 (Nov.1 - 7). The papers were examined during the crisis itself, from the sinking on May 7, 1915, through the exchange of three diplomatic notes ending February 4, 1916. To cover this crisis period, every issue in May, June, July, and the first two weeks in August were examined. The final U.S. protest note was sent on July 21, 1915, and was not answered until February 4, 1916. Therefore, to cover the final German response, the first two weeks of February, 1916

(Feb. 1 - 14), were also examined. The papers were studied six months after this final exchange of notes, August 1 - 7, 1916. A total of 134 issues per paper were examined.

This review of each newspaper included an examination of: the first seven pages of each paper, the unsigned editorials expressing the view of the editorial staff, and any letters to the editor, when published, that dealt with the sinking. This study used descriptive analysis to determine the degrees of difference, or biases, in the news coverage of each paper.

Qualitative analysis was used in this study, since the purpose and the data were well suited for non-statistical description and interpretation. The main reason for this is that the facts known today about the loss of the Lusitania are an accurate bench mark for comparison.

As outlined in Chapter One, and discussed later in this chapter, the facts of the last voyage and sinking of the Lusitania are well known and documented. The facts of the May, 1915, cruise of the U-20, and the actions of Captain Schwieger, are also well documented in the historic record. The major questions surrounding the sinking (discussed later in this chapter), though controversial, have not changed significantly since 1915: Was the Lusitania armed? Did it carry munitions? What sank the ship--exploding ammunition or bursting boilers? Why were no escorts provided? Was there a conspiracy to sink the



Lusitania?

The fact that this case is established with such firm historical documentation, it is possible to make comparisons and judgments on the news coverage of this event by the newspapers of 1915. Did the papers accurately depict these facts? Were there variances? Did the variances favor one side or another - Allied or German?

Using the facts of the sinking known today as a benchmark, the researcher read pages one through seven of the selected issues. Notes were taken on the headlines and contents of Lusitania stories on these pages according to the following criteria: Did the stories vary from the facts known today? If so how? Did any such variance from today's facts emphasize the German side in the crisis (that the Lusitania was an armed, munitions transport), or the British side (the ship was an innocent liner, and its sinking was a wanton act of cruelty)? The stories were also noted for their prominence in each newspaper. Were they relatively large stories or small? Did they appear on the front page, or inner pages? Did they appear on the top or bottom of each page?

The unsigned editorials of each newspaper were also read, and noted, in view of the accepted facts of the sinking. The opinions and judgments of each editorial were noted accordingly: What questions were raised by the paper over the sinking? Was there a change in tone or opinion



against Germany from six months before the crisis? Published letters to the editor were noted in the same manner: What was the reaction to the sinking? Had the tone or opinion regarding Germany changed? As there was much comment on the many aspects of the war in Europe, only unsigned editorials and letters to the editor specifically mentioning the Lusitania were reviewed during the crisis period of May, 1915, through February, 1916.

Six months before, and six months after the sinking, the papers were read and noted in the same manner as during the Lusitania crisis period. Keeping in mind what is known today about the U.S. neutrality period during World War I (as discussed in Chapters Three and Four), pages one through seven of each paper were reviewed. Headline and content of war stories were noted according to the following criteria: What was the subject of the story - Central Powers or Allied forces? Was it a feature or news story? What was the editorial slant of the story - did it criticize or promote either side? The prominence of each war story was also reviewed in the same manner as during the Lusitania crisis period: the relative size, page location, and placement on each page was noted.

Unsigned editorials six months before, and six months after the Lusitania crisis were reviewed and noted in the same manner as at the time of the sinking. Notes were taken on the editorials' opinions of the war policies of both the

Allied and Central Powers. Were the editorials supportive or critical of either side in their conduct of the war? The same review was conducted for letters to the editor.

A review of the notes taken during this process (134 issues per paper) allowed comparisons between the papers news coverage, and judgments to be made based on these comparisons. The language of these judgments, using such phrases as "majority of" and "most of the time," may seem out of place without statistics. But without such judgmental words the historian is crippled, and the analysis becomes strictly a narrative.

The goal of this study is to analyze whether the sinking of the Lusitania swayed editorial opinion against Germany in seven selected newspapers. The method-qualitative description and interpretation - is the best means for achieving that goal because it is sensitive enough to pick up subtle changes in editorial opinion or policy. Such a study does not lend itself to statistical analysis, a tool better suited for larger studies, comparing a series of events, over a longer period of time.

### Review of the Literature

Reviewing the literature, one finds that fewer than twenty books deal strictly with the sinking of the Lusitania. However, many other books of general history,



foreign policy, and military and maritime history continue to devote at least a chapter to the disaster. The Lusitania books published before 1920 are of little practical use today. These books, often relying on Allied propaganda for facts, attempt to justify the sinking as a casus belli for American belligerency.

Since 1920, the majority of books concerning the Lusitania have been historical narratives of her final voyage. Donald Chidsey's The Day They Sank the Lusitania, and A.A. and Mary Hoehling's The Last Voyage of the Lusitania, are good examples of such narratives. Both books are good sources of background information, but written during the 1950's and 1960's - before the bulk of government documents were declassified - and their scope is limited.

The most in-depth books have appeared since 1970. In 1972, British journalist Colin Simpson published The Lusitania, a rather sensational book outlining a conspiracy by the British government to expose the liner to German submarines, hoping its sinking would embroil America in the war. A bestseller, the book spawned a B.B.C. television documentary. Almost in answer to Simpson's book, Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan published The Lusitania Disaster in 1975. Bailey, a Stanford University foreign policy historian, and Ryan, a Stanford naval historian, claimed the sinking was the result of a series of blunders. The latest books on the Lusitania were published in 1982. They are Des



Hickey and Gus Smith's Seven Days to Disaster, and David Butler's Lusitania. The latter is a novel. Both works take advantage of declassified records to provide thrilling accounts, but they fail to address the major questions surrounding the sinking.

To this day dozens of questions remain unanswered about the loss of the Lusitania - now but a rusting hulk at the bottom of the Irish Sea. Scholars - those writing strictly of the Lusitania or those mentioning it as part of other works - are divided into two camps. Bailey and Ryan represent one group: they claim the sinking was the result of government policy gone awry and costly human errors - a terrible mistake. Simpson leads the second group: they claim the sinking was a deliberate trap set by Winston Churchill and the British Admiralty to trigger the entry of an already eager United States into World War I - a deliberate massacre. These two groups disagree on almost everything but outline four major questions.

#### What sank the Lusitania: bursting boilers or exploding cargo?

The Lusitania was primarily a passenger liner and not a cargo ship. There was cargo space available - for baggage

and other items - located in the bow section.<sup>1</sup> When the Lusitania left Pier 54 in New York she carried 4,200 cases of Remington rifle cartridges - 1,000 to a box, for a total of 4,200,000. Also carried were 1,250 cases of empty artillery shells, and 18 cases of non-explosive shell fuses. Such cargo was absolute contraband, according to international law (discussed in the next chapter), but was not explosive, according to Bailey and Ryan. Empty shells and fuses without gunpowder could not explode. They point to extensive tests on rifle cartridges by the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor in 1911. In those tests, cases of rifle shells were thrown into open fires - some cases popped like firecrackers but did not violently explode. Labeled "not explosive in bulk," federal law allowed such rifle cartridges to be shipped on passenger liners. The load of rifle ammunition was small, according to Atlantic trade standards, say Bailey and Ryan, and was not enough to explode with enough force to tear bulkheads and sink the ship.

Colin Simpson does not believe the sworn ship's manifest. He believes other high explosives were smuggled on board labeled as meat, cheese, and furs. Of particular

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<sup>1</sup>. See Appendix, p. 220 . Note: This diagram comes from The Lusitania Disaster by Bailey and Ryan. They place the torpedo's point of impact between the first and second funnels. Other authors, most notably Simpson, have placed the impact closer to the bow.

concern to Simpson is gun cotton, an easily concealed yet highly explosive and unstable material used in mines and artillery shells. The gun cotton was manufactured by E.I. DuPont de Nemours, according to Simpson, and sent to New York for shipment on the Lusitania and other British ships. Sewn into burlap bags and disguised, the gun cotton was placed in the forward area of the ship - in new storage facilities installed at the war's outbreak. The gun cotton - or pyroxylin - would explode with great force if exposed to flame, or even if chemically reacting with sea water. Simpson says the torpedo hit forward of the bridge, and the second explosion of the gun cotton ripped out the bow below the water line.

British military historian Patrick Beesly in his book, Room 40: British Naval Intelligence 1914-18, says that official Cunard files show that the 1,250 cases of empty shells were actually filled with gunpowder - "live" ammunition and that the so-called non-explosive fuses were actually made of highly explosive fulminate of mercury. Beesly says the Lusitania carried 18 cases of fuses and 1,466 cases of live artillery shells on her previous crossing. Thus, Beesly reaches the same conclusion as Simpson - the second explosion was ammunition. Both contend the British government covered this up because it would



verify Germany accusations after the sinking.<sup>2</sup>

Bailey and Ryan discount the ammunition theories, and say bursting boilers were behind the second and fatal explosion. The authors cite other rapid sinkings caused by ruptured boilers. Though six of the Lusitania's boilers were shut down in Boiler Room Number 4, located in the stern, the remaining boilers were red hot and operating at 195 pounds per square inch. An onrush of cold sea water could have caused an explosion as violent as any ammunition. According to Bailey and Ryan, the torpedo struck the starboard side of the ship between Boiler Room Number 1 and Number 2. The resulting explosion doomed the ship, they argue.

Dives on the wreck in 1962 and 1982 revealed that the bow section was badly mangled with steel plating blown outward. This tends to lend support to those who say ammunition exploded in the bow. Yet this may also be because as the ship hit the bottom - bow first - the remaining boilers and heavy engine equipment slid forward down the hull - tearing open the bow area. Still, in 1982 the Admiralty sent the following warning to members of a diving expedition investigating the wreck: "It would be imprudent not to point out the obvious but real danger inherent if explosives did happen to be present. In that unlikely event

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<sup>2</sup>. Patrick Beesly, Room 40: British Naval Intelligence 1914-18, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

you are strongly advised to stop operations.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence provided by Bailey and Ryan, more comprehensive than much of Simpson's, makes the boiler theory the more credible of the two. Ryan, a naval historian, provides several examples of torpedoed ships - definitely not carrying explosives - sinking in less than ten minutes from ruptured boilers. The cargo hold of the Lusitania was small, and there were plenty of large British freighters, armed to resist U-boats, that could carry much more ammunition. In 1915 Britain was desperately in need of military supplies and ammunition. Escorts were provided to ships carrying valuable military cargoes, even horses. Gun cotton and live artillery shells were quite valuable to the British military at the time. Had the Lusitania carried them, it is likely she would have been escorted by destroyers according to Admiralty orders.

### Was the Lusitania an armed warship?

As discussed in the next chapter, all British merchant captains were ordered to flee from, or to resist, any hostile U-boats by means that included ramming. Thus, from a legal perspective, the Lusitania was armed with a prow that could cut a U-boat in two.

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<sup>3</sup>. Dan Knowlton, "Exploring the Wreck of the Lusitania," Sea Classics, June 1985, p. 34.

But was the Lusitania called into service by the British Admiralty and given her complement of twelve 6-inch guns? Colin Simpson says yes. According to Simpson, the Lusitania entered dry-dock on May 12, 1913, not for what Cunard called routine maintenance, but for the installation of her guns and their supporting equipment. Gun rings were installed along the boat deck, then covered with wooden deck panels. Areas in both the bow and stern were converted into magazine areas, and the guns themselves were stored in the bow to be wheeled out and bolted down when needed. Simpson cites as evidence an article in a June 19, 1913, edition of the New York Tribune that discussed this conversion.

In 1962, diver John Light saw what he thought was a gun barrel while inspecting the wreck of the Lusitania. Light also found sections of the hull cut out by earlier salvagers. Light's dives were restricted to 10-minute intervals because he was using a standard wetsuit and oxygen tanks at 315 feet. Simpson says Light did see a gun, and that the British Navy had moored over the wreck in the years after the sinking - sending divers down to remove the evidence. Dives made in 1982 revealed that the wreck had deteriorated in the twenty years past - much of the superstructure has collapsed on the sea bed. No cannon were found.

Bailey and Ryan say Simpson relies heavily on blueprints for gun placement and one newspaper article for



his entire thesis. They claim the blueprints were plans, now declassified, that were never implemented. The two authors say the Lusitania was never in dry-dock long enough for such a refit, and that Admiralty files show the Lusitania was not called to the reserves. In addition, the 6-inch guns of 1913-1915 were large, crew-served cannon weighing several tons. They would have to be installed by crane, and could not be trundled along the deck on the high seas. Bailey and Ryan also say the Cunard piers in New York were crawling with German spies (something Simpson agrees with) that would have been only too anxious to alert American newspapers to the Lusitania's guns. No such reports ever surfaced before she sailed, and newsreels of the ship's final departure show no such guns, or concealed guns. Passengers on previous voyages never saw anything resembling cannons or their support equipment. John Light, who helped Bailey and Ryan in their research effort, admits he might have seen an exposed spar or pipe in the wreckage. Again, the evidence cited by Bailey and Ryan appears more credible: that the Lusitania never became the commerce raider her designers envisioned.

#### Why were no escorts provided for the Lusitania?

British corvettes and destroyers were the terror of the German U-boat, capable of speeds of up to 35 knots. Why were none provided for the Lusitania?

For Simpson, Beesly, and others, the reason is simple - there was a conspiracy to sink the Lusitania and armed escorts would have thwarted that plan. An author of particular note in this conspiracy-minded group is Samuel F. Bemis, who wrote, A Diplomatic History of the United States. Bemis himself was a Lusitania survivor.

According to Beesly, the British had broken the German naval codes, and by intercepting German wireless communication had a general idea of where every U-boat was patrolling. The British Admiralty, most notably First Sea Lord Winston Churchill (the villain in all the conspiracy theories), was hoping for at least an abortive attack by the U-20 on the famous liner carrying American citizens. Churchill and the Admiralty were hoping that such an attack would enrage America, which would then enter the war to aid the Allies. British destroyers remained idle at the nearby port of Milford Haven to allow the attack to take place.

Bailey and Ryan point out that destroyers were a rare commodity in 1915 for the British Admiralty. Most were involved in the disastrous naval campaign in the Dardanelles - an attack plan authored by Churchill himself. Others were occupied convoying troop transports and freighters across the English Channel into France. The few that remained were used as escorts for the slow freighters carrying important military cargo from America. But the Lusitania was not slow. She was capable of 21 knots without six of her boilers, and

had they been fired could have been capable of 25 knots. The ship's speed was her saving grace. Had she been zigzagging in midchannel as ordered, she would have been almost impossible to catch. The Admiralty had no way of knowing that Turner would be hugging the coast on a straight course at only 18 knots. In addition, a merchant ship accepting armed escort - or convoy - was considered a military target according to international law and subject to attack without warning. Why burden, and possibly endanger, the speedy liner with military escorts? Besides, say Bailey and Ryan, the Lusitania carried no vital military cargo to warrant the escort of the destroyers - some 100 miles and five hours steaming time away in Milford Haven.

### Was there a conspiracy to sink the Lusitania?

Simpson and Beesly say emphatically yes. Bemis seems resigned to it given the evidence. Bailey and Ryan claim horrible mistakes in judgement were made, but there was no conspiracy behind them.

Conspiracy stories surfaced about the Lusitania almost immediately after the ship went down. As stated earlier, conspiracy advocates say Churchill, the British Admiralty, and the London government in general, sought U.S. participation in the war and needed a trigger for the already pro-Allied Wilson. Conspiracy backers always point



to a damning comment by King George to Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson's advisor and confidant, the day before the tragedy: "Suppose they should sink the Lusitania with American passengers on board?"

Bailey and Ryan dismiss this comment as an idle piece of speculation, arguing that the British Royalty would be the last to know of a plan requiring such secrecy. The authors point out that in 1915, on the whole, the Allies were doing quite well against Germany in the fields of France. The Allies desired America's good will and ammunition, but the last thing they wanted was the idealistic Wilson to ruin their acquisitive postwar plans. It was not until 1917, when America finally did enter the war, that the Allies were in danger of collapse.

When one reviews these conspiracy theories regarding the sinking of the Lusitania, one can't help but use the paraphrase "lies, damn lies, and the historical record." It seems every author has files and new evidence to draw on. It often comes down to whether or not the reader believes governments always lie or tell the truth sometimes. It is only now, 71 years later, that all the material had been declassified. The Lusitania, now lying on her starboard side in a chilly grave of 315 feet of water, will always be a restless wreck.

The only point where these scholars agree is how many torpedoes were fired at the Lusitania - one. This was not

always the case, however, for accounts have said that as many as four torpedoes were fired at the ship. The multiple torpedo theory began with the survivors - who endured 18 minutes of life-threatening horror, not to mention hours floating in the chilly water. Conflicting reports from these confused, and angry, survivors included accounts of as many as four torpedoes and three submarines. Several claimed they saw the submarines surface - though Schwieger never did. The British government knew - by intercepting German naval codes - that only one, and possibly two, U-boats were in the area though it had no clear idea how many torpedoes were fired.

But it was important for Britain to hold fast to the multiple torpedo theory, lest a story of one torpedo, followed by a second explosion, appear to vindicate the German claims of exploding ammunition. The Germans always maintained that only one torpedo was fired by the U-20. Since the British never admitted the possibility that only one torpedo was fired, they encouraged speculation of the multiple theory in the press. The official government inquest said two torpedoes sank the Lusitania, and placed their impact point well behind the bow area - amidships.

Other scholars mention the Lusitania as part of general histories, or histories addressing some other aspect of World War I. The Lusitania is mentioned by foreign policy historians in terms of an international crisis during the U.S. neutrality period. The facts of the sinking are usually



reviewed in a narrative describing the events of the neutrality period of 1914-1917. Thomas A. Bailey, in the tenth edition of A Diplomatic History of the American People, said of the sinking: "For perhaps the first time the war was really brought home to the American people."<sup>4</sup> Julius W. Pratt, in the second edition of his book, A History of United States Foreign Policy, refers to earlier works by Bailey on the Lusitania: "According to the best available evidence, the Lusitania was not armed and did not, as the Germans claimed, carry Canadian troops. She did, however, carry munitions ... ."<sup>5</sup> One of the latest foreign policy histories is Howard Jones' The Course of American Diplomacy, published in 1985. The University of Alabama historian says: "Reaction in the United States to the sinking of the Lusitania was a mixture of stunned disbelief and revulsion. Many Americans considered it an atrocity."<sup>6</sup> Jones sums up the events of the crisis by saying:

On February 4, 1916, almost nine months after the sinking of the Lusitania, the German government expressed regret and agreed to make reparations, which it did during the early 1920's. Thus Germany never admitted wrongdoing,

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<sup>4</sup>. Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 10th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980), p. 578.

<sup>5</sup>. Julius W. Pratt, A History of United States Foreign Policy, 2nd ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 271.

<sup>6</sup>. Howard Jones, The Course of American Diplomacy: From the Revolution to the Present, (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1985), p. 282.



did not offer an apology, and continued its calls for arbitration. Yet there was no popular clamor in the United States for war, and the drawn out exchanges of notes allowed emotions to calm while leaving the impression that Wilsonian diplomacy had achieved a victory. The administration in Washington chose to regard the promise of indemnification as satisfactory, and dropped the matter.<sup>7</sup>

Samuel F. Bemis in the fifth edition of, A Diplomatic History of the United States, is critical of the British government, regarding the Lusitania, in a long note ending Chapter 32: "One might well wonder whether the British Government purposely exposed to attack the Lusitania and other British passenger vessels carrying American citizens, in order to lead the Germans on to a rash act which might bring the United States into the war."<sup>8</sup> Bemis' chapter deals particularly with the international maritime law questions of the period.

Wilson scholars view the crisis in terms of an example of presidential decision-making. Some of these historians, most notably Arthur S. Link, view Wilson as a kind of martyr for the cause of peace:

For the President of the United States this was by far the severest testing that he had ever known. We cannot live all these troubled hours over again with him, but we know enough about what he thought and did to say that now as never before did his true character manifest itself in word and deed.

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<sup>7</sup>. Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>8</sup>. Samuel F. Bemis, A Diplomatic History of the United States, 5th ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 616.

To begin with, he sought deliberately to set an example of calmness and detachment for his people in this time of stress. One can almost see him reading the line of Kipling of which he was so fond:

If you can keep your head when  
all about you Are losing theirs and  
blaming it on you ...<sup>9</sup>

Thankfully, recent scholars, such as Patrick Devlin, have viewed Wilson's decision-making with a more critical eye. In Too Proud to Fight, Devlin looks - through Wilson's eyes - at the crisis facing the United States and Germany over the Lusitania:

Wilson's attitude was that of the majority, though for him it was based on something more than the desire for action without its consequences. His thinking put him in the company of those who knew that the challenge could not be evaded, but his feeling and his whole nature put him against the resort to war. Reconciliation between thought and feeling was achieved by his belief, or at least his strong hope, that an appeal to conscience would prove as powerful a weapon as the threat of force. Thus once again Wilson's convictions led him towards the policy which was politically expedient, a policy which sacrificed neither peace nor irretrievably prestige and gained time for a country which was mentally and physically unprepared to fight. But it was a policy which might lead to war. If the appeal to conscience failed, America would, unless she could find some honourable way of escape, be confronted with a choice between a loss of prestige immeasurably greater than if she had adopted forthwith the Bryanist policy of non-involvement, a loss so great as to be tantamount to humiliation, and the threat of intervention

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<sup>9</sup>. Arthur S. Link, Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality 1914-1915, Vol. 3, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 379-380.



which might have to be made good.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars of military history, like their colleagues in foreign policy, tend to mention the Lusitania sinking as an aspect of the submarine warfare of World War I. They all usually review only the facts of the sinking, offering one or two comments about its legacy. Edwyn A. Gray said in the opening chapter of his book, The Killing Time: "The cold-blooded sinking of the Lusitania was the most publicized tragedy of the First World War and, in the skilled hands of the British propaganda machine, it did much to inflame public opinion in the United States against Germany."<sup>11</sup> It seems British historians will never forget, or forgive, the sinking. Historian Richard Hough in his 1983 book, The Great War at Sea, says that: "The one ship whose name signified the barbarity and revulsion felt for this new form of [submarine] warfare was the Lusitania."<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, Winston Churchill, in the World Crisis, also blames the Germans for piracy:

The United States, whose citizens had perished in large numbers, was convulsed with indignation, and in all parts of the great Republic the signal for armed intervention was awaited by the strongest elements of the

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10. Patrick Devlin, Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson's Neutrality, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 284-285.

11. Edwyn Gray, The Killing Time: The U-Boat War 1914-18, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 18-19.

12. Richard Hough, The Great War at Sea: 1914-1918, (London: The Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 174.



American people. It was not given, and the war continued in its destructive equipoise. But henceforward the friends of the Allies in the United States were armed with a weapon against which German influence was powerless, and before which after a lamentable interval cold-hearted policy was destined to succumb.<sup>13</sup>

None of these works of history, however, provide a systematic look at public opinion during the Lusitania crisis. Public opinion research was in its infancy in 1915, so historians have used the newspaper as the only reliable mirror of regional opinion. Authors that address the reaction of Americans to the sinking usually cite regional newspaper headlines, or excerpt editorials, to show U.S. outrage during, and after, the crisis. All these authors assume, without systematic public opinion research, that the sinking was one of several factors leading to U.S. belligerency.

Journalism historians also succumb to this type of reasoning. Frank Luther Mott, in the third edition of his book, American Journalism, says that the sinking of the Lusitania "afforded American papers the biggest story of the years 1914-16."<sup>14</sup> Then he devotes one sentence to the press reaction: "Six months later, after the sinking the Lusitania, few papers remained neutral; and certainly the

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<sup>13</sup>. Winston Churchill, The World Crisis: 1915, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 348.

<sup>14</sup>. Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History 1690-1960, 3rd ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 696.

pro-German proportion had not increased."<sup>15</sup> Edwin and Michael Emery also add little to the subject of the American press and the Lusitania. In the forth edition of their book, The Press and America, the authors call the sinking one of several "important factors" leading to American belligerency. Then, like Mott, the Emerys sum up the press reaction in one sentence:

But resentment ran high in the United States, particularly when it was remembered that an Imperial German Embassy advertisement warning travelers on Allied ships that they did so 'at their own risk' had appeared in New York newspapers the morning the Lusitania left port.<sup>16</sup>

Sidney Kobre, in his book, The Development of American Journalism, provides more newspaper quotes, but studies the origins of World War I only by citing New York newspapers. After using quotes from the New York World, Kobre says that the "sinking of this British liner, on which were traveling many Americans, proved to be one of the most sensational war stories in the period 1914 to 1917. The event contributed a great deal to the shaping of public opinion in this country against Germany."<sup>17</sup>

A second group of books of journalism history are

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<sup>15</sup>. Ibid., p. 616.

<sup>16</sup>. Edwin and Michael Emery, The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media, 4th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1978), p. 329.

<sup>17</sup>. Sidney Kobre, Development of American Journalism, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1969), p. 574.



strictly narrative tales of the adventures of war correspondents in World War I. A good example of this type of journalism history is M.L. Stein's, Under Fire: The Story of American War Correspondents. Another book is Behind the Front Page, by former United Press correspondent Wilbur Forrest. Both provide factual narratives telling how the news of the Lusitania was broken. Forrest, then a cub reporter for United Press, was the first journalist to reach Queenstown, Ireland, on the day of the sinking, beating rivals by several hours and 1,500 words.

But again, none of these works provide a systematic look at America's front pages. Only two research efforts have come close. The first was published in 1916, one year after the loss of the Lusitania. This is The Lusitania Case, by C.L. Droste and W.H. Tatum. Though reprinted in 1972, copies of this book are extremely hard to come by. The Lusitania Case is a bound collection of selected documents, speeches, letters, pictures, cartoons, newspaper and magazine stories, and editorials - from Britain, America, and Germany. The collection attempts to address each aspect of the sinking. Under chapter titles such as "The German Warning," "The Manifest of the Lusitania," and "America Comments," are collected material dealing specifically with that subject. This book, discussing some thirty aspects of the sinking, is an invaluable source of Lusitania information - and yet, it is limited. Written a year before



U.S. belligerency, the documents, speeches, and letters must be observed with a jaundiced eye - for wartime propaganda machines were in high gear. The collection of U.S. news stories and editorials is solid - coming from all over America - but suffers from a narrow time frame, largely from May through August 1915. It is, however, an excellent "snapshot" of world opinion during the summer of 1915. Another drawback is that it is a collection - and simply that. There is no analysis of any kind, save that from the items in the collection itself - news stories, columnists, and editorials.

Bailey and Ryan in, The Lusitania Disaster, make the second attempt at comprehensive research of the American press reaction. In Chapter 15, "The Worldwide Uproar," they cite headlines, stories, and editorials from across the country. They survey different newspapers - including those in countries besides the United States - but this too is a snapshot. The authors say there was no clamor for war over the sinking of the Lusitania, but like Droste and Tantum, they concentrate only on the spring and summer of 1915. Did American public opinion about the loss of the Lusitania change after the summer of 1915? What was the opinion of the war before the sinking? These are questions beyond the scope of Bailey and Ryan's book.

It is clear, then, from this review of the literature

that scholars have made assumptions about American public opinion regarding the sinking of the Lusitania. This study will contribute to the Lusitania literature by examining these assumptions through a study of seven newspapers. Did America clamor for war? Were the government policies of Britain, Germany, and the United States questioned? Did America demand answers to the questions stemming from the controversial circumstances of the sinking itself? This study will show how these seven newspapers dealt with the aforementioned questions.

Any comprehensive study of this time period must review the origins of World War I including the events, policies and personalities involved. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE SEEDS OF WAR

The Lusitania left a wake of controversy off the Old Head of Kinsale in May 1915. But this should come as no surprise to anyone, since the circumstances of her sinking have roots in one of the most controversial wars in history.

Historians still debate the origins and aftershocks of World War I - the Great War. Indeed it is a fruitful plain of harvest for any researcher. It was the first modern war of the 20th Century, born out of the economic imperialism and military chivalry of the 19th Century. The many aspects of the conflict fill volumes - the number of works on Wilson alone is staggering.

What follows here is a review of the foreign policy decisions that led up to that tragic encounter between the U-20 and the Lusitania off the Irish coast. The Entente Powers, the Central Powers, and the United States all made critical choices during this period - particularly the choice of maritime strategies.

#### War Clouds

World War I had its seeds in the economic imperialism of the late 19th Century. Rapid industrialization brought the need for new markets and sources of raw materials. The easiest outlet for such growing pains was colonial



expansion. Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, South America, and China were all areas ripe for exploitation by the imperial powers of Europe (not to mention the United States). Like the conquistadors of old, they sought new markets for their manufactured goods, while they reaped the benefits of new sources of oil, rubber, iron ore, and other raw materials. But there was only so much of a good thing to go around, and friction was bound to develop. Some of this friction was alleviated by treaties or minor military skirmishes - but the pressure was building.

Great Britain was the leading imperial power at the turn of the century. By 1900 she had the strongest navy in the world, the empire (on which the sun never set), and some \$20 billion in assets - an enormous sum in those days. The empire comprised 309 million people in 9.3 million square miles around the world. With the most to lose in any conflict, Britain sought to maintain the delicate balance of power through treaty - keeping other great powers from forming a solid block against her.<sup>1</sup>

France ranked second of the major European powers. Her empire consisted of 56 million people in 3.7 million square miles, primarily in Africa and Asia.

But it was Germany that was the rising power on the European scene. By 1900 it had transformed itself from an

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<sup>1</sup>. Sidney Lens, The Forging of the American Empire, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1971), p. 236.

agricultural nation into one of the world's leading industrialized states. Its empire ranked third with 15 million people in one million square miles - most of it in Africa. The spark for this growth had been the defeat of France in the 1870-1871 war, during which it had acquired Alsace-Lorraine, an area of France rich in coal, iron ore, and phosphorus. From the end of the war in 1871, until the period just prior to World War I, Germany's population had grown from 41 million people to 65 million people. Its output of pig iron, from 529,000 tons to 15 million, served to show its industrial might. Germany was a growing economic machine, pre-eminent in chemicals, machine building, precision instruments, and electrical equipment.<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned before, these three major powers sought new markets and sources of raw materials through expansion-peacefully, if possible. In the days of secret treaties, they formed alliances they thought would help them carve up the pieces of the economic pie.

Linked to Germany was Austria-Hungary, a monarchy of uneasy minorities and dynasties centralized in Austria. Austria-Hungary was seriously at odds with Czarist Russia over the fate of the states in the Balkan Peninsula. Italy, a more minor power, was also aligned with Germany (though it would later desert her). Together, these three nations made up the bulk of the Central Powers of Europe. The opposing

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<sup>2</sup>. Ibid., pp. 236-237.

Entente (French word for alliance) Powers included Great Britain, France, and Russia.

Germany's expansion plans for dominance of Europe directly challenged those of England. Germany planned to help Austria-Hungary consolidate an economic base in the Balkans. On her own she would move into Turkey, the Near East, and the Persian Gulf. A key part of this plan was the building of a Berlin-to-Baghdad railway, connecting Europe, as far west as Antwerp, with Persia. Such a railroad would divert large amounts of freight from British shipping companies using the Suez Canal. Germany could then dominate the Middle East region, and by running a rail line south, open the door to Africa. Such a plan would not only threaten British expansion and trade, but deny easy access to her colonies.<sup>3</sup>

These plans of the Central Powers ran headlong into those of the Entente. France desired the return of Alsace-Lorraine and a dominant position in the industrial heartland of the German Rhine. Russia sought dominance in the Balkans and Constantinople in Turkey. Great Britain sought the rich oil fields of Persia. Italy changed sides at the war's outbreak, and joined with the Entente Powers in plans to divide Asiatic Turkey amongst themselves. Italy also sought Trieste and part of the Tyrol.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid., p. 238.



Yet even as these political and economic blueprints opposed one another, the Entente and the Central Powers tried their best to achieve them without conflict.

Britain in particular, the country with the most to lose should war break out, sought to placate her friends and rivals. In August, 1907, she courted Russia by dividing Persia into three zones: the northern, a Russian sphere; the southern, British; and the zone in between - neutral. Japan was soothed with an alliance in 1902 that allowed that nation further markets in China. The United States was satisfied by Britain's inaction over the Roosevelt Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine that allowed U.S. interventions in Haiti, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. Britain worked with France for a settlement in North Africa: British support of France in Morocco for British control of Egypt.

Britain even sought accommodation with Germany. In 1913 the two countries agreed that the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway would terminate in the southern tip of Mesopotamia (Iraq), with two British administrators appointed to the board of directors. In return, a petroleum company in Mesopotamia would be established in which Britain held 75 percent of the shares, Germany 25 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Built on this foundation of economic rivalry was an arms race. Each country sought an army and navy strong

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<sup>5</sup>. Ibid., p. 238.

enough to ensure its economic strategies could be fulfilled. This collection of big sticks did nothing to alleviate the tensions building toward war.

Occasional power struggles and armed conflicts helped to shake the military and diplomatic status quo. Germany and France vied for influence in Morocco in 1905-1906 and again in 1911. In the same year, Italy declared war on Turkey to wrest the latter's control over the African territory of Tripoli. In 1912, war in the Balkans broke out between Turkey and Bulgaria, Montenegro, Serbia and Greece. When that war ended in 1913, another Balkan war began immediately between Bulgaria and Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, and Rumania.

Though western Europe was largely spared such conflict, it seemed only a matter of time until it would be drawn in. "Some damned foolish thing in the Balkans," Prince Otto von Bismark predicted, would ignite the next war.<sup>6</sup>

The long fuse, ignited during the 19th Century, reached the powder keg in Europe much the way Bismark predicted. On June 28, 1914, a fanatical Bosnian revolutionary named Gavrilo Princip assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife were riding through the streets of Bosnia's capital city of Sarajevo in a motorcade when Princip shot them to

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<sup>6</sup>. Barbara W. Tuchman, The Guns of August, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 71.

death.

Like a trip-wire, the killings in Sarajevo put into motion the complex system of European alliances. On July 28, the Austro-Hungarian government, suspecting the complicity of the Serbian government in the assassinations, declared war on Serbia. Two days later, Russia mobilized, determined to defend her small protege. On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia; on August 3, against Russia's ally France (which had refused assurances of remaining neutral). On August 4, Germany declared war on Belgium, which had denied passage to German armies en route to France. On the same day, Great Britain declared war on Germany for violating Belgian neutrality. Later, Turkey and Bulgaria entered the war with Germany and the Central Powers. Italy and Rumania eventually joined the Entente Powers. Japan declared war on Germany on August 23, largely to seize German holdings in China and the Pacific. In less than a month, Europe exploded like a string of firecrackers.

### America Wages Neutrality

The killings in Sarajevo and the outbreak of the Great War caught the United States completely by surprise. The State Department was unprepared for the crisis, having received no warning from its diplomats across the Atlantic. Many of these diplomats, political appointees, were ignorant



of both European history and geography. "I had never heard of Sarajevo," wrote Brand Whitlock, U.S. minister to Belgium. "I had not the least idea where it was in this world, if it was in this world." During the crisis of July and August, Whitlock was at his country home outside Brussels, writing a novel about rural life in Ohio. Frank E. Mallett, the American vice-consul in Budapest, did send a warning to Washington almost two weeks after the assassination of the archduke on June 28. Being only a vice-consul, however, Mallett sent his war warning via mail rather than expensive cables - it arrived at the State Department on July 27.<sup>7</sup>

President Wilson issued a formal proclamation of U.S. neutrality on August 4, 1914. He followed the formal proclamation with an appeal to Americans on August 20:

The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name ... We must be impartial in thought as well as in action, must put a curb upon our sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.<sup>8</sup>

Impartiality in thought and action was easier said than done for America in 1914. Americans, whether watching the World Series or a ping-pong match, love to choose sides

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<sup>7</sup>. Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: A History, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975), p. 457.

<sup>8</sup>. Julius W. Pratt, A History of United States Foreign Policy, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p.265.

- and usually root for the side they perceive as the underdog. Choosing sides in the Great War was no different.

By 1914, there were over 8 million German-Americans in the United States. Living mostly in the midwest, these citizens were squarely behind "the Fatherland," seeing Britain as the aggressor. In the same camp were the 4.5 million Irish-Americans. They had no love for Britain, long the oppressor of their homeland (the ruthless suppression of the Irish Rebellion of 1916 made even the Wilson Administration wince). America also contained over 4 million Jews, strongly opposed to Czarist Russia's anti-Semitism. Swedish-Americans, some 2 million, also despised Russia and favored Germany.<sup>9</sup>

On the other side of the coin were Americans backing the Entente Powers - or "Allies," as they were known on this side of the Atlantic. Despite the Anglo-American rivalry of the past century, the Revolution and the War of 1812, many Americans could not forget their bloodlines and cultural heritage. Relations between the U.S. and Great Britain had been largely friendly of late, and German militarism seemed the great evil. Other Americans had long memories when it came to Britain, but they believed they owed a debt to France. They took to heart the lines from Robert Underwood Johnson:

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<sup>9</sup>. Patrick Devlin, Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson's Neutrality, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 141.



Forget us, God, if we forget  
 The sacred sword of  
 Lafayette!<sup>10</sup>

The Allies were seen by many Americans as the underdogs in this fight. Britain had gone to war over the invasion of Belgium, a country whose King Albert had told the Germans: "Belgium is a nation, not a thoroughfare." The German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, had called the Belgian neutrality treaty his nation signed in 1839 "a scrap of paper." This did not seem fair to most Americans. Lurid Allied propaganda accounts of German atrocities in Belgium did not help their cause in America.

Though propaganda and the homefront will be addressed in a later chapter, it is important at this stage to outline the viewpoint of Americans. According to foreign policy historians, citizens had chosen sides, refusing to be "moral eunuchs," as one newspaper editor put it. But both sides, though pro or anti Allied or Central Powers, were firmly against U.S. intervention. It was Europe's war. Americans believed the senile monarchies of Europe were in one last death struggle, and that the United States should remember the words of George Washington and keep out of foreign entanglements. Americans thought the Atlantic Ocean safely protected them from the horror of war overseas.

The man America looked to at this critical hour was

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10. Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), p. 565.



Thomas Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United States. Wilson has been studied by countless scholars since his election over Taft, Roosevelt, and a divided Republican party in 1912. Wilson was a progressive reformer at home. In foreign policy he was more devious: he called for neutrality in 1914, but used the powers at his disposal to undermine it. Richard Hofstadter pointed out this inconsistency:

Wilson's Allied sympathies were as vital as his love for peace. He was a thorough Anglophile. He had learned his greatest lessons from English thinkers; he had taken English statesmen as his models of aspiration and the British Constitution as his model of government; his work as president of Princeton had been, in large measure, an effort to introduce the English idea of a university; even his favorite recreation was to bicycle about the villages of the Lake Country with the 'Oxford Book of English Verse' in his pocket.<sup>11</sup>

Born in Staunton, Virginia, during the ravages and hardship of the Civil War and Reconstruction, Wilson grew up with an impassioned love for peace. Though a sincere pacifist, Wilson felt a German victory would be a blow to western civilization - a triumph of militarism and autocracy.

Many historians, including the writers of most high school American history texts, depict Wilson holding fast to strict neutrality to the bitter end; accepting war only as a last resort to German barbarity. Wilson's official

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<sup>11</sup>. Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition And the Men Who Made It, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 393.

biographer, Arthur S. Link, is the most prominent defender of this view. Yet even in Link's own five-volume biography of Wilson can be found discrepancies. Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson's advisor and confidant, is quoted by Link after an August 30, 1914, meeting with Wilson:

The President spoke with deep feeling of the war. He said it made him heartsick to think of how near we had come to averting this great disaster ... I was interested to hear him express as his opinion what I had written him some time ago in one of my letters, to the effect that if Germany won it would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation ... He felt deeply the destruction of Louvain [the university library in Belgium], and I found him as unsympathetic with the German attitude as is the balance of America. He goes even further than I in his condemnation of Germany's part in this war, and almost allows his feeling to include the German people as a whole rather than the leaders alone. He said German philosophy was essentially selfish and lacking in spirituality ... He thought the war would throw the world back three or four centuries.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, in December, 1914, Wilson would write to a correspondent who had complained of anti-German bias in the American media:

I deplore as sincerely as you do expressions of violent condemnation or violent partisanship with regard to either side in the present dreadful conflict in Europe and have taken every public occasion that opened itself to me to urge upon my fellow-citizens a genuine neutrality of thought as well as of action. But, unhappily, the only thing that the Government can do is to enforce neutrality of action. This it has studiously and at every point been

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<sup>12</sup>. Arthur S. Link, Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality 1914-1915, Vol. 3, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 51.



careful to do and will continue to do with the utmost vigilance.<sup>13</sup>

Hofstadter sums up Wilson's uncertain course during the neutrality period as the clash of two inconsistent strategic ideas:

The first was that the United States must remain the Great Neutral, the conservator of sane and just peacetime values, the exponent of peace 'without victory.' The second was that the Allies must not be allowed to lose the war, that the 'military masters of Germany' must be crushed.<sup>14</sup>

Wilson delegated very little foreign policy authority, even to the point of "banging out" press releases and diplomatic notes on his own Underwood typewriter. The few advisors Wilson did use for advice were, for the most part, thoroughly pro-Ally.

Colonel Edward M. House was Wilson's political kingmaker from Texas. Wilson had been close to House since his days as Governor of New Jersey, and it was the wheeling and dealing of House that obtained for Wilson the Democratic presidential nomination in 1912. Wilson called him "my second personality ... my independent self," and he trusted House with his deepest thoughts. House fancied himself an urbane Texan, political strategist, and international trouble-shooter. He enjoyed being the power behind the throne. A thorough Anglophile, and inexperienced in

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<sup>13</sup>. Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>14</sup>. Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, p. 353.



diplomacy, House was putty in the hands of British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and Sir Cecil Spring Rice, Britain's ambassador to Washington. Both flattered his ego and kept him at arms length. Convinced the defeat of Germany was vital to U.S. national security, House greatly affected Wilson's views toward the Allies.

Wilson's second most important advisor during the period of neutrality was Robert Lansing, Counselor of the State Department (and later Secretary of State when William Jennings Bryan resigned during the Lusitania crisis). An able international lawyer, and strongly pro-Ally, Lansing drafted much of the correspondence sent to Berlin and London. He strongly influenced Wilson on points of international law. Colin Simpson in his book, The Lusitania, portrays Lansing as the major villain during the neutrality period; setting up Wilson and conspiring with the British. This may be too simplistic. Nevertheless, Daniel Smith, in one of the few works devoted solely to Lansing, says that he "bore a large share of the responsibility for American intervention in the war."<sup>15</sup> Smith says Lansing saw a real opportunity for the future economic and political dominance of the United States; that would be dependent on the status quo prior to 1914. A German victory, and the dominance of Europe that would follow, would force America toward

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<sup>15</sup>. Daniel M. Smith, Robert Lansing and American Neutrality 1914-1917, (New York: DaCapo Press, 1972), p.168.

militarism - leading to another future war. Thus, future U.S. growth was tied to the Allies, Britain was "fighting our fight." Specifically:

... Lansing's primary concern was to use his influence to ensure that all possible measures for an Allied victory were taken. This meant that nothing should be done to interfere with the Allied prosecution of the war and that diplomatic protest should be long and inconclusive, designed to satisfy public opinion and to maintain legal reservations of right for postwar settlement on the one hand, and, on the other, to prevent any of the controversies from degenerating into positive action of a coercive or retaliatory nature.<sup>16</sup>

America's ambassador in London was author-editor Walter Hines Page. Lacking diplomatic experience, but long-enamored of British literature, Page soon "went native" and saw himself as one with the British people. He had nothing but contempt for the bureaucrats in the State Department, often changing his instructions to make them more tolerable to the British. Sir Edward Grey, who found Page a willing spokesman for the Allied cause, spoke of one meeting:

Page came to see me at the Foreign Office one day and produced a long despatch from Washington contesting our claim to act as we were doing in stopping contraband going to neutral ports. 'I am instructed,' he said, 'to read this despatch to you.' He read, and I listened. He then said: 'I have now read the despatch, but I do not agree with it; let us consider how it should be answered!'<sup>17</sup>

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16. Ibid., pp. 169-170.

17. Bailey, Diplomatic History of the American People, p. 572.



Thomas A. Bailey said that instead of faithfully representing the United States in England, Page represented the British cause to Washington.<sup>18</sup>

The president's only truly neutral advisor during the period was Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. Though often portrayed as an idealistic buffoon in many works concerning this period, Bryan was the only one who took no sides, who faithfully carried out to the letter what his chief espoused in public. Bryan, the Democratic party's standard bearer for so many years, was appointed secretary of state largely for that very reason. He believed in Wilson's political agenda, and did much to solidify the agrarians in the West and deliver that region into the Democratic column in 1912.

Kendrick Clements, in his book, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist, says that Bryan is important because he mirrored the views of many Americans during this period:

Balanced somewhat precariously between traditional isolationism and a deep conviction that Christianity required service to others, Bryan's attitudes mirrored those of millions of Americans who found themselves torn between a fearful desire to escape and an idealistic wish to help, as they faced an increasingly unstable and dangerous world. Indeed, Bryan's foreign policy is of interest to us precisely because it was not based upon careful study of the issues or on much practical experience. More articulate and outspoken than most of his followers, Bryan nevertheless revealed their feelings more

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<sup>18</sup>. Ibid., p. 572.



faithfully than he might have if he had thought more systematically about the issues.<sup>19</sup>

Bryan, proud of his nickname "the Commoner," espoused what Clements terms "missionary isolationism:" that America had a special duty to improve and serve the world while at the same time remaining free from foreign entanglements. Robert Cherny said Bryan envisioned such improvements as self government, the resolution of conflict through negotiation, self-improvement for the individual, and the propagation of Christian values.<sup>20</sup>

Wilson and Bryan would eventually break because the latter believed in neutrality at any cost; Wilson, House, and Lansing believed in the guarantee of neutral rights-even if it meant conflict. With his own biases, and the biases of his closest advisors, Wilson set out to be neutral in thought and action.

### Economic Hands Across the Sea

After the proclamation of neutrality on August 4, the Wilson Administration faced a skidding economy, aggravated by the outbreak of war in Europe.

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19. Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist, (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), Preface, p. xi.

20. Robert W. Cherny, A Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985), p.195.

The slump in the economy was already a year old in 1914. Steel production was down 50 percent, and trouble loomed for copper, cotton, meat, chemicals and machinery. To make matters worse, on August 20, 1914, the British cabinet issued an Order in Council stating it would not respect the Declaration of London of 1909, an international agreement formulating rules for neutral trading with belligerents during wartime. Without so stating, Britain had instituted an economic blockade of Germany - expanding the definition of contraband, and seizing condemned cargos. The effect on the American economy was disastrous.

With the strongest navy in the world, Britain could make her blockade stick. German liners and merchantmen remained bottled up in U.S. ports like New York, Boston, and Baltimore. Other neutral countries also served as safe harbors. American trade with the Central Powers dropped from \$169 million in 1913-1914, to \$12 million in 1915, and to a low of \$1 million in 1916. The State Department, with Lansing in Washington and Page in London, "protested" the blockade. The British replied these were "unusual" methods brought on by the "exceptional" nature of this war. It was actually a repeat performance of Britain's strategy during the Napoleonic Wars.

An important figure during these lean economic times was the infamous financial buccaneer - John Pierpont Morgan. Morgan, one of the most prominent "robber barons" of the



period, had developed the investment strategy known as "Morganization." Before Morgan, investment bankers acted primarily as middlemen - arranging investors and financial backing without interfering with corporate policy. Morgan's policy was more aggressive, requiring representation on corporate boards as part of financing deals. Companies that came to the successful Morgan for help had to pay the piper. In 1912, the House of Morgan held controlling interest in 12 major banks, three insurance firms, 11 railroads, including the Pullman Company, Adams Express, United States Steel, General Electric, American Telephone and Telegraph, International Harvester, and Western Union, as well as public utilities and two Latin American corporations.<sup>21</sup>

In early August, 1914, the French government approached Morgan's Paris office with a \$100 million loan request. Though ready to oblige, the firm decided to check with the State Department, rather than run afoul of the neutrality proclamation. At the State Department, Morgan ran into opposition from Bryan. Writing to Wilson, Bryan called money "the worst of all contrabands because it commands everything else." If the loans were approved, he reasoned, citizens would take sides and begin loaning money to aide their favorite belligerent. He argued that powerful financial interests, aligned to one side or the other, would put pressure on newspapers for their cause. In short-

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21. Lens, Forging of American Empire, pp. 247-248.



neutrality would be undermined. Wilson agreed, and the loans were denied.

In the meantime, the initial bust at the war's outbreak turned into a boom for American business. The Allied powers, cut off from central Europe by the fighting, increasingly turned to the U.S. for its supplies. Britain, almost completely dependent on outside sources for food and other raw materials, became the biggest customer. With a strong British navy patrolling the searoutes, the Central Powers could not take advantage of purchasing from the United States.

In response to orders from abroad, U.S. wheat prices jumped from \$.85 per bushel; to \$1.67 per bushel by February, 1915. From 1914 to 1917, steel imports rose from \$.25 billion to \$1.1 billion and the export of chemicals, dyes and drugs from \$22 million to \$181 million. The U.S. became the Allied source for food and raw materials such as copper, iron ore, zinc, cotton, lumber, wool, and oil.

The manufacture of munitions was a key factor in the boom. Between 1914 and March 1917, munitions exports rose from \$6 million to \$1.7 billion. During the war, the E.I. duPont de Nemours Company supplied the Allies with two fifths of their ammunition.<sup>22</sup> According to Samuel Bemis, after some technical defaults on rifle contracts, "the British Government, anxious to keep up deliveries of desired

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<sup>22</sup>. Ibid., p. 241.

weapons, felt obliged to take over control, but not ownership, of some leading American arms factories.<sup>23</sup>

A leading figure behind this economic revival was J.P. Morgan, who by 1915, had become the sole purchasing agent for both the French and British governments in the United States. By 1917, Morgan had spent some \$3 billion of Allied money for munitions and commodities at a commission of 1 percent - \$30 million. But since Morgan, when possible, placed orders for Allied purchases with his own firms, his total financial gain was much greater.

The Allies initially paid for the purchases with gold or by selling stocks, bonds, or other assets in the United States. They had no other choice, since any domestically produced commodities went directly to the war effort, and could not be used for export trade. This could not last long, however, and by October, 1914, the Allies were again pressing for loans.

This time Morgan & Co., along with the Rockefeller-controlled National City Bank, approached Lansing to reconsider the ban on loans. Lansing was receptive, and pointed out to Wilson the legal precedents for such loans: both North and South had borrowed European money during the American Civil War; Japan had borrowed money from both

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<sup>23</sup>. Samuel F. Bemis, Diplomatic History of the United States, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 592.

England and the U.S. during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Russia had borrowed from France for the same war. Besides, it was not the government providing the loans, it was private citizens, he contended. The New York banking firms had also warned Lansing the economic surge could come to a grinding halt if the loans were not granted. Wilson agreed with Lansing, though it was decided the new loans to be authorized were to be called "credits," as a face-saving gesture for Bryan. The Wilson Administration reversed the neutral loan policy, but told bankers it was not to be approached publicly about loans again. Americans did not learn of this policy shift until a press release was issued on March 31, 1915.

When criticized by German-Americans for trade with the Allies, Lansing replied:

If one belligerent has by good fortune a superiority in the matter of geographic location or of military or naval power, the rules of neutral conduct cannot be varied so as to favor the less fortunate combatant.<sup>24</sup>

America's trade with the Allies not only helped their war effort, but tipped the balance of world economic power toward the United States. Sidney Lens has argued that the economic expansion during the neutrality period had four major implications for the U.S.:

(1) An enormous expansion of domestic industrial facilities.

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<sup>24</sup>. Pratt, History of United States Foreign Policy, p. 266.



(2) The liquidation of billions of dollars of foreign holdings in the United States and conversion of the nation from a debtor to a creditor.

(3) The emergence of New York on a par with London as the world's leading banking center.

(4) The take-over of British, German, and other investments in South America, to make the United States finally the unchallenged monarch of the western hemisphere.<sup>25</sup>

Wilson had essentially three options for a foreign policy strategy during the period of neutrality. First, he could, like Jefferson in 1807, issue an embargo on all exports to both belligerent alliances. Secondly, he could have ordered the navy to convoy U.S. merchantmen through the British blockade - Teddy Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet" was still the third most powerful in the world. Finally, he could acquiesce to the British blockade, and trade only with the Allies.

Clearly, the most neutral choice "in thought as well as in action" would be to embargo goods to both belligerents. Such a course would have meant political suicide, as Thomas Jefferson found out in 1807. With the 1916 election looming on the horizon, Wilson was not about to cut his own political throat at a time when war trade with the Allies was bringing the country out of recession. Besides, Wilson accepted Lansing's dubious legal argument that an embargo would aid the Central Powers at the cost of the Allies - and therefore, place the United States in a

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25. Lens, Forging of American Empire, p. 242.

non-neutral position.

The second choice was clearly the most warlike, and Wilson wanted at all costs to avoid war. Still, if he were serious about asserting neutral rights, he needed to allow trade. Though risking war with Britain, such a policy would have allowed Germany and the Central Powers a share in the benefits the Allies were reaping.

Wilson finally chose the path of least resistance, respecting the British blockade and trading only with the Allies. This option held no immediate risk of war. It also allowed the Allies access to continuous supply, something agreeable to all in the administration except Bryan - who was becoming more isolated within the State Department anyway. It was a peaceful choice that helped the Allies fight German militarism.

Edward Parsons in his book Wilsonian Diplomacy: Allied-American Rivalries in War and Peace, asserts that Wilson and his advisors saw in the war an opportunity for the United States to establish its pre-eminence on the world economic stage. America's neutral trade with Great Britain weakened that country's hold on the Western Hemisphere, and made her more dependent on U.S. goods. By not aiding the Central Powers, the administration allowed German militarism to bleed to death by destroying that country's economic base. Even when the U.S. entered the war, according to Parsons, it did so only to ensure peace on its own terms,



providing military supplies in small amounts to its ally, Britain, to ensure its cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

The administration's economic plans, however, were interrupted by a new German tactic - the use of the submarine as a commerce raider. This new tactic was outlined in the German "war zone" declaration of February 4, 1915. This set up a U-boat blockade of Great Britain that challenged Wilson's right to trade with the Allies. Though more spectacular than the British blockade, it was nonetheless as illegal - as a reprisal - according to international law. For Wilson to acquiesce to the U-boat blockade, as he had in the British, would be tantamount to establishing an embargo - forcing the economic panic and political fallout that would follow. Wilson chose the path of least resistance, aiding the Allies in spite of the U-boat blockade, and moving the nation closer to war.

### Freedom of the Seas

For all the pointing to international law by belligerents in World War I, this field was largely undefined when it came to modern sea warfare in 1914. Only a few new maritime customs were recognized and added in the years between 1856 and 1865.

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<sup>26</sup>. Edward B. Parsons, Wilsonian Diplomacy: Allied-American Rivalries in War and Peace, (St. Louis: Forum Press, 1978).



The Declaration of Paris, following the Crimean War in 1856, attempted to define the meaning of naval blockade. The declaration stated that: "Blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective; that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy." In short, it could not be a "paper blockade" only by declaration - there had to be real ships out there enforcing it. The declaration did not specify where the ships must be stationed, but custom dictated they would be outside harbors at the three-mile territorial limit. Britain's blockade of Germany during World War I was a type of paper blockade, since its warships patrolled the seelanes instead of stationing themselves outside harbors (where they would be easy targets for U-boats).

The Declaration of Paris also called for protection of neutral property on enemy ships as well as enemy property on neutral ships - "free ships, free goods." This protection did not apply to contraband of war. There was no definition of contraband, except according to custom: absolute contraband, such as ammunition; conditional contraband, such as food or barbed wire, both of which could be used for peaceful or warlike purposes; and free goods or noncontraband, such as paper and soap, with no particular wartime use.

The American Civil War added a new dictum to international law - the doctrine of "continuous voyage."

Under continuous voyage, Union forces intercepted neutral cargoes bound to a neutral port, on the first leg of a voyage enroute to the enemy by a subsequent maritime route. Britain would later extend this to mean a subsequent overland route as well.

Thus international law often meant international custom or usage. Without explicit definitions, it usually meant the power with the biggest stick made the rules.

Efforts at more complete definitions and actual laws were made at the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, and at the London Naval Conference of 1909. "The Declaration of London" came out of the London Conference of 1909, but it was never fully ratified.

The Declaration of London's most important validation was the practice of continuous voyage. It protected neutral commerce in conditional contraband bound for neutral ports. The United States adopted the declaration after Senate ratification. Germany ratified the declaration, since it would ensure neutral trade and allow it to obtain supplies through neighboring neutral countries. Britain rejected the treaty for the same reasons Germany accepted it: the nation that "ruled the waves" did not want to give up its chance for absolute blockade. When Britain rejected the treaty, both America and Germany withheld ratification. The Declaration of London was simply a collection of opinions.

Samuel Bemis said an international lawyer could



outline seven points of maritime law for the leader of a neutral country in 1914:

- (1) 'Paper' blockades are illegal. A blockade to be binding must be effectively maintained by an 'adequate' naval force.
- (2) Even enemy goods are safe on a neutral ship, if they are not contraband and if they are not destined for a blockaded port: 'Free ships make free goods.'
- (3) Neutral goods are safe even on an enemy ship, if they are not contraband and if they are not destined for a blockaded port.
- (4) A fortiori, neutral goods are safe on a neutral ship but only if they are not contraband and if they are not destined for a blockaded port.
- (5) Contraband goods are divided into two categories: absolute and conditional.
- (6) Absolute contraband consists of goods exclusively used for war and destined for an enemy country, even if passing through a neutral country enroute; the law of 'continuous voyage' applies.
- (7) Conditional contraband consists of goods which may have a peaceful use but which are also susceptible to use in war and are destined for the armed forces or a government department of a belligerent state; the rule of 'continuous voyage' does not apply.<sup>27</sup>

This was the international maritime law that Wilson had at his disposal. What little international law was available, was violated almost immediately when war began.

On August 5, 1914 - the second day of the war - British warships discovered and sank a German minelayer off the coast of England. It was claimed the minelayer flew a neutral flag. Though by custom, using neutral flags as a ruse de guerre was an accepted practice, laying mines

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<sup>27</sup>. Bemis, Diplomatic History of the United States, p. 597.



outside a country's three-mile limit was not. The Hague Convention of 1907 banned such minelaying outside a country's territorial waters. Germany denied it was laying mines illegally, but pointed out the 1907 Hague Convention was not binding since it was not completely ratified.

Britain reached for its most potent weapon, the one it had successfully used against Napoleon, a complete economic blockade of Germany. Though never officially called a blockade, the action began with the August 20, 1914, Orders in Council. With that order, the British arbitrarily expanded the definition of absolute contraband to include items once considered conditional contraband or free goods—such as foodstuffs. Armed with wider limits for absolute contraband, the British Navy began intercepting American merchant ships (as well as those of other neutral countries), taking them to British ports for inspection. Prior custom dictated that merchant ships were to be inspected on the high seas, and allowed to proceed if free of contraband. Citing "exceptional" measures for an "unusual" war, Britain pulled merchantmen into ports for thorough inspections — including X-ray. If suspicious, authorities required neutral ships to remain for several weeks while evidence was collected against them. Mail was censored, and cargoes were confiscated so they could not be transshipped to Germany. Many confiscated cargoes were paid for by the British, others were not. Sometimes the British

government resold confiscated items for considerable profit.

The British tightened the screws slowly, keeping items such as cotton, turpentine, resin, and tobacco off the contraband list initially, so that large sections of the American public would not be angered. Britain hoped the economic war boom in America would be the carrot that would make the U.S. acquiesce to later, tighter controls. Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey wrote:

Blockade of Germany was essential to the victory of the Allies, but the ill-will of the United States meant their certain defeat ... The object of diplomacy, therefore, was to secure the maximum of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States.<sup>28</sup>

American protests were muted by actions on both sides of the Atlantic. On September 26, Lansing prepared a lengthy memo for Wilson, unusually critical of Britain's action. Registering "keen disappointment" over the way the Declaration of London was being ignored, Lansing said Britain's actions made "neutral trade between neutral ports dependent upon the pleasure of belligerents." Colonel House, who was dining with Wilson when the draft arrived, was: "shocked by the severity of the language in Lansing's draft note, perceived the significance of sending such a protest to London at this time, and urged Wilson not to permit it to be sent."<sup>29</sup> House obtained permission to meet with

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<sup>28</sup>. Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 157.

<sup>29</sup>. Link, Wilson, Vol. 3, p. 110.



Ambassador Sir Cecil Spring Rice to "get at the bottom of the controversy." The ambassador was shown the drafts and "was really astonished at the tone in one or two of the sentences." Patrick Devlin writes that:

The upshot was that Wilson himself settled a brief, firm, and friendly telegram as a basis for an informal and confidential talk; and Lansing went round after dinner on 29 September to see Spring Rice and to discuss with him ways and means of giving Britain what she wanted within the framework of the Declaration.<sup>30</sup>

What House did not scuttle on this side of the Atlantic, Ambassador Page took care of in England. During this period, Page's British sympathies "caused him to resist the (State Department) protests and at times suppress them."<sup>31</sup>

Encouraged by American acquiescence, the British government announced on October 2, that it was mining "designated areas" or "zones" of the North Sea. This was in retaliation for Germany's alleged illegal minelaying of August 5 (a retaliation, according to international law, is itself illegal). On November 3, the British declared the entire North Sea a "military area," where neutrals traveled at risk of destruction by additional mines.<sup>32</sup> All neutrals would have to call in British ports to pick up sailing

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<sup>30</sup>. Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup>. Joyce G. Williams, Colonel House and Sir Edward Grey: A Study in Anglo-American Diplomacy, (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup>. See Appendix, p. 221 .



instructions, or pilots, to negotiate the minefields. While there, of course, the ships could be inspected, delayed, and their cargoes seized.

The United States sent another mild protest on December 26:

The commerce between countries which are not belligerents should not be interfered with by those at war unless such interference is manifestly an imperative necessity to protect their national safety, and then only to the extent that it is a necessity.<sup>33</sup>

Great Britain argued that such methods were so necessary, and continued to expand its lists of contraband. Norway and other neutrals protested vigorously, but had not the navies to back them up.

Freedom of the seas, the very issue of the War of 1812 and the reason the United States would use to declare war against Germany in 1917, thus was being violated here with only mild American protest. When Germany declared her U-boat blockade against Britain in February, 1915, Wilson, by contrast, held that government to "strict accountability."

Many historians, like Barbara Tuchman in her book, Practicing History, argue that the British blockade caused only inconvenience. Property was seized, but it was usually paid for. No human lives were lost, where the U-boat blockade involved the killing of innocent civilians. Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan in their book, The Lusitania

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<sup>33</sup>. Bemis, Diplomatic History of the United States, p. 600.

Disaster, point to a fact seldom noticed by such historians: the British blockade did not take lives because the United States and other neutrals honored it by acquiescing to it (though under some protest). If American ships had tried to run the minefields on their own, the loss of life would have been heavy. The odds were suicidal. Neutrals protested the German blockade, but sailed through it because the odds were better that they could get through it than through the British minefields in the North Sea. Eight American merchant ships struck mines, assumed to be British, between early 1915 and the declaration of war on Germany in 1917: five were sunk, three were damaged, 4 people were killed (four of them Americans) and 14 injured. It is interesting to point out that during the same period the U-boat blockade took three American lives on a U.S. merchant ship. That ship, the Gulflight, was torpedoed, but not sunk on May 1, 1915. The 128 Americans lost on the Lusitania were on a British ship.<sup>34</sup>

The vicious circle of maritime retaliation was further widened with the German announcement on February 4, 1915, that "an area of war" existed in the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>35</sup> In a war already using such modern weapons as the airplane, poison gas, and the machine

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<sup>34</sup>. Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy, (New York: The Free Press, 1975), pp. 32-33.

<sup>35</sup>. See Appendix, p. 221 .



gun, the submarine was about to take its infamous place in military history - "a damned un-English weapon."

The German proclamation was direct. All enemy vessels found within the war zone would be destroyed, "without its always being possible to avoid" the loss of lives. This included both armed and unarmed merchant ships. Neutral countries were warned against "further entrusting crews, passengers and wares to such ships." Neutrals were further warned that they should stay clear of the area. Since British ships were flying neutral flags it was stated the torpedoing of neutral ships "cannot always be avoided." Berlin said that neutrals had brought this war zone on themselves, because their acquiescence in the British blockade had meant supply to England while Germans starved. Neutrals were given two weeks to clear the area. Britain used the German proclamation as an excuse to add more items to the list of absolute contraband. Almost all food items were now included.

In the early days of the war, the declaration of the submarine zone was more a German bluff than an ironclad barrier. By February, 1914, the Germans had approximately 20 U-boats - some of them experimental, and others suited strictly for coastal waters. Given maintenance requirements, and the long, dangerous journey through the British blockade, only a third of these U-boats could be on patrol. At any one time one-third would be on patrol, one-third



heading either to or from patrol, and the final third undergoing overhaul in port. Though initially a bluff, the U-boat fleet expanded each month, and by the end of the war its numbers almost accomplished the objective of strangling England. France and England had twice as many submarines, but since trade to Germany was all but cut off, they were never used as commerce raiders.

In 1914, only Allied ships were threatened by the Germans. The German government had obtained from the State Department the silhouettes and markings of major American cargo and passenger lines. Passenger carriers, such as the America Line, operated liners from New York to Britain weekly - up until the point of U.S. belligerency - without incident. Berlin hoped its warning would scare off neutral cargo trade to Britain, but had no plans to risk a breach with the United States by sinking an American ship. The declaration of "unrestricted" U-boat warfare did not come until January 31, 1917. The 1917 declaration, which said all ships - armed, unarmed, Allied, or neutral - would be sunk on sight, was the last straw forcing U.S. belligerency.

The official American response, penned by Lansing for Bryan's signature, was remarkably swift. The note to Berlin, issued February 9, stated:

If the commanders of German vessels of war should act upon the presumption that the flag of the United States was not being used in good faith and should destroy on the high seas an American vessel or the lives of American citizens, it would be difficult for the

Government of the United States to view the act in any other light than as an indefensible violation of neutral rights which it would be very hard indeed to reconcile with the friendly relations now so happily subsisting between the two Governments.

If such a deplorable situation should arise, the Imperial Government can readily appreciate that the Government of the United States would be constrained to hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability for such acts of their naval authorities and to take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property and to secure to American citizens the full enjoyment of their acknowledged rights on the high seas.<sup>36</sup>

This was a remarkably strong protest in light of British violations of U.S. maritime rights. Though Bryan pushed Wilson for a more even-handed approach with both belligerents, Britain continued to get gentle reminders, and Germany ultimatums.

Though thoroughly threatening in tone, the U.S. reply - which was edited by Wilson - was just a ambiguous. What did strict accountability mean? Germany would pay if its U-boats "should destroy on the high seas an American vessel or the lives of American citizens." What did this mean? Historians to this day have lamented the vague language. It undoubtedly eased the minds of Americans who booked passage on the Lusitania, even though passage on American ships was available.

The language in Wilson's warning was not clear. Surely a U-boat sinking an American ship with the loss of American

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<sup>36</sup>. Link, Wilson, Vol. 3, pp. 322-323.



lives was in trouble, but what of Americans lost on a belligerent ship? A tradition with strong roots in international law was the principle "the flag covers the decks." In the War of 1812, Madison argued that the American flag turned the wooden decks into American soil. Through the Civil War and beyond, maritime courts had respected that principle - cargo and passengers were the responsibility of the nation flying the flag.

When the Lusitania was lost, Wilson argued that "strict accountability" covered Americans wherever they sailed: even if on belligerents, even if the belligerents carried contraband (as did the Lusitania). Wilson was criticized - not only by the Germans - for making Americans "guardian angels" for belligerent ships. Today's scholars argue that Wilson's "strict accountability," if carried to a logical extreme, meant that Paris could not be shelled nor London bombed by Zeppelins if Americans were within the city limits. Wilson claimed immunity for Americans on British ships that British citizens could not claim for themselves.<sup>37</sup>

What was so upsetting about the submarine was that its technology was not adaptable to the old "cruiser rules" of international law concerning visit and search. Those rules, adopted during the days of sail, outlined specific requirements for commerce raiding. When approaching a

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<sup>37</sup>. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 39.



belligerent merchantman on the high seas, the raider was to fire a warning shot "across the bows," or somehow signal (ie. flags, megaphone) the ship to stop. Once stopped, the raider would send a boarding party in a small boat to inspect the merchant ship's papers and cargo. If carrying non-contraband, the ship could continue. If carrying contraband, or suspected contraband, the raider would send over a prize crew to take over the ship, guide it to a home or neutral port, and submit the ship and cargo to a prize court. During the Civil War, Confederate raiders, unable to use prize courts because of the Union blockade, began sinking vessels once the crew was safely evacuated.

If the merchant ship attempted to flee, resist, or if it was being convoyed by warships, it lost its immunity under cruiser rules. Such a ship could be sunk without further hesitation. But an unarmed, unresisting, ship could not be sunk until warned, identified, and passengers and crew safely evacuated.

During World War I, German surface raiders behaved much as the Confederate raiders of the Civil War. Cruiser rules were respected, merchant crews provided for, and vessels destroyed. But it was easy to see that Germany's U-boats would not be able to fulfill these requirements. Unlike the submarine of today, the U-boats of 1914 were small and fragile craft - averaging 500 tons and less than 200 feet in length. There was no heavy armor on the thin

outer hulls, and their surface speed averaged only 15 knots (British destroyers averaged 35 knots). A U-boat crew was too small to provide a prize crew (about 40 men), so it could only destroy its intended victim. Though initially respecting cruiser rules when attacking, the British response to the U-boat forced German commanders to sink without warning.

Admiral Fisher, Britain's First Sea Lord when the Lusitania was sunk, succinctly defined the U-boat issue:

There is nothing else the submarine can do except sink her capture, and it must therefore be admitted that (provided it is done, and however barbarious and inhuman it may appear) this submarine menace is a truly terrible one for British commerce and Great Britain alike, for no means can be suggested at present of meeting it except by reprisals ... it is freely acknowledged to be an altogether barbarous method of warfare but ... the essence of war violence; moderation in war is imbecility!<sup>38</sup>

In March, 1916, when retired from the British Admiralty, Fisher wrote to German Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, the chief advocate for all-out U-boat warfare (ignored in Germany at the time):

Dear Old Tirps! ... Cheer up, old chap! ... You're the one German sailor who understands War! Kill your enemy without being killed yourself. I don't blame you for the submarine business. I'd have done the same myself, only our idiots in England wouldn't believe it when I told 'em. Well! So long! Yours till hell

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<sup>38</sup>. Edwyn Gray, The Killing Time: The U-Boat War 1914-1918, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 20-21.



freezes, Fisher.<sup>39</sup>

The ship with the dubious distinction of being the first sunk by a submarine was the 866 ton British steamer Glitra. Bound to Norway from Scotland, she encountered the U-17 fourteen miles off the Norwegian coast. She was stopped and boarded, according to the cruiser rules, and her crew given ten minutes to abandon ship. Once her crew was safely away, the Germans opened up the sea-cocks (valves) and sunk her. The U-boat then towed the British lifeboats 15 minutes closer to shore.

Though initial encounters between U-boats and merchantmen (such as the Glitra) remained in accordance with international custom, British defense tactics soon forced a change.

The British Admiralty had issued a series of secret orders to British merchant captains on how to deal with German U-boats. The first, dated January 31, 1915, encouraged the use of neutral flags, and painting schemes designed to make a ship appear to be from a neutral country. The neutral of choice was the United States. In fact, the day before the orders were issued, the Lusitania had raised the American flag when nearing the Irish coast - Colonel House was aboard. The British claimed they raised it to warn U-boats that Americans were aboard. Though Bryan saw the opportunity for a firm protest to both belligerents, the

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39. Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 36.



Wilson Administration issued a mild protest - agreeing to "occasional" use of neutral flags to avoid destruction.

The British Admiralty issued its second set of secret orders on February 10, six days after the proclamation of the German war zone. These orders called on merchant skippers to attempt escape unless absolutely cornered. This included ramming the U-boat, or firing on it, if armed.

Britain had begun arming its merchant ships in 1913. Many such armed merchant ships, built to government specifications and paid for by government funds, were listed by the admiralty as auxiliary cruisers (the Lusitania was one such ship). By 1915, many, but by no means all, British merchantmen were armed. Guns were usually mounted on the bow or stern, sometimes along the sides.

Merchant captains, when encountering a hostile U-boat, were to attempt to flee - keeping the U-boat astern. By immediately turning away from a U-boat, only a narrow target would be exposed to torpedo attack (German U-boats also mounted deck guns, but early in the war they were of light caliber, and notoriously inaccurate on a heaving sea). While fleeing, stern mounted deck guns could be used to fend off the U-boat. Should the U-boat surface close ahead of the merchant ship, captains were instructed to bear down on it - using deck guns on the bow if possible. In this way, a U-boat would either be forced to crash dive or be rammed. Surfacing after such a crash dive, the U-boat would often be

well-astern of the fleeing merchant ship.

These tactics were remarkably effective against U-boats. Of eleven U-boats lost before May, 1915, eight were rammed. One British steamer, the 500-ton Thordis, rammed the U-6 off the south coast of England. The crew of the Thordis was awarded prize money from a London newspaper; the Captain received prize money, a lieutenant's commission in the Royal Navy Reserve, and the Distinguished Service Cross. The celebration was premature because the U-6, though damaged, was not sunk - and able to limp home. Germans commanders became more wary.

Though the Germans were aware of the existence of these admiralty orders by their mounting losses, actual copies were not obtained from a British ship until later (captains were instructed to destroy the orders before capture). Photographic reproductions of the British orders were given to American Ambassador James W. Gerard in Berlin. They did not reach Washington until December 30, 1915 - 7 months after the Lusitania went down. Bryan heard about British ramming orders from discussions with German-Americans. He cabled Page in London on April 12, 1915, to look into the matter. Page replied immediately that he had heard of no such orders.

In addition to the orders to ram, flee, and use false flags, the British made use of "Q" ships or "Mystery" ships. These were heavily armed warships disguised as unarmed,



neutral merchantmen by wooden facades and neutral paint. When a U-boat approached to board, or fire her deck gun, the screens were dropped and the Q-ship opened fire.

One such incident involved the Baralong, one of the most famous of these Q-ships. On August 19, 1915, three months after the Lusitania had sunk, the U-27 encountered the Nicosian off the south coast of Ireland. The 6,000 ton Nicosian was a British steamer carrying a load of army mules from New Orleans, with ten American muleteers. The U-27 surfaced, fired a warning shot, and allowed the crew to take to the lifeboats. As the U-27 began to fire on the abandoned steamer, another ship came into view. It appeared to be a small tramp steamer, with American flags - painted on two large billboards - hanging from its sides. The U-boat motored up to this new arrival for a closer look. When it was within 100 yards, the Baralong raised the British colors and began firing with 12 rapid-fire cannon. The U-boat sank immediately, and the Baralong fired on the Germans who remained in the water. Lansing, then Secretary of State, citing the conflicting statements of the 10 American muleteers, lodged no official protest.

Consequently, the war at sea in 1914-1915 was indeed brutal, but the brutality was not limited to one belligerent. As a result, German U-boat commanders, keeping in mind the orders of the British admiralty and the existence of Q-ships, began to attack without warning.



Three major incidents involving Americans on the high seas occurred prior to the sinking of the Lusitania. The first involved the British cargo-passenger ship Falaba, 4,800 tons, bound to West Africa from Liverpool. The encounter this ship would have with Baron von Forstner's U-28 would parallel, in some ways, the sinking of the Lusitania.

On March 28, 1915, one day out of Liverpool, the Falaba - flying no flag - encountered the U-28. The U-boat surfaced some three miles away, and signaled the Falaba to "stop and abandon ship." The British ship attempted to escape at full steam, but the U-boat caught up with her. Though lawfully able to sink a fleeing ship without further warning, the U-boat signaled again. This time the ship gave up and the 242 passengers and crew made for the lifeboats. Von Forstner gave the Falaba ten minutes, then extended this to 23 minutes (this both belligerents disputed). During the entire period, the Falaba's wireless operator was sending distress signals to the British coastal patrol - it also sent up distress rockets. A small flotilla of fishing trawlers approached, though they were well out of gun range. Whether conservative or ruthless, Von Forstner fired a torpedo into the stern of the ship. There was a great explosion of either ammunition or the boilers, and the ship went down in eight minutes. An American, Leon Thrasher, was among the 104 people killed.

The Falaba, like the Lusitania, carried ammunition, sank quickly; and carried Americans. Like the Lusitania it was disputed what caused the internal explosion: Britain said boilers; Germany said gunpowder. And finally, like the Lusitania, the British board of inquiry laid total blame for the sinking on the U-boat captain and the policies of the German government. The fact that the Falaba resisted was not publicly released until later, so that the incident appeared a wanton act of cruelty.

Though a challenge to the policy of "strict accountability," no official protest over the Falaba was sent from Washington. Facts were in dispute: the ship had carried munitions, it had been warned, and only one American passenger had been killed. Added to this was the dispute between Bryan and Lansing over "contributory negligence"-whether or not Americans took their chances when sailing on belligerents. Bryan wanted Americans warned to stay off such ships in the interest of neutrality. Lansing who authored "strict accountability," said they should be able to go where they pleased with U.S. protection. No protest was issued until May, when the Falaba was lumped in with the Lusitania protest. In Germany's eyes, however, the silence meant one of two things: "strict accountability" applied only to U.S. merchant ships, or it was a bluff.

On April 29, an American oil tanker was bombed by a German seaplane in the North Sea off the Dutch coast. The



Cushing, bound for the Netherlands from New York, was hit by one of the three bombs dropped - causing slight damage and no injuries. The case of the Cushing also merged with the Lusitania, but it was subsequently seen by the Germans as a mistake in judgement. The ship flew the Stars and Stripes, but it had no other markings, and could not be seen from the air. The United States accepted this explanation.

On May 1, 1915, the day the Lusitania left New York for the last time, the American tanker Gulflight was torpedoed off the south coast of Ireland. The ship was bound for Rouen, France, out of Port Arthur, Texas, with a cargo of oil. In an area close to where the Falaba was sunk, and where the Lusitania would meet her fate, the captain of the Gulflight had asked British patrol boats where a French harbor pilot might be obtained. The British patrol suspected the tanker of refueling U-boats in the area, and began to escort it to the nearest port. The U-30, commanded by Captain von Rosenberg-Gruszczyński, surfaced and attempted to halt the convoy. One of the patrol boats attempted to ram the U-boat, which then crash-dived. When the U-30 resurfaced, the crew fired a torpedo at the tanker which it thought was part of a British convoy. The torpedo exploded, but with very little damage. However, two American crewmen panicked, jumped overboard, and drowned. When Von Rosenberg saw the Stars and Stripes on the Gulflight's stern, he abandoned his attack. Later that night, the Gulflight's



captain died of a heart attack. The three dead crewmen were the only Americans killed on an American ship from the outbreak of the war in Europe until Washington broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on March 16, 1917.

The attack on the Gulflight, like that on the Cushing, was a mistake of war. The Germans apologized in both cases, and later paid damages in the case of the Gulflight. The Gulflight was also lumped in with the first U.S. protest after the sinking of the Lusitania.

After looking at the 1915 foreign policies of Britain, Germany, and the United States, as well as the international maritime law of the period, it is easy to see why the debate over the Lusitania continues. Such a review is essential, however, to an understanding of the complex issues surrounding the sinking. The study will now build on this foundation, with a review of the systems of censorship and propaganda that affected the news of the Lusitania that reached the United States, and the seven newspapers of this study that had to report it.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE AMERICAN PRESS

### Censorship and Propaganda

The role of censorship and propaganda in World War I is one of the best researched aspects of the conflict. Though every belligerent in the struggle had some system controlling censorship and propaganda, the major ones that influenced America were Great Britain and Germany. A brief review is required in order to study American newspapers during the neutrality period.

The battle for the hearts and minds of Americans began immediately after the outbreak of the war. Great Britain made the first move - a decisive one in propaganda terms. On August 5, 1914, England cut the trans-Atlantic cables between Germany and the United States. From that moment on, all war news - all European news of any kind - bound for the United States would have to pass through London and one of the most elaborate censorship apparatuses the world had ever seen.

The cutting of the trans-Atlantic cable was the most visible aspect of an elaborate British plan for disinformation. The planning for this operation took place a year before the outbreak of the war. In 1913 the government formed a Joint Consultative Committee of Admiralty, War Office, and Press for the purpose of planning wartime



censorship. This Press Censorship Committee, as it was also known, was replaced in 1916 with the Press Bureau - but the mission was always the same: "supervise, largely on a voluntary basis, issue of news to and by the press."<sup>1</sup> This "voluntary" press censorship board was reinforced by intelligence and censorship bureaus in every government agency.

The Defense of the Realm Act was enacted by Parliament at the outbreak of the war in 1914. This law armed British censors with control over "all statements intended or likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign powers." Such general language gave British censors sweeping powers over the press. Phillip Knightley in his book, The First Casualty, discussed the results of this censorship power:

It was a routine designed with two ostensible ends in view: to enable the public to have a picture of its army at the front, but at the same time to prevent the publication of any information that might be of use to the enemy. But, of course, these were not the real aims. The real aims were, first, to provide colourful stories of heroism and glory calculated to sustain enthusiasm for the war and ensure a supply of recruits for the front and, second, to cover any mistakes the high command might make, preserve it from criticism in its conduct of the war, and safeguard the reputations of its generals.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Dictionary of Official War-Time Organizations, quoted in H.C. Peterson, Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917, (The University of Oklahoma Press, 1939; reprint ed., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), p. 13.

2. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 97.



Such an accusation could be hurled at any one of the belligerents in the field, but it applied especially to the British, since London was the gatekeeper of all news to America. Once news dispatches reached London, the British government could re-censor items already censored by the French, Germans, Austrians, and Russians. Though there were some other ways to get news to America - mail, wireless radio, smuggling, and circuitous cable routes - the fastest, and most reliable route was via London. The rush for news beats often gave reporters no other choice. The British noose on news was extremely tight, however, as the Defense of the Realm Act allowed all means of communication - even mail- to be censored.

Negative actions by the British government were coupled with "positive reinforcement" - censorship went hand in hand with propaganda and disinformation. In September, 1914, the government authorized the British Foreign Office to form a War Propaganda Bureau. Installed in Wellington House, the office of an insurance firm, the group was responsible for all war propaganda - especially that aimed at the United States. The responsibilities of Wellington House were many and varied:

Wellington house was ... concerned with the production, translation and distribution of books, pamphlets, government publications, speeches and so forth dealing with the war, its origin, its history and all the varied and difficult questions which arose during its development; the production and distribution of special pictorial papers; assisting in the

placing of articles and interviews designed to influence opinion in the world's newspapers and magazines, especially in America; the wide distribution of pictorial matter, cartoons, pictures and drawings, photographs for insertion in newspapers and periodicals and for exhibition; the production and distribution of cinematograph films; personal correspondence with influential people abroad, especially in America; arrangements for the interchange of visits, of personal tours to neutral and allied countries and of visits of distinguished neutrals and of representatives of the Allies to this country; the production and distribution of maps, diagrams, posters, lantern slides and lectures, pictures, postcards, and all other possible means of miscellaneous propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the propaganda handled by officials from Wellington House involved stories of German war atrocities. Germany did not help its own public relations effort when it invaded neutral Belgium at the war's outbreak, calling the neutrality accord it had signed "a scrap of paper." The British capitalized on this brutal invasion of a neutral country by inventing atrocity stories about the type of warfare conducted by the Germans. Wellington House arranged lectures, books and pamphlets by "experts" detailing such grotesque stories as: public gang rapes of Belgian women, the crucifixion of Allied troops, and German soldiers cutting off the hands of young children. Though the essence of war is violence, and the German advance across Belgium caused civilian casualties, various sources have estimated that 90 percent of these atrocity stories were false. All

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<sup>3</sup>. "An Aspect of British Official War-Time Propaganda," quoted in Peterson, Propaganda for War, p. 17.



the belligerents - including the British and French-inflicted their share of civilian casualties.

Members of Wellington House made use of British friends of Theodore Roosevelt, J.P. Morgan, Colonel House, and other prominent Americans, in a letter writing campaign stressing Anglo-American ties. Speaking tours were arranged for British "experts" to travel to the United States on lecture tours - usually giving the lurid accounts of German atrocities. Well-appointed chateaus near the war front were made available to British and American VIPs - especially writers - for tours of the front. The well-orchestrated tours, along with briefings, convinced such people as Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells of the righteousness of the Allied cause.

The all-encompassing British propaganda effort was strengthened by the fact that, at the war's outbreak, many journalists from American news organizations were pro-Allied anyway:

For years the American public had received its day-by-day picture of Europe through a distinctly British perspective. Few American newspapers at that time maintained European staffs of their own; while those which did found few trained American foreign correspondents to man them. There were one or two capable American newspapermen in Berlin, but there were probably none at all in St. Petersburg, while even the Paris correspondents concentrated mainly upon social and artistic news rather than political reporting. Both our newspapers and press associations tended to cover European politics from London. Their London bureaus had general supervision over the correspondents on the Continent; the news was largely assembled in



London bureaus and forwarded by them. It was often heavily filled out with information or 'background' material derived from the British newspapers and magazines simply because they had so much better sources than the American staff ... The New York Times, which perhaps gave more serious attention to European events than any other American newspaper, had an Englishman, Mr. Ernest Marshall, as the head of its London bureau, and his subordinates were largely Britishers. Its Berlin correspondent, Mr. Frederick William Wile, was an American, but the Times shared him with Northcliffe's [London] Daily Mail, a leader in the anti-German propaganda in England. The New York World's London correspondent was an Irishman who had never worked in the United States; his staff, like Mr. Marshall's, was largely composed of British newspapermen. So was that of the [New York] Sun. Those correspondents who were American citizens, moreover, had often lived so long abroad as to absorb the British viewpoint. The dean of the American correspondents in London, Mr. Edward Price Bell of the Chicago Daily News, had arrived fresh from college, to remain there for the rest of his active life, and it was naturally impossible for the others not to reflect the atmosphere by which they were daily surrounded.' The result was 'that the American view of Europe was normally and unavoidably colored very deeply by the British attitude.'<sup>4</sup>

The collar of British censorship was tight, their propaganda extremely effective, and American reporters inclined to favor the Allies - but the Germans were initially able to deliver a strong disinformation counterpunch.

The British controlled all European cable traffic and mail bound for the United States. Smuggling dispatches by boat - though often a way major stories were broken - was

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<sup>4</sup>. Road to War, America 1914-1917, quoted in Peterson, Propaganda for War, p. 6.

unreliable and slow. But the Marconi wireless radio used thin air to deliver its message - and not even the tight British noose could control the airwaves. The wireless was an important means of communication between Berlin and America.

During the early days of the war Germany was winning - her troops raced across Belgium and into France. The German government was anxious to exploit this good news, and show the efficiency and superior fighting spirit of the German soldier. Thus it initially allowed correspondents free rein along the war front. German censors, facing only news stories telling of victory in the field, cut only the bare amount of information - such as unit strengths and specific casualty figures. Wireless stations in Berlin broadcast these dispatches throughout the world. For awhile, Americans had in-depth news and feature stories of the war's early campaigns. This forced the British to somewhat ease their restrictions on the activities of combat journalists. It accredited five correspondents - one carefully chosen American - to accompany units into the field (though under tight censorship requirements that allowed only upbeat feature stories).

But the early German victories were soon supplanted by the attrition tactics of trench warfare as the armies bogged down in France - here success was measured in yards instead of miles. Without good news, the Germans became as strict as



the British - correspondents were no longer able to roam the front.

German censorship was less subtle, and somewhat more harsh than the British. The Berlin government took direct control of all German newspapers. Where an enterprising British paper might be able to work a watered-down story past the military censor, the German papers could not. In effect, the government in Berlin made its own news. This policy would later boomerang on Berlin officials during the last days of the war when German citizens revolted against the government that covered up the magnitude of its losses.

Like the British, the Germans made an effort at positive propaganda aimed at America. Coordinated by the German Embassy in Washington, the propaganda effort enlisted noted German leaders - such as Dr. Bernard Dernburg, former director of the German government's Colonial Office - to arrange pro-German speakers, books and pamphlets, movies, and editorial columns. The effort enlisted the help of the many German-Americans in the United States - the powerful German-American Alliance was a prominent U.S. lobby group that helped promote the German cause. The German propaganda effort struck a responsive cord among Americans of German and Irish descent, and other citizens with no love for England.

But the German effort was clumsy, largely because of cultural differences, a lack of public relations skill, and



little coordination between military and propaganda strategies.

The German military was often its own worst enemy. Not only did Germany try to stem the flow of American munitions to England by its U-boat campaign - it sent saboteurs to attack the sources. Several U.S. munitions factories and warehouses were destroyed during the neutrality period, and the Justice Department later uncovered many other German plots. This did nothing to help the German cause in America.

In Belgium, many members of a violent underground movement against the German occupation were women. When such women were taken prisoner, they were legitimately - as spies and saboteurs - shot by firing squad. The German army rightly defended its action, but had no conception of its public relations mistake which gave the British propagandists a field day. Though most of the German atrocity stories were untrue, Prussian military efficiency did little to help their cause on the world stage. The sinking of the Lusitania itself was the biggest German propaganda blunder of the war. Though technically within their rights under international law to sink a ship like the Lusitania, the German Admiralty had no conception of the wrath brought on by the spectacular act of sinking an ocean liner with women and children aboard.

The weather even turned against the Germans. The

atmospheric conditions required for German wireless to reach the United States occurred only during the cool fall and winter months. Half the year - spring and summer - the Germans were at the mercy of the British cable censors in London. The sinking of the Lusitania occurred in May when the long-distance wireless was practically useless.

### Reporting the War

A flood of new war correspondents hit Europe after the outbreak of hostilities but all of them chafed under the wartime press restrictions. As the war bogged down in the trench warfare of the western and eastern fronts, all belligerents banned unescorted journalists from viewing the scenes of battle - especially those journalists not officially accredited. Unescorted correspondents wandering the front in search of news were subject to arrest and execution as spies. Though many were arrested, however, there is no record of any war correspondents being executed. Troublesome reporters failed to receive special tours or pre-arranged interviews.

Official accreditation was hard to come by. France required French citizenship and language fluency before correspondents were accredited (this was eased later). Germany required journalists to sign an oath that their stories would remain unchanged while passing from the hands



of the censors in Berlin to the pages of their newspapers. British accreditation was based on a check of the correspondent's background, and required that no stories be written that mentioned regiments by name and places (except in vague terms), and any officers other than the commander-in-chief. In almost all cases the correspondents were treated extremely well when they played by the rules. They lived and filed their stories in large group houses near the front - where fine food and drink were provided. War information officers accompanied them at all time in the field, providing well-orchestrated tours of the front. Phillip Knightley described the correspondent's daily routine on the British front:

The correspondents soon settled down into a routine. On the day that an attack was scheduled, they drew lots to see who would cover which area. Each then set out in his chauffeur-driven car, accompanied by his conducting officer. They went as close to the front as possible, watched the preliminary bombardment, got into the backwash of prisoners and walking wounded, interviewed anyone they could, and tried to piece together a story. Back at their quarters, the correspondents held a meeting, and each man outlined the narrative part of his story, keeping any personal impressions for his own dispatch. They then retired to their own rooms, wrote their pieces, and submitted them to the waiting censors. What the censors left was given to a dispatch rider, who took the message to Signals at G.H.Q [General Headquarters], where they were telephoned to the War Office and sent from there by hand to the various newspapers' offices.<sup>5</sup>

Many reporters joked that the only accurate, unaltered

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<sup>5</sup>. Knightley, The First Casualty, pp. 96-97.



fact they could get past the censors was the weather. Added to these news gathering conditions were the flood of "official communiques" provided by the belligerent governments. These communiques, the only battle reports allowed to be circulated, often had no basis in reality-skewing casualty figures and calling retreats "strategic repositioning." Such government policies took their toll on the quality of the writing from the front. An American journalist said:

In general the World War correspondents felt they were writing pretty fine stuff, stuff worthy of the romantic war correspondent of an earlier day ... Few of them stopped to think the matter through. The censorship irked them and they hated it at first, but gradually they grew used to it and wrote what they could, working up all the 'human interest stuff' available and learning quickly that the censors loved it and almost invariably passed it - provided it said nothing about the drinking, stealing and rugged amours ... Dragooned into thinking about and observing the war in terms of what would get printed he [the correspondent] went on exuding larger and larger gobs of slush, to the continual delight of the appreciative censor, the supreme satisfaction of his managing editor and the glory of the paper that had sent him.<sup>6</sup>

It has been said that had there been adequate press coverage of the American Civil War it would not have lasted as long as it did. The same can be said of World War I. Wartime restrictions meant that hundreds of important stories were missed. Supplies were so short that thousands

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<sup>6</sup>. "Front Page Stuff: 1918," quoted in Joseph J. Mathews, Reporting the Wars, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1957), pp. 157-158.

of men marched into battle without rifles. Generals, fighting 20th Century weapons with 19th Century strategy, sent wave after wave of men "over the top" of the trenches in a cruel war of attrition. The French alone lost five million men by the end of the war.

Some major war stories were broken in spite of the censor, such as British reporting of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, but these were the exception rather than the rule. The British and French correspondents generally answered the call of patriotism, making their censors happy. It was usually the Americans who got into trouble - many were arrested and jailed for trying to circumvent wartime press restrictions. Some American journalists - volunteers at that point from a neutral country - left the wartime restrictions in Europe and returned home for more substantial work. This left the American people with less information - just when they needed it the most. Though many war correspondents wrote books after the war denouncing the censorship and propaganda, few organized protests occurred during the conflict.

### The American Press: The Seven Selected Newspapers

With few correspondents overseas at the beginning of the war in August, 1914, Americans began arriving in Europe soon after. Many reporters were assigned the war beats, many



others volunteered to cover the war - in search of romance and action. Almost all the Americans ran afoul of wartime press restrictions, and it was only after they returned home that they could freely publish in-depth stories. One group of Americans, who had traveled with the German army in Belgium, was strongly condemned in the British press for publishing a story disputing the atrocity stories coming out of the invasion of that country. Until America entered the war, U.S. correspondents shuttled back and forth to Europe - usually leaving the war theater when disillusioned with its press restrictions. But the reporters with the major news services - among them the Associated Press, United Press, International News Service, and New York Times News Service - remained throughout the war.

At home, a Literary Digest poll of leading American editors in the third month of the war showed 240 neutral, 105 pro-Ally, and 20 pro-German. How scientific this 1914 poll was is open to question. However, it is often cited by journalism historians as a measure of the editorial viewpoint of the neutrality period. After reviewing the literature, however, it appears to this writer that "pro-German" was in the eye of the beholder - those editors and newspapers who sought to balance their coverage between Allied and Central Powers were labeled "pro-German."

It is important here to restate the method of examination used. Seven newspapers were chosen for this



study based on their geographic locations and political prominence: the New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Examiner, Washington Post, Kansas City Star, and Milwaukee Journal. The Times was chosen for its reputation as a paper of record, and because New York marked the Lusitania's last point of departure. The Constitution was chosen as one of the most prominent and respected dailies of the south. The Tribune was selected not only as prominent mid-western paper, but as one of the most notorious American dailies favoring the Republican Party - a paper opposing the policies of Woodrow Wilson. The Examiner was used as a representative from the west coast, and as a paper owned by William Randolph Hearst, a man with an enormous affect on the journalism of this period. The Post was selected because of the importance of Washington in the foreign policy process. The Star was selected because of its prominence in the western farm states - "America's Heartland." The Journal was chosen because the majority of its city's population was made up of German immigrants. It was felt that these papers represented most political shades of opinion in the United States of 1915. Thus a firm foundation for a study of this type.

Each paper was studied before, during, and after the crisis, in order to determine any change in editorial policy or outlook. The papers were examined six months prior to the sinking of the Lusitania, that is, the first week in

November 1914 (Nov. 1 - 7). The papers were examined during the crisis itself, from the sinking on May 7, 1914, through the exchange of three diplomatic notes ending February 4, 1916. To cover this crisis period, every issue in May, June, July, and the first two weeks in August were examined. The final U.S. protest note was sent on July 21, 1915, and was not answered until February 4, 1916. Therefore, to cover the final German response, the first two weeks of February, 1916 (Feb. 1 - 14), were also examined. The papers were studied six months after this final exchange of notes, during the week of August 1 - 7, 1916. A total of 134 issues per paper.

This review of each newspaper included an examination of: the first seven pages of each paper, the unsigned editorials expressing the view of the editorial staff, and any letters to the editor, when published, that dealt with the sinking. This study used descriptive analysis to determine degrees of difference, or biases, in the news coverage of each paper. Therefore, a formal content analysis - the counting and categorizing of each story, picture, map, diagram, editorial, and letter - was unnecessary.

The first seven pages were examined to see how the same story received coverage in each newspaper. This included headline, placement, size, and content - along with any graphics used. Six months before, and six months after the sinking, the news of the European war was analyzed in this way. During the crisis, news of the sinking itself was

the focus of study.

As there was much comment on the many aspects of the war in Europe, only unsigned editorials and letters to the editor specifically mentioning the Lusitania were reviewed during the crisis period of May, 1915, through February, 1916. Six months prior to the sinking (November, 1914), and six months after the final German note (August 1916), general war editorials and letters to the editor were reviewed to obtain the papers' views on foreign policy issues.

The remainder of this chapter will provide a brief history of each newspaper studied, as well as the news coverage and editorial viewpoint of each paper six months prior to the sinking of the Lusitania.

### New York Times

The New York Times was the most pro-Ally of the papers used in this study. Many journalism historians write of the Times as if Moses brought it down the Mountain with the Ten Commandments. Yet in World War I it was hardly "All the News That's Fit to Print."

The Times was founded in 1851 as a paper following the tenets of the Whig Party. With the demise of the Whigs, it moved from the Free Soilers to the Republican party before the Civil War - all the while advocating the conservative



industrial and banking interests of the northeast. Owner-editor Henry J. Raymond wrote the first Republican party platform in 1856. But Raymond dabbled too much in party politics and the Times began to suffer. Without adequate leadership from Raymond, and leaderless after his death in 1869, the Times - though providing copious amounts of news - appeared dull compared to its rivals. It was also more expensive. The Times went into receivership in 1895.

Editorial page editor Charles R. Miller, a stalwart leader during this period, then brought to the Times Tennessee newspaperman Adolph S. Ochs. A success in Tennessee, Ochs desired work in New York and had heard of the Times financial troubles - Miller urged stockholders to give Ochs a chance. In 1896, Ochs agreed to a deal allowing him controlling interest in the paper should he make it successful in three years.

Much has been written of Ochs by journalism historians, again as if he had strolled down the Mountain with Moses. He was a solid editor - but above all he was a smart businessman. In 1896 he published his declaration of purpose:

It will be my earnest aim that the New-York Times give the news, all the news, in concise and attractive form, in language that is parliamentary in good society, and give it as early, if not earlier, than it can be learned through any other reliable medium; to give the news impartially, without fear of favor, regardless of any party, sect or interest involved; to make the columns of the New-York

Times a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Frank Luther Mott has said that the motto "All the News That's Fit to Print" was aimed at the tawdry "yellow" journals of Hearst and Pulitzer. But Ochs was smart enough to know what sold newspapers - and he copied some of their methods. Pictures were used more frequently, headlines stretched across pages, some crime stories were printed, and the Times financed its share of foreign expeditions - including one to the Arctic. The paper's readership was the solid New York businessman, and it reported widely on news that affected business: foreign news, financial news, economic forecasts and government policy. It became a leader - and a paper of record - for printing important speeches and government documents in their entirety. At the outbreak of World War I, it printed "white papers" from each belligerent's foreign office, explaining their individual causes. The Times did it share of muckraking, but only when business was adversely affected - it vigorously opposed the Tweed Ring in Tammany Hall, but opposed anti-trust legislation just as strongly. Ochs modeled his paper after the Times of London, and shared much of its foreign news.

This is evident in a review of the New York Times six months before the sinking of the Lusitania. A review of the

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<sup>7</sup>. Meyer Berger, The Story of the New York Times: 1851-1951, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), pp. 107-108.



contents of the first week of November, 1914, revealed much about the paper's editorial viewpoint.

At least the first five pages of the Times contained war news from Europe - often stretching to pages six and seven. Most of the front page was devoted to war news, which usually made up the lead stories. Stories of national or local news appeared beyond pages five and six, including the jumps from page one. An exception to this was the late-breaking election news of this first week in November. The Times war news included pictures, maps, and analysis - one standing feature, "The War Situation," was written "by a military expert of the New York Times, (An associate Editor of the Army and Navy Journal)."<sup>8</sup> War news usually included its route to the Times - "via Marconi wireless" or "via cable from London." Few reporters had by-lines. The Times relied on its own worldwide news service - few stories were credited to the Associated Press or United Press. The editorials were usually located on page ten. The editorials shared space with letters to the editor, columnists, and "Topics of the Times" (short, unsigned editorials). There were no editorial cartoons.

The only balance to be found in the pro-British Times of November, 1914, was in its letters to the editor. Published letters always balanced British and German

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<sup>8</sup>. This regular feature of the Times always appeared on page 3.



interests - with writers attacking the Times from both sides. The rest of the paper was shamelessly pro-British. War news compared the brutal efficiency of the Germans with the heart and courage of the Allies. Stories of the military movements of both sides - as far as the censors would allow - were given equal status on the front page.

But most of the Times' war news was obtained via cable from London - even news from Berlin (few stories came by German wireless) - so the British angle was highlighted. The pages of the Times were filled with features highlighting German atrocities or the pluck of the Allied fighting man. Stories of Germany emphasized the brutal efficiency of her armies - burning and raping their way across Belgium. The few German features stories that were printed emphasized only German weakness - such as the lack of adequate ambulance service at the fronts.<sup>9</sup>

Allied features stories were all over the first seven pages, highlighting courageous British nurses or brave French fliers: BOLD AIRMAN PLAYS HIS GAME WITH GLEE - SWOOPS DOWN ON GERMAN CAMP AND ESCAPES - FINDS FOE'S BATTERY AND WINS GENERAL'S PRAISE.<sup>10</sup> Editorials were just as biased. An editorial of November 5 praised the British Treasury for raising money for the war effort - and urged America to

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<sup>9</sup>. New York Times, 5 November 1914, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid., p. 2.

grant loans to the Allies.<sup>11</sup> A November 3 editorial discussed the effectiveness of Allied submarine nets: "... a convenient and effective means of reducing these much-dreaded little assassins to helplessness."<sup>12</sup>

### Washington Post

The Washington Post was more balanced in its coverage of the war than the Times, but had a character all its own. The Post was founded as a Democratic paper in 1877 by Stilson Hutchins and it quickly became very popular in the city. In 1889, Hutchins sold the paper to Frank Hatton, former Postmaster General, and Beriah Wilkins, a member of Congress from Ohio. Hatton was a Republican and Wilkins a Democrat, so the paper took on a distinctive, independent approach to the news. The paper became a well respected daily - noted for muckraking at the local level, and in-depth political news. By 1905, however, both Hatton and Wilkins had died. The Post was sold to a publisher, politician, and businessman from Cincinnati - John R. McLean.

McLean was a survivor of several political battles in Ohio - a Democrat in an overwhelmingly Republican state who came close to winning the governor's race in 1899. McLean

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>. New York Times, 3 November 1914, p. 10.

took over the reins of the Cincinnati Enquirer from his father in 1880. His father, Washington McLean, had owned the paper since 1857. John McLean was a Democrat, but from the conservative side of that party - backing industrial and financial interests. He was also a wealthy man, and used to boast that he even made his father pay for his Enquirer subscription.<sup>13</sup> The Enquirer was a major Democratic daily of the midwest, a paper to be reckoned with in the politics of the Ohio valley. McLean moved to Washington in 1884, balancing his business interests between the two cities. At the time he bought the Post in 1905, McLean owned controlling interest in the Washington Gas Light Company, American Security and Trust Company, Riggs National Bank, and a streetcar line - the Old Dominion Railway.<sup>14</sup>

McLean was a good friend of William Randolph Hearst, and like Hearst, knew how to sell newspapers. Both the Post and Enquirer published lurid crime stories, colorful comics, sports news, and Sunday magazines and used bold headlines. But the Post's reputation began to decline under McLean. Foreign news came almost exclusively from the wire services, and the conservative publisher put a stop to business muckraking. The Post was an eastern newspaper with many southern traditions. Therefore, like the Times, the Post

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<sup>13</sup>. Chalmers M. Roberts, The Washington Post: The First 100 Years, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1977), p. 85.

<sup>14</sup>. Ibid., p. 85.



lauded American business and trade interests; and like the Atlanta Constitution, it espoused many rural ideals and protected agricultural interests - particularly cotton. Though a Democrat, McLean was suspicious of Wilson's progressive "New Freedom" legislation - and remained a distant critic of the administration.

The Post of the first week of November, 1914, unlike the Times, provided balanced coverage of the war in Europe. Part of this due no doubt to McLean's Cincinnati background - a midwestern city, largely German and Irish. The Post openly criticized British war policies, but was no strong advocate for the German cause either. Some historians, such as Frank Luther Mott and Edwin Emery, have labeled the paper "anti-British." The Post was, more accurately, fiercely pro-American - backing U.S. neutrality and calling for armed preparedness.

The front page of the Post was usually a mix of war, national and local news - with war news often getting half the space. War news dominated until page three or four, where national and local news began. War stories centered on military movements and analysis, yet there were few of the syrupy feature stories of sacrifice and heroism - the few that did appear highlighted both sides. Stories of Allied or German victories and defeats - though censored - were given equal placement in the paper. Like the Times, the Post published side-by-side communiques from the belligerent

governments. During the week of November 1 - 7, 1914, it was the German and French. The Post's local and national news was highlighted by several "man bites dog" stories-oddities to attract reader's interest: a Wilmington, Delaware, man swallowed his false teeth,<sup>15</sup> or a local burglar left his own book review in the library of a local house.<sup>16</sup> The Post contained more community news in its first seven pages than did the Times. Stories had few by-lines, and, like the Times, stories attributed their routes to the paper - such as, "Paris, via cable from London."

The Post's editorial page was not as comprehensive as the Times. Letters to the editor were supplanted by daily short interviews with Washington visitors - giving their hometown views on major issues. The editorial page also contained daily humorous excerpts from newspapers and magazines across the country. The editorials themselves were comprehensive and generally balanced. A November 2 editorial urged caution and skepticism when reading atrocity stories from both sides - without a way to find out who's telling the truth, let history be the judge, it argued.<sup>17</sup> An editorial on November 4 criticized both Germany and Britain for restricting neutral trade - though admitting Britain

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15. Washington Post, 2 November 1914, p. 1.

16. Washington Post, 6 November 1914, p. 5.

17. Washington Post, 2 November 1914, p. 6.

seemed "more reasonable" about it.<sup>18</sup> A theme running throughout the Post's editorials was armed preparedness-staying out of the war, but being strong enough to keep European powers from tangling with America. The Post constantly urged Congress to build up the nation's coastal defenses.

### San Francisco Examiner

Another preparedness advocate was McLean's friend William Randolph Hearst. By 1914, Hearst's San Francisco Examiner was part of a chain of morning and evening dailies that included papers in New York, Boston, and Chicago. The Examiner had been Hearst's springboard to journalistic fame. He had inherited the paper from his millionaire father in 1891. While he was in San Francisco Hearst admired and imitated the new, sensational journalism of Joseph Pulitzer's New York World - some would say he perfected it. In 1895, Hearst bought the New York Journal and began to compete with Pulitzer on his home ground - New York - the nation's most influential newspaper city. Much has been written of the 19th Century journalistic escapades of Hearst: the circulation war with Pulitzer, the sensationalism of the "yellow" press, and the adventure of the Spanish-American War.

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<sup>18</sup>. Washington Post, 4 November 1914, p. 6.



By 1914, however, Hearst's brand of journalism had toned down a bit. Several factors contributed to his change. Hearst's papers delivered vicious, and personal, editorial attacks on William McKinley as a candidate, and as president. When McKinley was assassinated in 1901, there was a strong public backlash against Hearst. Many said his editorials created the climate for the murder. Hearst also entertained strong political ambition. Hearst, aligning himself with the Democratic machine of New York's Tammany Hall, was elected to Congress in 1902 and 1904. He sought the party's presidential nomination in 1904, but came up short of delegates in a tough convention fight. Hearst ran, and lost, for the job of mayor of New York in 1905. In 1906, he obtained the Democratic nomination for New York governor - but lost to Republican Charles Evans Hughes. In 1909 Hearst ran again for mayor of New York and lost. In 1910 he tried unsuccessfully for the job of lieutenant governor. Such political activity, by means of which he sought the presidency, forced him to become a man of compromise. Finally, by 1914, Hearst had become a millionaire many times over. He was now a more mature businessman, and began looking out for his own interests. Hearst saw in the European war a chance to allow Britain to weaken economically and allow the U.S. to fill the void. The war could be a boon for American business, his interest, in gaining new markets abroad. All these factors combined to

temper Hearst's role in World War I - it would not be his "splendid little war" as had been the one in Cuba.

This did not mean Hearst was a passive force during the period of U.S. neutrality. He was one of the first publishers to seize on the issue of American preparedness - calling for better coastal defenses and a larger navy. He openly criticized British trade policies, especially wartime restrictions preventing U.S. growth and profits. Critics pointed to his German investments and labeled him "pro-German." He was hung in effigy for his anti-Ally views, and the New York Tribune pictured him as a snake, coiled in the American flag hissing "Hears-ss-ss-t." By 1916, the British found an official reason to deny Hearst's International News Service use of the trans-Atlantic cable.

The San Francisco Examiner of November 1 - 7, 1914, still used many of the sensational techniques made famous by its owner in 1896. The paper still used occasional banner headlines, and kept readers abreast of the lurid crimes and other news oddities of its region. The paper included many pictures, drawings and maps. War news made up most of the front page, and continued through page three - where local and national news took over. The Examiner published daily the "official statements" - communiques - of the warring nations during this first week of November, all except Britain. War news concentrated on troop movements and battles. The story selection and placement was evenly



balanced between accounts of the Allies and Central Powers. An occasional column of "expert" analysis appeared on the editorial page. There were few war features in the daily Examiner; those that were published were evenly divided-though Germany had a few more than Britain and France. Some stories were attributed to the Associated Press or Reuters, though most appeared to be from the International News Service. The Examiner also gave stories from Asia and the Far East more prominent page placement than the other newspapers studied. Local and national news highlighted the offbeat: KEG OF BEER ROLLS ON MAYOR IN DRY TOWN, or FAMILY TRAPS BURGLARS - LAD FIRES, CATCHES ONE - GRANDMOTHER HEROINE.<sup>19</sup>

The editorial page was bright, readable, and never lacked for controversy. The page contained unsigned editorials, columns, excerpts from other newspapers and magazines, a thought for the day, and a political cartoon. There were no letters to the editor. The Examiner seemed to relish the old game of "twisting the Lion's tail"-criticizing Britain - in editorials. A November 5 editorial traced the royal lineage of King George, and said before Britain should question anyone's loyalty it should note that its king has "no English blood in his veins."<sup>20</sup> But the Germans were not always spared. A news story quoted German

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19. San Francisco Examiner, 2 November 1914, p. 1.

20. San Francisco Examiner, 5 November 1914, p. 18.



Ambassador Count Bernstorff as saying the Monroe Doctrine would not protect Canada from German invasion and colonization. The Examiner replied on November 4 with Hearst-like defiance: "if there is to be any colonizing done in Canada, Count Bernstorff, we will do it ourselves."<sup>21</sup>

But preparedness was the Examiner's major issue during this week. A November 5 editorial strongly attacked critics of military preparedness, calling on congress to build eight battleships a year until it reached a total of fifty. The editorial exhorted the people: "will you not make these representatives do the people's will and spend the people's money to build the ships of battle which alone can protect us all? What say you?"<sup>22</sup> Another editorial on the same day praised the efforts of Belgian relief, but urged officials to make the aristocracy of that country work for its help.<sup>23</sup>

### Chicago Tribune

Like Hearst and the Examiner, the Chicago Tribune and its ruling family were controversial giants in the journalism of this period. The paper had been an outspoken

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<sup>21</sup>. "Count Bernstorff and Canada," San Francisco Examiner, 4 November 1914, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup>. "Battleships Cost Less Than Battles," San Francisco Examiner, 5 November 1914, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup>. "Wrong Folks Are Hungry," San Francisco Examiner, 5 November 1914, p. 18.

advocate for the Republican party since Joseph Medill bought controlling interest in 1855. Medill, and his partner, Charles Ray, were a major force behind the political success of Abraham Lincoln - and the paper had supported all Republican efforts ever since. Though initially liberal, the Tribune had turned conservative in line with the Republican party by the turn of the century. The paper opposed many progressive reforms - including the eight-hour day - and was strongly anti-labor, calling union leaders "scum." Like the New York Times, the Tribune appealed to the wealthy men of business and industry - but in a much more radical fashion. The paper was often criticized for slanting its news stories to fit its editorial views, but the Tribune remained an influential paper in the midwest of 1914, and was one of America's largest dailies.

With Joseph Medill's death in 1899, control of the paper was passed to a series of his relatives. By 1914, Robert R. McCormick, Medill's grandson, had taken control. Though the paper opposed Wilson and U.S. entry in the war, McCormick eventually served on Pershing's staff in Europe, achieving the rank of colonel. By 1914, the Tribune had a large foreign and national news staff - one of the most efficient in the nation. The paper's editorial view reflected the attitudes of the large Irish and German populations in Chicago.

The Tribune of November 1 - 7, 1914, used many of



Hearst's ideas to sell newspapers, including many pictures, maps, and drawings. It was particularly fond of bold black banner headlines. Like the Washington Post and the San Francisco Examiner, the Tribune printed oddities and stories of crime - particularly those featuring damsels in distress. War news was usually balanced with local and national news on page one, but dominated pages two, three, and often page four. War accounts, like those in the Post and Examiner, centered on battles and other military movements. There were fewer war features, and like those in the Examiner, these tended to highlight the Germans. The overall coverage was balanced between the belligerents, however. The Tribune used its own foreign staff, few stories were credited to the wire services. The news stories were listed as coming to Chicago "via cable" or "via wireless." Local political news received special treatment in the Tribune, and political editorials often appeared on the front page. On November 3, election day, a huge banner proclaimed: IT'S YOUR DAY, MR. AND MRS. VOTER, while underneath appeared a large ballot listing the Tribune's "absolutely non-partisan" recommendations - almost exclusively Republicans.<sup>24</sup> When the national off-year elections went slightly against the Democrats - who still held control of both houses of congress - a Tribune banner proclaimed REPUBLICAN LANDSLIDE IN MANY STATES INCLUDING NEW

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<sup>24</sup>. Chicago Tribune, 3 November 1914, p. 1.



YORK.<sup>25</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, a former Republican president, received good story placement in the Tribune.

The Tribune's editorial page was lively during the first week in November, 1914, using several regular features. Two citizen-help columns - "How to Keep Well" and "Legal Friend of the People" - appeared daily. The paper also printed, on a daily basis, letters to the editor and "A Line-O'-Type or Two" from around the country. Letters to the editor concentrated mainly on local issues during this period. Most of the week's editorials centered on preparedness, the backing of Republican political moves, and statements telling readers not to underestimate the pride and efficiency of the German military. A November 1 editorial rebuked pacifists, particularly Secretary of State Bryan:

The perversion of the peace propaganda by impracticables and sentimentalists, which shows in opposition to all measures for naval and military defense, ought to be challenged wherever it appears. It does not represent the main current of peace sentiment in America, which is sane, if rather ingenious in some respects. We are all pacifists in the United States, holding war in detestation and mere military glory in indifference or humorous contempt. This is so true that what we need is to be waked up to the fact that we cannot afford to neglect national defense on the comfortable theory that we are immune from aggression or free from the entanglements of world relations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>. Chicago Tribune, 4 November 1914, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>. "War and American Policy," Chicago Tribune, 1 November 1914, p. 11.

The Tribune was fiercely pro-American. It leaned toward the German side in the war, but wanted no part of it. It even urged its readers to "buy American" so that the country would not need the powers of Europe.<sup>27</sup> The Tribune, reflecting the ethnic background of its city, condemned those who questioned the loyalty of "hyphenated Americans"-those of European descent:

Hyphenated Americanism is going to be more vexatious and injurious for awhile. Let us hope it will be followed by a reaction in favor of plain Americanism, and let us not merely hope but work for that reaction.<sup>28</sup>

### Atlanta Constitution

Like the Tribune, the Atlanta Constitution vigorously defended its editorial beliefs, but it differed from the Chicago daily in many significant ways. The Constitution was the leading newspaper of the "New South." Its tradition came from its progressive managing editor Henry W. Grady, who led the paper from 1880 until his untimely death of pneumonia in 1889. In those nine short years, Grady made the Constitution one of the country's most influential southern newspapers. Grady is credited with the idea of the "New South," calling on the region to improve its strong agricultural base with

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27. Chicago Tribune, 6 November 1914, p. 6.

28. "Politics and Hyphenated Americans," Chicago Tribune, 1 November 1914, p. 11.



new industry, making the way to bridge the cultural and economic rift between north and south. The Constitution held fast to this ideal in its editorial policies under Grady, and it was one of the south's more progressive papers on racial issues.

Clark Howell, Sr., son of publisher Evan P. Howell, replaced Grady as managing editor after his death. Under Howell, the paper aligned itself more toward the Democratic Party. In 1896, it was one of the major "jingo" papers calling for U.S. entry in the Spanish-American War. Howell was also influenced by New York's sensational press, and tried to incorporate those ideas in the Constitution, using large headlines, pictures, Sunday supplements and fiery editorials.

The Constitution of November 1 - 7, 1914, resembled the Washington Post in its layout - but the New York Times in its editorial policy and story selection. The Constitution was fiercely pro-British, and like the Times, emphasized the brutal efficiency of the German war machine as opposed to the heart and courage of the Allies. The issue of November 1 provided many examples of pro-Allied stories: REFUGEE SHIP STRUCK BY GERMANS; FRENCH AIRMEN RAIN BOMBS ON GERMANS;<sup>29</sup> MILITARY IS SUPREME IN THE GERMAN EMPIRE.<sup>30</sup> On November 3, the Constitution printed a communique from the

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29. Atlanta Constitution, 1 November 1914, p. 3.

30. Ibid., p. 6.



British foreign office on page three under the headline: RIGHTS OF U.S. VESSELS RECOGNIZED BY BRITAIN.<sup>31</sup> On November 2 another published story came from the British foreign office: GOOD TREATMENT GIVEN TO GERMAN PRISONERS.<sup>32</sup> On November 5, the Chicago Tribune had declared the opposite: BRITAIN AND FRANCE TREAT PRISONERS BADLY, IS CLAIM.<sup>33</sup> The Constitution's war news came completely from the wire services - particularly the Associated Press. The week's front pages were dominated by European war news, which usually stretched back six pages into the daily paper. The paper contained national news, but was more comprehensive in its coverage of local and regional news. It also printed its share of the bizarre: BRIDE TRIES TO COMMIT SUICIDE.<sup>34</sup>

Except for the editorials themselves, the Constitution's daily editorial page was light-hearted in tone. Regular features included: "The Life Line," "Just From Georgia," and "Issues of the Day" - all of which looked at the lighter side of the news. There were several daily editorials in the Constitution during the week studied, many dealt with southern agriculture - cotton, pecans, apples, and livestock. On these issues the paper was less sympathetic to Britain, whose blockade had restricted

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<sup>31</sup>. Atlanta Constitution, 3 November 1914, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup>. Atlanta Constitution, 2 November 1914, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>. Chicago Tribune, 5 November 1914, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup>. Atlanta Constitution, 3 November 1914, p. 1.

southern trade. The editorial viewpoint, on the whole, was pro-Allied but non-interventionist. The paper was disgusted by this modern war, and on November 1, ran an editorial declaring the mass slaughter might cause men to give up on armed conflict:

Glory and grandeur, with their traditional appeal, cannot survive under these conditions. Diet of this harshness kills both. When men find they must go forth to combat machines, instead of other men; to pit their brain and their noblest impulses against cogs and gears - what then? Will there not be an accumulating hesitation to engage in this bloody and mechanical business? Will not men, denied the lure of romance as an appetite for battle, see the folly of battle and turn to peaceful ways of arbitrating their differences?<sup>35</sup>

The November Constitution supported Woodrow Wilson - a Democrat and a southerner. It was not happy with his trade policy, however, hoping for a more vigorous defense of trading rights with Britain, especially where cotton was concerned. But the Constitution, like Wilson, was strongly against the "jingoes" clamoring for armed preparedness (though Wilson took up their rallying cry by 1916). On November 3, the paper strongly attacked defense build-ups as a waste of tax money. The Constitution said it was not "soft" on the military, but:

... we decidedly object to this country being lugged into the race toward bankruptcy that invariably is implied by 'armed preparedness.' What a horrible commentary it would be on common sense if, after the

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<sup>35</sup>. "Will Romance-Robbed War Lead Mankind to Peace?" Atlanta Constitution, 1 November 1914, p. 2F.



expiration of the present war, none of the nations had learned one lesson, and went straight back at the old game of impoverishing themselves for standing armies and battleships.<sup>36</sup>

### Kansas City Star

Like the Constitution, the Kansas City Star was a well respected regional paper. But unlike the Constitution, Post, Examiner, or Tribune, it achieved its prominence without the sensational. The Star's success was due in large part to the personality of its crusading editor - William Rockhill Nelson. A construction contractor and newspaper publisher in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Nelson moved west to Kansas City - buying the four-page Star in 1880. At that time, Kansas City had all the elements of an old frontier town - unpaved streets, rowdy gambling, ramshackle buildings, and a corrupt city government. But the town was a busy transportation hub. It was a major port on the Missouri River, had once been a gateway to the Santa Fe Trail, and by the 20th Century was a terminus for several railroad lines. Nelson based his crusading newspaper on community service. Not a writer himself, Nelson hired the best editors and writers he could find, giving them full rein to sniff out corruption. Nelson emphasized his news sections more than his editorial page, but he used his editorials effectively to attack machine

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<sup>36</sup>. Atlanta Constitution, 3 November 1914, p. 6.



government and call for city improvements. Initially a Democrat, Nelson became a solid member of the Progressive Party and a strong backer of Theodore Roosevelt. But the paper displayed a remarkable political independence - giving the news and letting the people make up their own minds. Improvements came to Kansas City - streets were paved, electricity installed, viaducts built, parks established - in part because of Nelson's hometown boosterism.

And yet, the Star of November 1 -7, 1914, was a progressive paper with a conservative style. It was small, used one-column headlines, few pictures, and no comics. The stories were short, with a heavy emphasis on local, upbeat stories and muckraking. The Star did print its share of crime stories, however. Nelson pictured the Star as a family paper, and it was wildly popular - with a morning, evening, and weekly edition. The popularity was also due to the price. A shrewd businessman, Nelson forced advertisers use his newspaper, its large circulation meant they could go nowhere else. Meanwhile, customers paid a weekly subscription rate of ten cents, covering 14 issues - morning, evening, and Sunday. At less than a penny a copy, it was one of the best deals in journalism history. Nelson saw the outbreak of World War I, but he did not see its end. He died in April, 1915, at the age of 75.

The Kansas City Star of the first week of November, 1914, emphasized local news and the importance of the off-

year elections. Small front page editorials urged voters to support the Progressive ticket and the temperance movement - liquor was a big evil for the Star. The front page was usually dominated by local news. War news often took the form of short bulletins down the right hand column. On the inside pages of the paper, the war news was always mixed evenly with national and local through page seven. News of the war in Europe, as was all the news in the paper - short. Page for page, the Star printed less war news than all the other papers studied. The paper received its war and national news from the major news services - Associated Press, United Press, New York Times, New York Herald - all these sources were credited. But because the Star received so much of its war news from New York, the coverage closely resembled that of the Times. The Germans tended to be the brutally efficient "Huns," and the British and French the lovable heroes. One typographical drawback to Nelson's circulation strategy was evident on the first seven pages - pages two through seven were mostly advertising.

Unlike its war news, the Star's editorial viewpoint of the war was very balanced - both sides received criticism. The decadence of European aristocracy was a theme of several editorials during the week studied. A November 2 editorial wondered why people pay so much attention to war casualties among the royal families of both sides when many nameless



folks had died.<sup>37</sup> A November 1 editorial called the aristocracy of Russia "medieval" and "backward."<sup>38</sup> A November 4 editorial criticized the English crown for sending its young men to die fighting the Russians in the Crimean War, only to find itself now helping the Russians to take the same territory:

Almost it is enough to make an Englishman change his mind about dying for his country since his country changes her own with such facility.<sup>39</sup>

Another November 1 editorial criticized the French government, blaming the huge losses at Verdun on inadequately trained troops.<sup>40</sup> The Star prophetically bemoaned, on November 2, the fact that this war had a tendency to draw in "innocent bystander" nations.<sup>41</sup> The Star criticized the super-patriots of preparedness on November 4: "Some confuse patriotism with the nationalism that sets nations at one another's throats." The Star said "genial, charitable affection is patriotism."<sup>42</sup> The majority of Star editorials, however, dealt with local issues and progressive

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37. Kansas City Star, 2 November 1914, p. 12.

38. Kansas City Star, 1 November 1914, p. 2D.

39. "Somebody Blundered," Kansas City Star, 4 November 1914, p. 6B.

40. Kansas City Star, 1 November 1914, p. 2D.

41. Kansas City Star, 2 November 1914, p. 12.

42. "Patriotism," Kansas City Star, 4 November 1914, p. 6B.



reform. Letters to the editor were published, but on a separate page under "Speaking the Public Mind." They usually dealt with local issues.

### Milwaukee Journal

Like William R. Nelson and the Kansas City Star, Lucius Nieman used his newspaper, the Milwaukee Journal, to boost his city's image. But while Nelson sought to improve the image of Kansas City with its residents, Nieman fought to improve Milwaukee's image with the rest of the country.

Nieman bought the Journal in 1882 when the paper was then only 20 days old. From the 10 x 10 foot office Nieman initially shared with a German-language newspaper, he built the Journal into a crusading newspaper that influenced not only Milwaukee, but the state of Wisconsin as well. Nieman's philosophy was to be the champion of the people, providing them with both sides of every story. He said that his paper would "be sensational ... only when the facts are sensational. Every unfettered newspaper is the same."<sup>43</sup> Nieman flirted early on with the Democratic party but left when it gave the presidential nomination to William Jennings Bryan in 1896. From that point on, the Journal was

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<sup>43</sup>. Berres, Jean L., "Local Aspects of the 'Campaign for Americanism': The Milwaukee Journal in World War I," (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University - School of Journalism, 1977), p. 33.

independent of party, backing only those candidates interested in reform. Nieman consistently attacked Milwaukee's Socialist government, and its mayor Victor Berger, largely for their pacifist views. Also criticized in the Journal was Republican Senator Robert M. LaFollette. Nieman agreed with his goals, but found him ill-equipped to achieve them (LaFollette also was a pacifist). Nieman's idea of reform applied internationally. He felt the powers of free democracies should prevail and crush the autocracy of Germany.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, the Milwaukee Journal served a city made up largely by European immigrants. The majority of city residents were of German descent; half of them spoke no English. The teaching of German was required in city schools, and there were a half-dozen German-language newspapers. Journalism historian Jean L. Berres sums up Nieman's view of his city in 1914:

The nation's press combined these isolated attitudes with the Socialist's proclaimed pacifism and LaFollette's anti-Wilson position. Under this guilt-by-association reasoning this press gave all of Milwaukee the unwarranted appellations of a 'disloyal city,' a 'member of the German Empire' and one which had 'repudiated' the rest of the nation. The result was a confused populace, misunderstood by many Americans.

Nieman set about correcting this false impression. Through the use of his newspaper he expressed what he saw as the true, American viewpoint on the war. He exposed the disloyal, or at least the misguided, element of the population, and called upon all to proclaim the loyalty of Milwaukee and Milwaukeans. He urged such means as petitions of patriotism,



all-out support of the government's position on war issues, and resolutions by clubs and organizations stating their unbounded Americanism.

He did not wait until the United States entered the war in April 1917 to use his newspaper to achieve this end.<sup>44</sup>

In 1919, the Pulitzer Prize Committee called Nieman's witch-hunt the "Campaign for Americanism," and awarded him a gold medal for meritorious service.

The Milwaukee Journal of November 1 - 7, 1914, resembled the Kansas City Star in many ways. Like the Star, the Journal received all of its war news from the east coast - the New York Times, New York Herald, New York World, and United Press. Both the Journal and Star emphasized local and regional news over the conflict in Europe. But the Journal differed in its story selection. Though receiving its news from pro-Allied sources, the Journal carefully balanced its war coverage. Stories concentrated on battles and troop movements. There were few features, and in both cases the coverage was balanced between Allied and Central Powers. Another similarity between the Journal and the Star was their fascination with upbeat local stories, as is evident from these headlines in the November 1 Journal: TRAVELING MAN'S STORY OF BEING LOST ON GRAND-AV MAKES TRAFFIC OFFICER SMILE,<sup>45</sup> and GIRAFFE IN HIS LONG NECK HAS ONE HALF AS MANY

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<sup>44</sup>. Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>45</sup>. Milwaukee Journal, 1 November 1914, p. 3.



BONES AS SPARROW HAS IN HIS.<sup>46</sup>

Though carrying roughly the same amount of war news as the Star, the Journal included regular features to make its news much more comprehensive. A daily page two feature was "Today's War News Analyzed - European Military Officer Tells What Dispatches Mean." This was written anonymously by a "graduate of famous War School in Europe used by Journal for hour by hour updates." This column provided a balanced view of the official news from the front (an early "deep throat," the author was known to exist but Nieman never revealed his name). Two regular editorial features included "Light on the World War" and "Around the Edges." The "Light" column used articles by academics, diplomats, and journalists to explain the causes and movements of the war. The "Edges" feature was the one place the Journal printed its syrupy human interest stories - provided by journalists "from the war zone." Another regular feature, related to the letters to the editor, was the "War Query Box" - letters from readers stating their views on the war. The Journal also published, side-by-side, the official communiques from the various belligerent governments.

November's editorial page, besides carrying the war features already mentioned, included a health column, quotable quotes, and articles on how to train your dog. The unsigned editorials dealt almost exclusively with

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<sup>46</sup>. Ibid., p. 5.

Milwaukee's elections. One front-page editorial shouted: VOTE TO SAVE MILWAUKEE FROM THE DISASTER OF SOCIALISTIC TRIUMPH.<sup>47</sup> The war in Europe was only indirectly mentioned.

Thus, six months prior to the sinking of the Lusitania, each of the seven newspapers had their own editorial vantage point from which to view the events of May 7, 1915. The Times was an outright advocate of the British cause, in news coverage as well as in editorials. In the same Allied camp, but less extreme, were the Constitution and the Star. Both papers news coverage, like the Times, portrayed the Germans as vicious beasts, while the Allies were valiant heroes. The Constitution and Star differed with the Times, however, in their editorial policy. Both were more moderate, not hesitating to criticize Britain as well as Germany.

On the other editorial extreme were the Post, Tribune, and Examiner. Their news coverage, on the whole, was quite balanced - portraying neither belligerent as hero or villain. Their editorial policy, however, was definitely anti-British. Never failing to criticize the actions of the British government. These papers did not praise Germany, however, but often pointed out that the German military was more potent and efficient than the Allies would have America believe. These papers were, perhaps, aggressively neutral.

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<sup>47</sup>. Milwaukee Journal, 3 November 1914, p. 1.

Attacking the British because, in reality, they were violating more of America's trading rights than the Germans. When they described a strong German military they were calling the situation squarely - the war was a stalemate. The Post, Tribune, and Examiner, were also vigorously pro-American. Calling for a tougher U.S. military to assure American isolation.

The Journal was in between these two groups, with a perfectly balanced view of the warring sides in both its news coverage and editorials. This editorial balance was due in part to the large German population of Milwaukee. It was also due to the fact that publisher Lucius Nieman was a Wilson supporter and an advocate of the Allied cause.

With an understanding of wartime press restrictions, and the political and historical backgrounds of the newspapers studied, we now turn our attention to the coverage of the loss of the Lusitania.



## CHAPTER FIVE: REVIEWING THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

### The Sinking of the Lusitania

The sinking of the Lusitania was the biggest public relations gaffe of the First World War. And the British government made sure that the entire world knew of Germany's miscalculation. American news bureaus in London began to hear rumors of the disaster during the late afternoon of Friday, May 7. Calls to the British Admiralty and to Cunard quickly confirmed that the sinking had occurred. The news was immediately cabled to America - FLASH. LUSITANIA SUNK - along with the initial sketchy details. British censors cleared these messages with unusual speed.

The race was then on to Queenstown, the small shipping port on the south coast of Ireland. United Press correspondent Wilbur Forrest made use of a friend in the Admiralty to obtain the most direct boat passage to the area - a steamship route otherwise restricted to aliens. As a result, Forrest arrived hours ahead of his competition, and the United Press initially had the most precise information of the disaster. Forrest even identified several of the dead - including Frohman - for Irish officials. Reporters from the other major news services soon arrived, and the bulk of information was soon on its way to America. Though the news of the disaster arrived in time for the deadlines of some

evening papers on May 7, the majority of Americans read of the disaster on the morning of May 8.

### The New York Times

#### **News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7**

The pro-British New York Times exploded with news of the Lusitania disaster. A large, factual, headline stretched in several lines across page one: LUSITANIA SUNK BY A SUBMARINE, PROBABLY 1,000 DEAD; TWICE TORPEDOED OFF IRISH COAST; SINKS IN 15 MINUTES; AMERICANS ABOARD INCLUDED VANDERBILT AND FROHMAN; WASHINGTON BELIEVES THAT A GRAVE CRISIS IS AT HAND.

Though the facts were still a bit confused, the Times' coverage of the event stretched a full nine pages. A large photograph was printed of the Lusitania on page one, with "X's" showing the impact points of the "torpedoes;" pages two and three contained full diagrams of the lost liner, and a map of Ireland showing the location of the attack. Full passenger lists, and lists of the known survivors, were printed. The Times made use of news from the Associated Press, United Press, Reuters, and its own reporters in London and Queenstown. Survivor stories abounded. One such story was from Ernest Cowper, a Toronto journalist aboard the liner, who claimed to have seen the submarine surface

and fire the torpedoes. The torpedoes, he said, were filled with "poison gas."<sup>1</sup> Other stories expressed fear and uncertainty over the losses of Vanderbilt and Frohman, and gave accounts of other New York passengers on board. Theodore Roosevelt called the sinking "piracy" on page one. And Washington and Wilson waited for all the facts.

The next day, Sunday, May 9, the Times again devoted over seven pages to the Lusitania tragedy. Survivor stories emphasized the recovery of the bodies of women and children. Germany declared justification - the ship was armed and loaded with munitions. Cunard and the British government denied this allegation. In Washington, Wilson and his cabinet continued calm deliberation. In New York the Cunard offices were swamped with people seeking information - and war talk was reported to be high on Times Square.

In the days following May 9, the Times continued to devote most of its front section to the Lusitania. The administration was still awaiting complete information about the disaster before making a statement. Press reaction from around the country said the nation stood behind Wilson. At the inquest, Captain Turner said he saw only one torpedo- and an internal explosion followed. The lists of dead and survivors became more complete - Vanderbilt, Frohman, and Hubbard all perished. Stories were printed telling how the U-boat surfaced among the struggling passengers and its crew

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<sup>1</sup>. New York Times, 8 May 1915, p. 1.



laughed at them.

### Editorials

The Times' first editorial concerning the sinking, "War by Assassination," was published on May 8. Its author must have used a thesaurus to find new ways of describing "murder." The editorial condemned Germany and recalled Wilson's "strict accountability" warning regarding submarine warfare and neutrals given on February 10, 1915:

From our Department of State there must go to the Imperial Government at Berlin a demand that the Germans shall no longer make war like savages drunk with blood, that they shall cease to seek the attainment of their ends by the assassination of non-combatants and neutrals. In the history of wars there is no single deed comparable in its inhumanity and its horror to the destruction, without warning, by German torpedoes of the great steamship Lusitania, with more than 1,800 souls on board, and among them more than 100 Americans. Our demand must be made, and it will be heeded unless Germany in her madness would have it understood that she is at war with the whole civilized world ...

It [the sinking] will stir the American people as they have not been stirred since the destruction of the Maine in the harbor of Havana, and government and people will be united in the resolve that Germany must be called upon to bring her practices into conformity with the usages of civilized warfare.<sup>2</sup>

The editorial went on to say that although the American people were passionate, they were also deliberate,

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<sup>2</sup>. "War By Assassination," New York Times, 8 May 1915, p. 14.

and all citizens were urged to support the president in whatever he did.

The editorials of May 9 continued the condemnation of Germany. Under "The Law of the Lusitania Case," the Times said that even if the ship contained munitions, Germany did not have the right to imperil the passengers:

Germany snapped her fingers at the laws of war and at the law of morality when she did this deed of blood. She put herself outside the domain of law, and it is a frequent comment upon her behavior that by that act she confessed herself to be an outlaw nation. We know how she makes war, how she intends to make war - that discussion is ended.

Should this lawlessness continue, the editorial said, the neutral nations should unite and act to bring about "the saving consummation" of the German spirit.<sup>3</sup>

After these strong (even hostile) words, the Times proceeded to excuse all the questionable actions of the British Admiralty regarding the Lusitania in a companion piece:

There is only one possible explanation for the British Admiralty's neglect of its plain duty, which has resulted in such terrible fatalities. Perhaps the British government could not believe, in spite of the many recent revelations of the unutterable brutality of the Germans, that any nation would be guilty of a crime so shocking, so unnecessary, and in violation of all the rules of warfare. If that is the explanation, an unfortunate delusion has

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<sup>3</sup>. "The Law of the Lusitania Case," New York Times, 9 May 1915, p. 2C.



been dispelled forever.<sup>4</sup>

Editorials cautioned faith in Wilson and the need for preparedness, should the nation be called on to suppress this outlaw German nation.

On May 11, in an editorial entitled "Germany's Defenses," the Times refuted all of Germany's positions in the Lusitania matter, and defended Britain's starvation blockade. Responding to Germany's allegations as to the arms and cargo of the Lusitania, the Times said:

Governments in their official communications are not supposed to enter falsehoods. Unless her spy system utterly failed her in this instance, Germany might have known the truth.

The British side of the story was obviously the truth for the Times. Regarding the inhumanity of the British food blockade of Germany, the editorial continued: "... a blockade which inhibits the food of an enemy country is a recognized method of warfare, neither cruel nor unusual." The submarine on the other hand, will never fit into international law. There is no defense for Germany. There is nothing to be said in her behalf that can diminish her "blood guiltiness."<sup>5</sup>

Another May 11 editorial again completely excused Cunard and the British Admiralty. It claimed those

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<sup>4</sup>. "The Admiralty's Neglect," New York Times, 9 May 1915, p. 2C.

<sup>5</sup>. "Germany's Defenses," New York Times, 11 May 1915, p. 14.



passengers who submitted allegations of the lack of safety and the crew's ineptness were victims of shock and the excitement of the moment. Such allegations could be given "no great weight as testimony." The criticism of Cunard and the Admiralty was "founded on misapprehension."<sup>6</sup> Apparently the same did not hold true for the Times' stories of gas-filled torpedoes, and laughing U-boat crews.

### Letters to the Editor

Though an occasional letter advocating the German cause would be printed in the Times, the majority were strong condemnations of the sinking. Most called for decisive action against Germany:

To the Times: Germany has not respected our neutrality; on the contrary, she has deliberately destroyed American lives and ships. Her evident purpose is to continue to destroy them whenever she thinks best to do so. Shall we submit, or shall we take steps to make our neutrality respected by her? There is no doubt that every American worthy of the name is now ready to declare that we shall not submit. The time has come to assert ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

To the Times: We read this morning that Germany is "sorry" and offers "sympathy" to the United States. Should a murderer, then, be allowed to go free by merely saying that he is sorry and sympathizes? Where has the spirit of '76, of 1812, of 1896 gone? Where's the spirit that made

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<sup>6</sup>. "Based on Misapprehension," New York Times, 11 May 1915, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>. "Does Germany Want Our Neutrality?" New York Times, 12 May 1915, p. 12.

us strike after the sinking of the Maine?<sup>8</sup>

### The Chicago Tribune

#### **News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7**

The Chicago Tribune hit the streets that fateful morning of May 8 with a huge banner headline: 1,400 DEAD ON LUSITANIA. A subhead declared: HOLD FILLED WITH WAR MUNITIONS. Beneath this was added that the number of rescued had reached 658 and that Vanderbilt and Frohman were feared dead. The Tribune's front page also contained a cartoon by John McCutcheon that epitomized the paper's attitude toward the crisis. In the cartoon, Wilson stood at the bridge of an ocean liner, while Uncle Sam sitting in a deck chair told a worried passenger: "Keep cool, hope for the best, trust the captain, and stand by the ship fair weather and foul."

The May 8 edition of the Tribune carried six pages of articles relating to the sinking of the Lusitania. The pages contained survivor accounts, descriptions of the disaster, pictures and diagrams of the liner, maps, and stories of Washington's quiet concern. The list of survivors was printed with the original passenger list. The paper's news came from the major wire

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<sup>8</sup>. "A Woman Demands War," New York Times, 13 May 1915, p. 14.

services - Associated Press, United Press - and its own reporters in London and Queenstown. One story covered the national press reaction to the sinking, and the confusion in New York - where many of the Americans on board came from. Two stories involved first the prominent Chicagoans on board the liner, and then covered the "neutral" reaction of the citizens of Chicago.

The Tribune differed from the New York Times in its coverage of the disaster. The vivid descriptions of the dead, included in the Times were toned down in the Tribune. There were no stories about the U-boat surfacing to laugh at survivors, although one story did deal with the possibility of gas in the torpedoes. Another clear difference in the two papers' coverage concerned the issue of whether the Lusitania carried munitions or was armed. A story on the Tribune's May 8 front page described the cargo of munitions; a story on the third page said "substantially all of the \$750,000 cargo of the Lusitania consisted of contraband of war." The Times had downplayed the munitions issue, following the Cunard point of view. While stories in the Times proclaimed the Lusitania was unarmed, similar stories in the Tribune were given less prominence and placed on the inside pages.

## Editorials



The Tribune's May 8 editorial concerning the disaster contemplated the issues involving "massacre" and contraband: "To the slaughter of innocents in Belgium and in Poland has been added the slaughter of the innocents on the Lusitania. This last massacre violates all previous laws of the seas ..." The editorial then mentioned the fact that the ship carried munitions, and that Germany would use this as justification:

We do not propose to weigh the value (if any) of the defense as compared with the evil of the deed. That is a function that belongs to our official government, under the leadership of President Wilson, and which, in a crisis as grave as this one, should belong exclusively to our official government.

It is not for any good American now to cloud its counsels with unsought advice, or to attempt to force its decision. We can only stand and wait, united in our determination to enforce the will of our government whatever that may be.

'Our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong.'<sup>9</sup>

In short, the Tribune sought to be neither pro-German nor pro-British, but strongly pro-American. In fact, the editorial's closing quote of Stephen Decatur would be printed at the head of every editorial page for the remainder of the year.

In the days that followed, as more news of the tragedy became available, the Tribune - through its editorials - began to ask more questions concerning the events surrounding it. Why was the Lusitania maintaining a straight

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<sup>9</sup>. "Lusitania," Chicago Tribune, 8 May 1915, p. 8.

course at such a slow speed? Why was not escort provided?

The issue of particular concern to the Tribune was the carrying of munitions on passenger ships. The paper felt that if the United States wished to remain neutral and avoid war it should not allow Americans to board steamers carrying contraband. Regardless of the question of international law, another incident like the Lusitania, could bring America into war with Germany.

Two days after the sinking, on May 10, the Tribune addressed itself to this issue:

Pending any determination of our course of action upon the loss of American lives on the Lusitania, immediate measures should be taken to discourage or prevent the transportation of American citizens on ships carrying arms and munitions of war.

The fact that the Lusitania carried this form of contraband, which constitutes perhaps the most grievous danger to the German cause, considered with the notice given Americans not to embark, provides the principle grounds of moral justification for the attack. Without conceding the German right under international law, as it is or as it ought to be, to pursue the course adopted in the proclaimed war zone, it is proper for us to recognize the facts and try to avoid further loss of life and further serious complications.<sup>10</sup>

Another editorial, more prophetic, discussed America's course of diplomacy regarding U.S. citizens on munitions carriers:

... We cannot continue to say, to Germany, 'You must not do that,' and be engulfed in notes and representations while citizens who adhere to

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<sup>10</sup>. "Non Combatants and Contraband," Chicago Tribune, 10 May 1915.



our interpretation of international justice and right are being killed. That sort of controversy cannot be continued ... We may accept this German reasoning or reject it. We cannot continue to maintain that our citizens have a right to enter that war zone, under certain defined conditions, and continue to assure them that they have a right to enter, and continue also to argue with German while they are being killed.

There is no further argument about it. Further words merely abase, dishonor, and humiliate us.<sup>11</sup>

The Tribune had hit the nail on the head as far as true neutrality was concerned. This was the position Secretary of State Bryan was calling for, without result, in discussions with Wilson, House and Lansing. Wilson publicly proclaimed his neutrality, but the Allied die had been cast. Still the Tribune proclaimed: "The United State government ought to prevent its citizens from embarking on a boat which carries war material, even as the police would prevent citizens from going into a burning building."<sup>12</sup>

### Letters to the Editor

The majority of the Tribune' letters took an isolationist stand. Although and occasional pro-British letter appeared, most followed the Tribune's viewpoint, criticizing Britain for shipping munitions on passenger

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11. "Lusitania and Consequences," Chicago Tribune, 9 May 1915, p. 4B.

12. "Carrying Arms and Passengers," Chicago Tribune, 11 May 1915, p. 6.



liners and the Wilson administration for not doing something about it:

To the Tribune: Neutrals that willfully accept such risks should be no more entitled to the protection of our government than if they sailed on a dreadnought, a transport bearing troops or rode between the trenches in an ammunition wagon. Why don't they sail on American Steamers or those of any other neutral country which have been promised immunity by Germany? Furthermore, is the life of an American citizen held in very high esteem when he is placed over a \$750,000 cargo of explosives, and especially under present conditions? The Cunard company and the English government are due for severe censure.<sup>13</sup>

To the Tribune: ... an American sailing on a British ship is virtually under British protection as against the rest of the world, and it stands to reason that an American in such a position cannot claim more rights or more protection than that foreign nation under whose flag he is sailing is capable of giving to its own citizens.<sup>14</sup>

To the Tribune: I am partly of German blood. Heretofore I have held that there are two sides to the European conflict. For me, since the Lusitania outrage, which Mr. Roosevelt rightly terms piratical murder, there is but one side. This has become a conflict of freedom and civilization against tyranny and savagery. I am against tyranny and savagery - I am against Germany.<sup>15</sup>

### San Francisco Examiner

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13. "Should Sail on American Ships," Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1915, p. 6.

14. "British Ship, British Protection," Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1915, p. 6.

15. "His Blood Is Up," Chicago Tribune, 11 May 1915, p. 6.

**News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7**

The news judgement and editorial positions of the San Francisco Examiner were similar to the Tribune's. The Examiner, however, though fiercely neutral like the Tribune, was more likely to implicate Great Britain in the situation. The May 8 edition of the Examiner was topped by the banner headline: LUSITANIA TORPEDOED: 1,409 DIE. A large photograph of the ship on the front page was followed by more pictures, diagrams, and maps on the inside pages. A total of six pages was devoted to the Lusitania, most topped by large headlines. The paper claimed that Hearst's International News Service had beaten all the other services with word of the disaster.<sup>16</sup> The paper used some reports from the Associated Press and United Press, but relied mostly on the International News Service. A page one story, BLAME PUT ON ENGLAND, discussed the German accusations that the ship was armed and carried munitions. Another front page story, SHARP DROP FOR STOCKS, discussed how the disaster had affected the Wall Street stocks of the Allies' major munitions suppliers. Like the Times and the Tribune, the Examiner covered the prominent passengers, published survivor lists, and described the tense mood in Washington. A May 8 story on page five, SAFETY DEVICES FAILED TO SAVE THE LINER, discussed the Lusitania's construction, and pondered what

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<sup>16</sup>. San Francisco Examiner, 8 May 1915, p. 5.



caused the ship to sink so quickly after being struck. The Examiner's coverage was more like that of the Tribune, than the Times. The munitions issue was highlighted, while stories like the laughing U-boat crew failed to appear.

## Editorials

Like the Tribune, the Examiner's editorial opinion was strongly in favor of neutrality, but it used the sinking as a lesson for preparedness. The editorial of May 8 said both the Germans and the British failed to respect international law:

No the fact is only emphasized today - the fact that has long been apparent - that neither the allies nor the Germans give to international law or custom any more adherence than may suit their immediate end. They are both estopped from discussing this frightful catastrophe in the light of any international law or usage.

The sinking of the Lusitania was not an act of war but an act of "wholesale murder:"

It must however teach the people of the United States, who will today read with horror the list of their fellow countrymen sacrificed to the red rage of Europe, that a nation can rely upon nothing for its own protection, and for the safeguarding of its own citizens, except for the own physical power to protect them against all menace.

The Examiner felt that it was useless to enter into any "hollow treaties" or reach agreements in international



law with such barbaric countries.<sup>17</sup> Following the sinking of the Lusitania, every editorial page of the paper was topped with the bold statement: OUR FIRST DUTY IS TO MAINTAIN PEACE; OUR NEXT DUTY IS TO PREPARE FOR WAR.

Again on May 10, the Examiner graphically stated its views regarding the Lusitania:

How small a company, amid the millions of souls of men and women and children who have died in torment since this war began, are the sad ghosts of the Lusitania's slain! How few are they amid the enumerable hosts of Europe's dead! Nor is this warfare, this inhumanity, this desolation, this slaughter a new thing under the sun.

The normal enterprise of Europe's rulers is war ...

We have now this frightful evidence that the civilized peoples can degenerate into savages within the space of a few months.

And we have the most conclusive evidence that now, as in the past, NEITHER ABSENCE OF PROVOCATION NOR ABSENCE OF ARMED PREPARATION EVER SECURES A NATION FROM THE DANGER OF ATTACK AND WAR.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the Examiner sailed a course of non-intervention in the affairs of Europe, and called for preparedness as a way to ward off any potential challenges from the Old World. Unlike the Times and Tribune, the Examiner did not publish letters to the editor.

### Atlanta Constitution

17. "The Lesson of the Lusitania; Let Our People Heed It," San Francisco Examiner, 8 May 1915.

18. "American People Dare Not Trust Paper Treaties As a Defense Against Nations that Likely Break Them," San Francisco Examiner, 10 May 1915.

## News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7

In general the Atlanta Constitution's news coverage of the Lusitania sinking was quite similar to that of the Times - highlighting the German brutality.

The May 8 edition of the Constitution was topped with the banner headline: OVER 1,000 LIVES LOST ON THE LUSITANIA WHEN SUNK BY A GERMAN SUBMARINE. Page one included a large picture of the liner at sea, a story detailing how two torpedoes struck the ship, and Teddy Roosevelt's charge of "pure piracy." Four pages of news were devoted to the disaster, one of the fewest of the papers studied. The news came exclusively from the wires - mostly the Associated Press. Details of the sinking, tales of survivors, the loss of famous passengers, pictures, diagrams and maps were all part of the coverage. Great space was given to the few prominent citizens of Atlanta that were on the liner.

Page three on May 8 contained a story unique to the Constitution: GERMAN ADMIRALTY FORMED THE PLANS TO SINK THE LUSITANIA. The story said that the Kaiser and his advisors believed the destruction of the ship would be a crushing blow to Great Britain's morale. Other papers had called it piracy, the Constitution set it up as premeditated murder. The front page of May 9 proclaimed: THERE IS JOY IN GERMANY OVER THE LUSITANIA TRAGEDY.



## Editorials

Though the Constitution, like the Times, highlighted German barbarity in its news coverage, its editorial position was more moderate. It was one of the strongest backers of Wilson in the group of newspapers studied. Much of this was due, no doubt, to the fact that Wilson was a southerner and a Democrat - the first elected since the Civil War. The paper seemed to choose its words carefully, discussing the disaster only when necessary. The Constitution spent most of May addressing regional issues, as if heeding Wilson's call to be neutral in thought and deed.

The Constitution was the only paper not to publish an editorial comment on the disaster on May 8. That day's editorials addressed local issues such as highway construction. The paper's first Lusitania comment appeared on May 9, following four pages of news coverage of the sinking. The editorial called for the nation to remain calm behind Wilson:

Shocked as we are in common with the rest of the world over the appalling loss of life on the Lusitania - now, more than ever, our country should keep cool and be guided by judgement rather than by emotion ...

Our protest made to the German government at the beginning of the undersea campaign was right; we should repeat it now following the Lusitania Horror, in language, if possible even more emphatic; we should give Germany to



understand beyond all question that we will demand a reckoning and enforce that demand.

But that does not necessarily mean war. The people of the United States do not want war. They have no desire to become embroiled in this European upheaval, and conservative America will congratulate herself that there is at the head of the government a man who has demonstrated his capacity in dealing coolly, calmly, and dispassionately with each individual incident that has brought it into contact with the quarrel across the Atlantic.<sup>19</sup>

Two days later, on May 11, a Constitution editorial sharply criticized "some jingoes among newspapers as well among individual citizens" for advocating war with Germany over the loss of the Lusitania's Americans:

Suppose we should declare war upon Germany now, what could we do? Nothing; less than nothing! It would amount to declaration, without action, at least without present action, and we would have on our hands a far more difficult situation than that which now confronts us. We could not send an army against Germany; that would be out of the question. There is nothing against which we could send our navy.

The Constitution then outlined a course of action unique to the paper's studied:

There is just one thing and one thing only that would be possible - the seizure of the \$70,000,000 worth of German ships now interned in American ports. They are here, anyhow - here to remain until the end of the war. They stand an absolute guarantee of German reparation; it will be time to act when diplomacy has exhausted itself and Germany has refused our right to exact it. Then, if hostilities must come, let them come as the result of Germany's declaration, not of ours.

But we do not believe there will be

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19. "Time to Keep Cool," Atlanta Constitution, 9 May 1915.

occasion for it.<sup>20</sup>

### Letters to the Editor

Most citizens, expressing their views in the Constitution's letters to the editor, said the loss of life on the Lusitania was appalling, but not enough to embroil the United States:

To the Constitution: ... While I think it would be best for the world at large for the Germans to be defeated, I can't find any real cause for America being against her.

As for the Americans on the Lusitania, they certainly regarded their personal interests, or inclinations, as superior to the neutrality of our country.

This section of our country don't want to cross the ocean to fight.<sup>21</sup>

To the Constitution: ... I am no German sympathizer but I have always understood that anything was fair in war, and this fact alone, without considering the ownership of the vessel and the repeated warnings sent out by the German government, ought to leave them without censure or condemnation in the matter.<sup>22</sup>

### Washington Post

#### News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7

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20. "The Only Sane Course," Atlanta Constitution, 11 May 1915, p.6.

21. "Holds Germany Blameless," Atlanta Constitution, 14 May 1915, p. 8.

22. "South Georgia Merchant's View," Atlanta Constitution, 15 May 1915, p. 8.



The Washington Post was as much anti-British as the Times was pro-Ally. But like the Examiner, the Post treated both the Germans and British with equal disdain. Eleven pages of the Post's May 8 edition were devoted to news of the Lusitania. The two-line headline ran: STEAMER LUSITANIA TORPEDOED AND SUNK OFF IRISH COAST; OF 2,000 ON BOARD, ONLY 650 ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN SAVED. The disaster news came mostly from the Associated Press and United Press. Front page stories detailed that two "terrific explosions" tore holes in the liner's hull - the result of two torpedoes. Another story pointed out that: "The Lusitania carried in her cargo a large store of ammunition for the allies."<sup>23</sup> Like the other papers, the Post's coverage included pictures, diagrams, eyewitness accounts, passenger and survivor lists, and the press reaction of Europe and the United States. News from Washington received comprehensive coverage; one story mentioned Bryan's opposition to American travellers on belligerent ships.<sup>24</sup> Accounts of the sinking depicted its horror, but were more restrained than the stories in the Times.

### Editorials

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<sup>23</sup>. "Salient Features of Catastrophe," Washington Post, 8 May 1915, p.1.

<sup>24</sup>. "Fate of Lusitania Shock to Capital," Washington Post, 8 May 1915, p. 1.

Editorially, the Post never hesitated to attack British policies. But in its first comment on the Lusitania, the paper left no doubt as to who was at fault:

No warrant whatever, in law or morals can be found for the willful destruction of an unarmed vessel, neutral of enemy, carrying passengers, without giving them an opportunity to leave the vessel. Germany stands indicted on this charge, and if it is proved the world will not exonerate that nation for the awful destruction of innocent life.

It may be that Germany will lay stress upon the fact that warning was given to Americans not to sail on the Lusitania. It is true that such warning was given, and it is true that Americans act unwisely when they travel in the war zone. But this does not excuse Germany for its failure to give the Lusitania's passengers time to take to the boats.

Though the Lusitania was probably loaded with munitions, this did not exonerate the Germans, according to the Post. The paper echoed the Tribune:

Probably, however, the Lusitania's fate will lead to the adoption of a new rule, providing that vessels carrying passengers shall not carry arms and ammunition. Such a rule should be adopted by all the belligerents ...<sup>25</sup>

The Post, like the Tribune, disagreed with America's policy of letting passengers sail on merchantmen carrying contraband. Still, the paper advised caution over emotion, and urged all to remain behind Wilson.

On May 10 the Post attacked the British Admiralty over the loss of the liner. The failure to provide an escort was

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25. "The Lusitania Case," Washington Post, 9 May 1915.



indefensible, it said. Great Britain could have used some her "hundreds of torpedoboats" to bring in the Lusitania: "The Failure of the British Admiralty to take this obvious precaution is one of the mysteries of the war. It must be explained."<sup>26</sup> The Post, like the Tribune, began to probe the unanswered questions surrounding the sinking as more news became available. The Post pursued these issues with an anti-British slant. Like the Examiner, the Post advocated preparedness; and also did not publish letters to the editor.

### Kansas City Star

#### **News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7**

The Kansas City Star was one of the evening dailies able to provide details of the sinking on May 7. That day's front page of the Star, as usual, was mostly local news. But the early news of the sinking took up three columns, topped with a large headline: SANK THE LUSITANIA - A SUBMARINE STRUCK THE CUNARD GIANT AT 2 O'CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON AND IT WENT DOWN NEAR THE HARBOR OF CORK, IRELAND. The paper could not confirm the fate of the passengers. A small, hurried-looking sketch of the liner accompanied the story in the

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<sup>26</sup>. "Why Was the Lusitania Not Guarded," Washington Post, 10 May 1915.

lower right-hand corner of page one. The late breaking stories only occupied the first page.

The Star's "Last Sporting Extra" of 6:00 P.M., May 7, sounded an optimistic note: SAVED ALL ABOARD - CUNARD LINE ANNOUNCES THAT NONE OF THE LUSITANIA'S PASSENGERS OR CREW WAS LOST - WEATHER WAS FAIR. Additional information included the fact that the submarine struck without warning, and that the ship foundered in 21 minutes.

After initially reporting no fatalities in the loss of the Lusitania, the Star of May 8 devoted four pages to the disaster. Like that of the Times, the story selection tended to highlight German brutality and to praise the efforts of the Lusitania's crew. Official statements and counterclaims for both the Germans and the British were given equal emphasis, however. The Star's news came from the major wire services - Associated Press and United Press - and the New York Times, and New York Herald. The front page of May 8 was dominated by several, one-column width headlines: LOSS NOW IS 1,346 -TOTAL SAVED IS 703. The stories on page one said that the Lusitania had been hit without warning by four torpedoes from more than one submarine. The crew had acted bravely but "hysterical women interfered with the launching of the Lusitania's boats," increasing the loss of life, the story read.<sup>27</sup> A story in the evening extra passed on to

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27. "Panic Was Fatal," Kansas City Star, 8 May 1915, p. 1.



Kansas City the news that at least one submarine had surfaced to admire its deadly work.<sup>28</sup> In the same extra a story detailed the cargo of ammunition aboard the liner, estimating its value at \$750,000.<sup>29</sup> A front page story on May 9 described the poison gas in the torpedoes.<sup>30</sup>

Like the other papers, the Star printed survivor lists, eyewitness accounts, and the reaction of other American newspapers. Unlike the others, it did not use graphics. The Star used small sketches of prominent victims, survivors, and the ship itself. There were no pictures, diagrams of the ship, or maps of the area.

## Editorials

Like the Constitution, the Star was firmly behind President Wilson in the crisis. The Star, however, seemed to give to Wilson almost super-human qualities:

'The melting pot' has got now to prove that it has fused a nation. It is up to this Nation to stand by its President, by its national leaders, with the same unity any kingly government commands from its people.

Individuals not in official place cannot know all the facts. They are not in position to form completely intelligent or informed

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28. "Plunger Gave No Aid," Kansas City Star, Second Sports Extra, 8 May 1915, p. 1.

29. "A Big Ammunition Cargo Too," Kansas City Star, Second Sporting Extra, 8 May 1915, p. 1.

30. "Dazed by Fumes," Kansas City Star, 9 May 1915, p. 1.

judgement. They may, if they will, indulge in impulsive sentiments and possibly unjust expressions of opinion. The President may not do that. On him rests the responsibility for 100 million people. He must speak with calmness and deliberation. On him Fate and the voice of the people have cast the burden of history. It is but just, it is only safe, that the voice of the people shall choose him as its oracle.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the Post, Tribune, or Examiner, the Star voiced no concerns about the circumstances surrounding the loss of the Lusitania. There was no call to keep Americans off English passenger ships carrying munitions. The Star would wait for Wilson's lead:

In this critical situation the attitude of President Wilson is commanding confidence. He is acting with deliberation, after taking counsel with his associates and with the Nation. His proposed plan of action, if the semi-official forecast is correct, is in accordance with that larger patriotism which takes into account the welfare of humanity, as well as the honor of the United States.

In support of the President and that program, if the country understands it aright, all differences vanish, and we are all Americans. We all follow the flag!<sup>32</sup>

### Letters to the Editor

Few of the Star's letters to the editor dealt directly with the Lusitania crisis, most discussed local issues.

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<sup>31</sup>. "Stand By the President," Kansas City Star, 8 May 1915, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>. "Following the Flag," Kansas City Star, 12 May 1915, p. 10.



Those that did appear, like the Star's own editorials, praised Wilson's neutral stand for peace:

To the Star: We, as one of the millions of common families, wish to express, through the column of the Public Mind, our gratitude, admiration, and almost worship of President Wilson for his view in not declaring war. Our family is not one of men of high position, such as some who are trying to stir the nation to war, but of the common men who would be the sufferers if war was declared.<sup>33</sup>

To the Star: ... I am a mother and an American and, oh, I pray our country will never go to arms. Oh, mothers wake up before it is too late and let us do what we can for peace.<sup>34</sup>

### Milwaukee Journal

#### **News Coverage: Pages 1 - 7**

The Milwaukee Journal was also an evening daily publishing news of the disaster on May 7. But unlike the Star, it was more cautious with the initial bulletins of that day. A banner headline stretched across page one: LUSITANIA TORPEDOED AND SUNK OFF THE COAST OF IRELAND-GREAT LINER IS DESTROYED BY GERMANS. Two right-hand columns of news on page one were accompanied by small pictures of the prominent passengers - the stories jumped to page two.

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33. "Almost Worship President Wilson," "Speaking the Public Mind," Kansas City Star, 15 May 1915, p. 4.

34. "A Mother's Plea for Peace," Kansas City Star, 16 May 1915, p. 3B.

The Journal reported the sinking time as 30 minutes, but gave no details of the passengers: "Ambassador Page cables that nothing is known as to whether passengers were saved . But a late Queenstown message says lifeboats were launched before the gigantic ship took final plunge." The Journal mentioned on page one that the Lusitania had once flown the American flag as protection. Reports from Washington said there would be no complication in relations with Germany unless American lives were lost. A list of first-class passengers was printed on page two.

Like the Star and the Constitution, the Milwaukee Journal was a paper that concentrated on local and regional news. Like those papers, the Journal devoted only four pages to news coverage of the Lusitania disaster, and was the first of the papers studied to drop off in the coverage of the event. By May 12, news of the Lusitania would go no further than page two.

Half of the front page of the May 8 edition was devoted to the Lusitania, following the cautious news printed in the May 7 evening edition. A large portion of page one, however, detailed the visit to Milwaukee by former President William Howard Taft. Taft was pictured on page one instead of the Lusitania. News of the disaster was topped by the headline: 1,216 LOST LIVES ON LUSITANIA - FEW OF THE AMERICANS SAVED - MANY PICKED UP IN WATER - SUCCUMB TO THEIR INJURIES. The Journal's news came from the services of



the New York Times, New York Herald, New York World, and United Press. The Journal reported that several submarines fired at least three torpedoes into the liner. The paper reported bulletins that said the crew had acted bravely, and that forty children, less than a year old, had died during the attack.<sup>35</sup> But even as the Journal outlined the horror of the sinking, the paper gave equal emphasis to German justification. A page two story of May 8 discussed the contraband cargo of the Lusitania. And a front page story on May 9 discussed the British starvation blockade of Germany.<sup>36</sup> The reaction of newspapers in Germany was also reviewed in several issues.

### **Editorials**

Editorially, the Journal followed the Star and the Constitution in urging calm deliberation and faith in the president. A May 8 Journal editorial told Americans: "Sit tight. Don't rock the boat." The disaster called for calm, clear thinking:

The sinking of the Lusitania, with consequent loss of American lives, comes as a great and almost unprecedented shock to the nation. It makes still more tense, still more menacing a situation that has caused alarm among all thoughtful men.

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<sup>35</sup>. Milwaukee Journal, 8 May 1915, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>. "Sinking Due to Starving Plans - Dernburg Puts Tragedy Up to British," Milwaukee Journal, 9 May 1915, p. 1.

Because of this emotion, this shock and this danger, it is more necessary than ever for Americans to take a firm grip upon themselves and to win and retain self-mastery. It is imperative that they do this. It is no time for excited talk and reckless declarations. Clear heads, good sense, and calm thinking and reasoning are absolutely required in America today.<sup>37</sup>

The Journal praised statesmen like former president Taft for urging calm faith in Wilson. The paper attacked the jingoes, most notably Theodore Roosevelt, for recklessly calling for military action:

... The thing Mr. Roosevelt ought to consider, and apparently does not consider, is that as a man who has occupied the post of president, he will be listened to more at home and in other lands than a man who has been only a private citizen. In his language, which is anything but the voice of calmness and judgement; in his violence, which is anything but representative of the American people, he does what one man can to hamper and embarrass the administration, which is charged with the responsibility of guarding the interests of the nation, and to misrepresent the American people.<sup>38</sup>

### Letters to the Editor

The Journal's letters to the editor, like its news coverage, reflected both sides of the issue. The letters covered both ends of the Lusitania spectrum: severe

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<sup>37</sup>. "Let Reason Rule," Milwaukee Journal, 8 May 1915, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>. "Not Serving His Country," Milwaukee Journal, 13 May 1915, p. 8.



condemnation of Germany, and criticism of British policies and Americans who traveled in the danger zone:

To the Journal: The premeditated and cruel destruction of the Lusitania and the lives of innocent American citizens by Germany by means of submarines will go down in history as a most barbaric event. It is inconceivable at this stage of civilization that any nation would ever lend its aid and support to such wholesale destruction of innocent men, women and children ...<sup>39</sup>

To the Journal: ... While all must regret the sinking of the Lusitania, particularly the loss of so many American lives, in war it is necessary to destroy as much property belonging to the enemy as is possible, and the fact that the ship was sunk by a German submarine is certainly no cause why we should go to war with Germany. All passengers had been repeatedly warned of the danger; there are American ships crossing the Atlantic in which they could have taken passage and been safe.<sup>40</sup>

### "Too Proud to Fight"

Meanwhile, Woodrow Wilson, the man the newspapers looked to in this hour of crisis, had issued no official word concerning the loss of American lives on the Lusitania. For three days after the tragedy - while front page stories of shock and concern from Washington quoted members of Congress, officials from the State Department, and members of the cabinet - Wilson remained stoically silent while the

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39. "Sinking of the Lusitania," Milwaukee Journal, 13 May 1915, p. 8.

40. "Use American Ships," Milwaukee Journal, 14 May 1915, p. 12.

facts filtered in from Ireland. He broke his silence on the night of May 10, when he traveled to Philadelphia to speak before a crowd of four thousand newly naturalized citizens. During his address he touched on the ideals of America:

The example of America must be a special example. The example of America must be the example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but of peace because it is the healing and elevating influence of the world and strife is not. There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.<sup>41</sup>

Wilson had intended his remarks as another statement of American neutrality and peace versus the warring nations of Europe. But coming on the heels of the Lusitania sinking, political foes seized the phrase, "too proud to fight," and began to use it against him. Again, Roosevelt led the charge, saying that "Professor Wilson," was a "Byzantine logothete," who was supported by all the "flubdubs," "mollycoddles," and "flapdoodle pacifists."<sup>42</sup>

On May 11, all the newspapers reported Wilson's Philadelphia speech within the context of the Lusitania disaster. The speech was covered on the front page, and second page of all seven of the newspapers studied. The news in all the papers included the negative reaction of European leaders and newspapers. The Journal printed a story quoting

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<sup>41</sup>. Patrick Devlin, Too Proud to Fight, p. 288.

<sup>42</sup>. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, p. 579.



White House advisors that said Wilson's speech was not a statement of his Lusitania policy.<sup>43</sup>

Overall editorial opinion favored Wilson's speech. The Star compared Wilson to Abraham Lincoln:

In looking back now at the great figure of Abraham Lincoln the distinctive attribute of him was his patience - the quality that gave him understanding of the passions and tribulations of others. The quality, also, that gave him strength to shape his course by his own ideals despite those passions and tribulations others.

It is not possible to measure a living actor on the world's stage with the accuracy that perspective gives. But it is possible to feel the stimulus of character and of moral greatness when exerted by a living personage. Indeed, it is impossible not to respond to such qualities and to feel one's own moral energies are revived.<sup>44</sup>

The Constitution also praised the speech, saying that Wilson's policies were anchored on the "broad ground of humanity," instead of the narrow self-interest of the jingoes:

President Wilson could not have laid down a better rule of action than his assertion, 'There is such a thing as being so right that it [a nation] doesn't need to convince others by force that it is right.' The president has made it clear that his remarks applied not alone to the Lusitania incident, but to all of those which have tended to produce friction with Germany or other countries; or, in other words, he put the reformations of a mistaken German policy above the question of attempted chastisement for a

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43. "Speech Not a Declaration of Policy," Milwaukee Journal, 11 May 1915, p. 6.

44. "The National Honor," Kansas City Star, 11 May 1915, p. 18.

single untoward act.<sup>45</sup>

The Post praised the speech for its directness, simplicity and patriotism. The Tribune lauded the speech's "sane statecraft," citing it as another reason to support the president: "If the cost of coming through safely be humiliation, we think the guide of our ways will have to be some other man than Woodrow Wilson."<sup>46</sup>

The reaction of the Times to the president's Philadelphia speech was unique to the papers studied. It praised the speech in a May 11 editorial, but indicated that Wilson was simply waiting for public opinion to jell before striking out against Germany. The American people, said the Times, feel "there can be no peace on earth until the Hohenzollern curse is lifted from Germany, until her godless military arrogance is crushed." Wilson, the editorial continued, although knowing this feeling of the nation, could not say this in his speech in Philadelphia, but was waiting for the right moment. Wilson, according to the Times, would not let the people down.<sup>47</sup>

Hearst's Examiner was the only paper to criticize the speech. Although praising that aspect of Wilson's address

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45. "The President's Address," Atlanta Constitution, 12 May 1915, p. 8.

46. "In the Hands of the President," Chicago Tribune, 12 May 1915, p. 6.

47. "Not the Final Word," New York Times, 11 May 1915, p. 14.



that dealt with unity among Americans, the Examiner criticized the "too proud to fight" remark:

The President's theory that a nation may be too proud to fight does more credit to his heart than to his head.

The trouble with this theory is that the other nations may not be too proud to fight.

Altruistic theories are one thing. The realities of life are another ...

Let us always be too proud to make unjust war. But let us always be proud enough to fight valiantly any power which threatens us with unjust war.<sup>48</sup>

Thus ended the initial coverage of the tragedy. the splendid Lusitania was now a "smear of flotsam" on the Irish Sea. The Germans had apologized for the loss of American lives, but blamed the British for arming the vessel and filling it with contraband. Britain blamed the brutality of the "Huns." And Wilson had called for unity and neutrality in Philadelphia. The world awaited his official response to Germany.

Each of the papers studied reviewed events from its own particular vantage point. The Times could have been a state-owned newspaper of the British government. Every account of the sinking, every accusation against the Germans, released by the British government or Cunard was publicized and editorially verified by the Times. The German side of the story was ignored, or viewed with suspicion.

The Tribune, Post, and Examiner, on the other hand,

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<sup>48</sup>. "Fine Theory, But Won't Work," San Francisco Examiner, 12 May 1915.

took a strictly neutral, pro-American stance. Charges from both sides were given coverage in these newspapers. German defenses and stories criticizing Cunard and the British Admiralty were placed as prominently as were the disaster stories themselves. Editorially, these papers wanted answers from both sides, and wanted the United States government to take action against a recurrence - by banning Americans from travel on belligerent ships.

The Constitution and Star were similar in both news coverage and editorial opinion. Both used the major wire services and the services of the New York press to provide their readers with a news selection similar to the Times. German brutality was highlighted, while German defenses and counterclaims received little emphasis. Editorially, both backed President Wilson without question. The Journal was also an unquestioning advocate for the president's choice of strategy, but its news coverage was more balanced than the Constitution and the Star - even though it used the same news sources.

During the initial coverage of the Lusitania crisis an editorial pattern began to appear. The large metropolitan dailies - Post, Times, Examiner, and Tribune - all rallied around the president, but were quick to point out policy options - such as preparedness, or keeping Americans off British ships. The regional dailies of the smaller cities - Constitution, Star, and Journal - urged calm deliberation



and faith in the president, but refused to second-guess the administration.

As events drew on into the summer, the papers continued to probe, speculate, and comment - based on their unique political and editorial positions.

## CHAPTER SIX: AFTERWARD - THE DIPLOMATIC DEBATE

### The Lusitania Notes

President Wilson's first formal protest against the Lusitania's sinking was cabled to Berlin on May 13, 1915, six days after the disaster. Though still receiving front page coverage in all the papers studied, the Lusitania news was becoming more a story of diplomatic debate, and less a tale of tragedy at sea. Only the communication between Berlin and Washington was front page news. Remaining survivor and salvage stories began to share space with other war news on the inside pages or to disappear completely. Other than the mass funerals for the dead in Queenstown, no other breaking news came from the sinking. Not surprisingly, the British Admiralty and Cunard were vindicated at an inquest in Kinsale, Ireland. Germany was indicted for murder. An investigation by Parliament reached the same verdict on July 17.

The first American Lusitania note upheld the "indisputable" right of Americans to sail on the high seas. It demanded a disavowal of the act and reparation for damages. It called for an end to U-boat warfare, because the submarine could never be used in accordance with international law. The note itself was drafted by Wilson, Bryan was forced to sign it although he personally had been



fighting to keep Americans off belligerent ships.

The Examiner attacked this first note, largely on the same grounds as Bryan. The Examiner said it was unrealistic to expect that Germany would give up her only effective weapon against Britain, the submarine. It said Wilson's insistence on this could lead to war.<sup>1</sup>

All the other papers however, fell into line behind the president. The Times praised the president's note as temperate but firm:

It may be said that the note leaves no point of the controversy untouched and touches nothing as to which it is not convincing and conclusive.

The editorial continued that the choice Wilson gave to Germany

was between "abandonment of a method of warfare in which she may feel that she has been singly successful and conformity to the dictates of justice and humanity." This should not be a hard choice for Germany, for if she refused, she would be considered an outlaw nation and all of civilization would rise against her.<sup>2</sup>

The Tribune called the note "at once an assertion of right an eloquent and friendly appeal." It said the note, although uncompromising on submarine warfare, was considered

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<sup>1</sup>. "The President's Note to Germany," San Francisco Examiner, 14 May 1915, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>. "The President's Note," New York Times, 14 May 1915, p. 12.

friendly enough to encourage negotiations over the matter. Such a note held out the possibility of renewing normally friendly relations between the two countries.<sup>3</sup> The Tribune did not push for Americans to be banned from belligerent ships.

The Constitution said that the president's note proved there were other ways to solve a crisis than war. The paper simply stated: "The President's attitude is in full accord with the editorial expression of the Constitution." In short, "Well done, Mr. President."<sup>4</sup>

The Post continued to back the president. Its comment was that the note:

... is framed in moderate language and leaves abundant opportunity for the German government to reply in a way that will restore good feeling between the countries. At the same time the note conveys an unmistakable warning that the practices complained of must cease, or the United States will take steps in its own way to protect the lives of its citizens and their exercise of their unquestioned rights.<sup>5</sup>

The Star said that: "The German government will strengthen itself before world public opinion if it accepts the note in the spirit in which it was sent, and changes its

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<sup>3</sup>. "The American Note," Chicago Tribune, 14 May 1915, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>. "Well Done Mr. President," Atlanta Constitution, 14 May 1915, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>. "Up to Germany," Washington Post, 19 May 1915.



mode of warfare to meet the conditions laid down."<sup>6</sup>

The Journal backed the President, and seemingly called its city's large German-born population to do the same:

His firmness and his desire for friendship are certain of the confidence and support of all Americans. It is our part not alone to approve, but to refrain from excitement or that kind of discussion which provokes unfriendly feeling. It is a time when we must hold every other thing second to our duty as Americans ...<sup>7</sup>

It took about two weeks for the Germans to deliberate and send back their reply from Berlin. This delay had a purpose, for Berlin hoped to give the United States time to cool off. In the meantime, the American press returned to business as usual.

The Constitution, Star, and Journal went back to local and regional issues. After May 13, stories from Washington about the negotiations with Berlin began to share the inside pages with other news of the war. The attitude of these three newspapers was best summed up by a page one editorial in the Star: "The tragedy in Europe must not be permitted to absorb attention to the exclusion of obligations at home."<sup>8</sup> The Star turned its editorial attention toward a bond referendum for civic improvements; but the few editorials

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<sup>6</sup>. "The Note to Germany," Kansas City Star, 14 May 1915, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>. "The Note to Germany," Milwaukee Journal, 14 May 1915, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup>. "Boost Kansas City," Kansas City Star, 16 May 1915, p. 1.

dealing with foreign policy backed the preparedness policies of Theodore Roosevelt. The Constitution emphasized highway construction and the city schools in its editorials. The Journal continued to push for American unity in the face of conflict abroad.

The Times continued its emphasis on international and national news. Preparedness was a growing theme in the paper's editorials. It reaffirmed Wilson's note, saying the U.S. position was non-negotiable. The Germans continued to receive the condemnation of the paper, while the British were upheld as champions of democracy.

The Examiner continued to brood over Wilson's note and to urge the nation to beef up her defenses so that she could enforce her neutral rights against any nation. All the belligerents in the war were savage, self-interested, and not to be trusted with international agreements, it claimed. In Chicago, the Tribune also stepped up its preparedness campaign. All Americans of foreign descent were praised for their loyalty. Citing the difficulty for a democracy to formulate consistent foreign policy, it cautioned Americans to be patient and stand behind the president.

The Post was also a member of the preparedness team. It held neutral rights had to be protected from abuse by any belligerent. The interruption of American commerce by the British blockade continued to be an issue for the paper. And President Wilson was urged to address Great Britain on the



same issues as he had Germany. The Post also continued to comment on the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Lusitania, and it questioned the British silence in the matter.

The German reply was cabled to Washington on May 18. The question concerning the validity of submarine warfare, raised by the United States in the first note was avoided. Germany said that it had already offered apologies to all the neutral nations involved in the sinking of the Lusitania; she would go no farther because the liner was an armed auxiliary cruiser - a justified target. The British government had been using neutral passengers as a shield for its munitions.

The Times reacted sharply to this rather defiant reply. Germany was temporizing over the issues - clearly she misunderstood the resolve of the people of America. The Lusitania was not an armed cruiser and its deliberate sinking was an act of murder. The Times said of the German reply:

... we should find it difficult to refrain from calling into question Germany's good faith. That we shall not do, but she will be plainly told that her reply to our note is unsatisfactory and she will again be told that we expect to be clearly and definitely informed of her intentions.<sup>9</sup>

The Tribune called the German reply "less a response

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<sup>9</sup>. "Germany's Disappointing Reply," New York Times, 31 May 1915, p. 6.



than an invitation to debate." And it called on all trans-Atlantic passengers to refrain from traveling on steamers carrying munitions until the questions concerning submarine warfare could be settled.<sup>10</sup>

To the Examiner, the vague and defiant reply was invited by the contents of the first American note. It claimed Wilson had no right to prohibit Germany's use of her submarines against enemy commerce and said America could not tell a country how to fight its wars. Contending the submarine would eventually have to be covered by the rules of international law, it held Wilson's position was outdated. It called on the United States to join with other neutrals to draw up a clear cut list of rights - and then stand to defend them.<sup>11</sup>

The Constitution speculated over the reason for Berlin's vague and resistant reply. The paper said that Wilson should stick to his guns, to demand answers to the two critical questions he posed - "Will Germany cease to make war upon innocent American citizens, and will she make amends for the wanton slaughter she has already committed?" Although it called for "direct answers," it also said, "we cannot afford to let hysteria supplant reason. The breaking

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<sup>10</sup>. "The German Reply," Chicago Tribune, 31 May 1915, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>. "Define Neutral Rights, and Then Unite All Neutral Nations to Defend Them," San Francisco Examiner, 1 June 1915, p. 24.

point is still a long way off."<sup>12</sup>

The Post joined the Constitution in calling for calm deliberation in this "critical situation" involving the German reply. According to the Post, the German reply was based on faulty reasoning. How could the victims of the sinking themselves be blamed for their tragedy?<sup>13</sup>

The Star was not satisfied with the German reply, and said the U.S. must insist on the protection of her citizens, no matter where they travel: "This government would fail in its duty to its citizens, and to the cause of humanity, if it did not stand by the terms of its great protest."<sup>14</sup>

The Journal continued its theme of American unity. Its editorial gave no opinion on the German reply except that it "will meet a variety of opinion in the minds of the American people." The Journal said that no matter what individual feelings were about the German response, it was every citizen's duty to maintain "self control" and "trust" the actions of the president.<sup>15</sup>

Official Washington was quite disappointed with the German reply to the first Lusitania note. Wilson, and his

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12. "The German Answer," Atlanta Constitution, 1 June 1915, p. 8.

13. "A Critical Situation," Washington Post, 31 May 1915, p. 6.

14. "The Protest Still Stands," Kansas City Star, 31 May 1915, p. 1.

15. "The American Duty," Milwaukee Journal, 31 May 1915, p. 6.



advisors, set out almost immediately to formulate an answer. Again following the legal advice of Lansing, Wilson drafted the second Lusitania note. In blunt language it refuted Germany's claims that the ship was armed and said the fact it carried a small amount of munitions did not justify an attack without warning. He again urged, on humanitarian grounds, that Germany give up its use of the submarine as a commerce raider. Wilson defended the right of Americans to travel freely on the high seas.

This second note was too much for Bryan, who was now convinced that Wilson's pro-Ally policy would eventually lead to a showdown with Germany. Frustrated after months of watching true American neutrality slip away, Bryan resigned on June 8. Lansing became Secretary of State.

Americans were unaware of the deep rift that had opened between Bryan and Wilson. As a loyal party man, Bryan steadfastly refused to criticize his chief in public. So his resignation at this point in the negotiations made it appear the administration's foreign policy was in disarray. Six of the newspapers studied saw Bryan's resignation as an act of disloyalty, and he received sharp criticism. In the ensuing weeks, the Star and Times viciously attacked the former secretary of state. Only the Examiner praised Bryan's resignation as an act of conscience:

Perhaps in thus following his conscience Mr. Bryan has done his country a real service by emphasizing the far divergence of the Administration, of which he now ceases to be a



member, from that strict and impartial neutrality which should characterize this nation and by the observance of which alone it can escape entanglement in the world war.<sup>16</sup>

With the Bryan resignation, the press expected the second note to be close to a declaration of war. When it repeated the terms of the first note, they were relieved. The Constitution praised the president's second note as being "consistent with American dignity and honor." It said Wilson stood on firm ground with international law; Berlin would be mistaken to doubt America's resolve.<sup>17</sup>

The Tribune saw the second note as more neutral than the first. Its tone seemed to invite mediation over the use of the submarine in warfare. To blindly insist on a total ban on the use of the submarines against merchant ships would favor Great Britain. This second note expressed a balanced approach, according to the Tribune, and it lacked the wording of an ultimatum.<sup>18</sup>

The Times called the note "firm and courteous." It had an appeal to justice and humanity that no nation could refuse. Wilson was offering Germany the opportunity to enter

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16. "Mr. Bryan's Resignation And Its Significance," San Francisco Examiner, 9 June 1915, p. 24.

17. "Second Note to Germany," Atlanta Constitution, 12 June 1915, p. 6.

18. "The Second Note," Chicago Tribune, 11 June 1915, p. 6.

once again the "roles of civilization."<sup>19</sup>

The Post said of the second note:

While the United States yields nothing in asking for an assurance that the destruction of American lives shall not occur again, there is nothing in the note at which Germany can take offense, and much that points the way toward a friendly adjustment of all differences.<sup>20</sup>

The Examiner was pleased with the second note, noting especially that the use of the submarine was now an item for negotiation:

The American people ought now to be able to look forward to the proper assertion of the rightful demands of the nation instead of the extreme unreasonable demands of the original note now delicately set over if not entirely eliminated.

With the submarine issue now negotiable, the Examiner wondered by Bryan had resigned.<sup>21</sup>

The Star was still directly behind Wilson on the second note:

The United States would be lacking in self respect, it would be false to its obligation as the leading neutral power, it would be inviting the contempt of the world, if it did not insist on those rights that were disregarded when the Lusitania was sunk.<sup>22</sup>

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19. "Germany's Opportunity," New York Times, 11 June 1915, p. 14.

20. "The Note to Germany," Washington Post, 11 June 1915, p. 6.

21. "Our Rights, All Our Rights, And Nothing But Our Rights," San Francisco Examiner, 11 June 1915, p. 24.

22. "America's Duty," Kansas City Star, 9 June 1915, p. 1.

The Journal praised the "friendly" tone of the second note, and said that if an agreement could not be reached it would be through no fault of President Wilson.<sup>23</sup>

The German response of July 8 again sidestepped Wilson's demands. Berlin said it did indeed respect the laws of humanity, but was obliged to continue submarine warfare due to the unlawful acts of her enemies. It argued Great Britain had first broken international law by its food blockade of Germany and by arming many of her merchant ships had forced Germany to sink vessels without warning. Therefore, it said submarine warfare was a justifiable response to the British blockade, and in the case of the Lusitania, there would be no disavowal.

The Times reacted angrily:

The purpose of Germany in this latest note is quite unconcealed. It could hardly be more frankly avowed. She asks us to suspend the law of nations, the laws of war and humanity for her benefit.

The editorial asserted that Germany was an outlaw nation, and Americans must be firm in asserting their rights abroad.<sup>24</sup>

The Constitution took a more optimistic view of the situation:

Although the german note, just received,

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23. "The Note to Germany," Milwaukee Journal, 11 June 1915, p. 12.

24. "What are Germany's Intentions?" New York Times, 11 July 1915, p. 14.



making reply to the demands of the United States regarding rights upon the high seas, fails in some important particulars to meet American views, there is evidence enough that Germany and this country through diplomatic negotiation, are gradually finding a way out of the entanglement that came about as the result of the torpedoing of the Lusitania.

The Constitution pointed out that since the sending of the first American note, Germany had been complying with the legal principles recognized by America regarding neutral shipping. Germany had not attacked an American or other neutral ship without warning. Surely a compromise could be reached from this situation, it said.<sup>25</sup>

The Post held the same view as the Constitution:

If this avoidance of injury to Americans is continued as policy, it matters little what the two governments may declare in their exchange of notes. Actual danger of conflict will have been removed.<sup>26</sup>

The Tribune suggested that since this second German reply was as equally unbending as the first, the nation might be asking too much of Berlin. It was time to seek compromise, it said, Germany could not be expected to give up her only worthwhile naval weapon:

The question is whether the United States stands ready to stand upon the full measure of its rights to the uttermost, or finds it consistent with its honor, its duty, and its interests to forego full enjoyment of its legal rights in favor of an agreement which will in

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25. "Our Foreign Problems," Atlanta Constitution, 11 July 1915, p. 2F.

26. "Germany's Note and Her Policy in Fact," Washington Post, 11 July 1915, p. 4.

fact protect its citizens and avoid the danger or certainty of a resort to extreme measures.<sup>27</sup>

The Examiner continued to comment that the reason for the unsatisfactory German reply was the unrealistic demands of Wilson. Like the Tribune, the Examiner called for compromise and negotiation on the subject of submarines and international law, so the right of neutrals might be clearly established.<sup>28</sup>

The Journal again addressed its citizens as if they were about to riot over the issue:

The reply of Germany to the recent note of the state department refuses to grant the demands made by this government. We must now look for a flare of indignation throughout this country. There will be much excited comment, and we enter on the gravest situation since the sinking of the Lusitania. We must still remember that the president has a better view of this matter than any one else can have.<sup>29</sup>

The Star said that Wilson was following the only diplomatic path available:

... The Lusitania tragedy remains as it was the day it occurred. The sinking of an unarmed merchantman without warning and with great loss of life is not disavowed. There is no assurances that other similar tragedies may not be enacted.

There is nothing in the note to cause the United State to alter the position which it has assumed, and which it must maintain. This government is standing for the rights of neutral

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27. "The German Note," Chicago Tribune, 11 July 1915, p. 4 II.

28. "Insist Upon All Rights, And Only Upon Rights," San Francisco Examiner, 12 July 1915, p 16.

29. "Germany's Reply," Milwaukee Journal, 10 July 1915, p. 4.



nations, which in this particular case are the rights of humanity as well.<sup>30</sup>

By July the sinking of the Lusitania was found nowhere on the pages of the newspapers studied. More exciting war news - the loss of battleships and the struggle in the trenches - had taken its place. Only the diplomatic wrestling over the Lusitania remained news on the front page. And this was only when a note was anticipated from either Berlin or Washington. Otherwise, speculation on the outcome of the debate was buried on the inside pages. Ironically, this is what both Berlin and Washington had wanted, hoping the passage of time would change two unyielding positions.

With the pro-Ally Lansing now firmly in charge at the State Department, he set about providing Wilson with a firm answer to this second defiant German reply. Lansing was hoping to get the Germans to admit the sinking was illegal, as a reprisal to an already illegal starvation blockade. What neither Lansing nor Wilson knew, but both the Constitution and the Post had observed in their editorials (already mentioned), was that the German Admiralty was now under standing orders to spare all passenger liners - regardless of nationality. No passenger ships had been sunk since the loss of the Lusitania.

Wilson drafted his third, and final Lusitania note for

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<sup>30</sup>. "The German Note," Kansas City Star, 11 July 1915, p. 1.



Lansing's signature on July 21. The note was still blunt, but it admitted that the submarine might be used legally if deployed using the Cruiser Rules of visit and search. The note sought an acknowledgement from Berlin that the sinking was illegal, and that American rights to sail on belligerent ships would not be threatened. After the note was cabled, little mention was made of it in the front pages within a few days.

On July 22, the Tribune continued its call for the ban of passengers on ships carrying munitions of war. But with the release of the third note, the paper saw its duty as one of backing the president - right or wrong. The Tribune said the third note was: "If not an ultimatum in form, it is an ultimatum in fact. The door of discussion is closed."<sup>31</sup>

The Examiner felt the third note an unjustifiable ultimatum from Wilson and Lansing:

Naturally, Germany will no more admit that the President of the United States can formulate international law and apply it without Germany's assent than would we Americans admit that the Kaiser can formulate new international law and apply it to us without our assent.<sup>32</sup>

The Times said the third note stated the U.S. position with "courage and firmness." Now that our nation had spoken: "It rests with Germany to say whether she desires the continuance of friendly relations between the two

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<sup>31</sup>. "Our Country!" Chicago Tribune, 24 July 1915, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>. "Arbitration, Not Ultimatums, Best For European Issues," San Francisco Examiner, 26 July 1915, p. 16.

Governments and the two peoples."<sup>33</sup>

The Post was not impressed with the note. Like the Examiner, the paper felt it was now time to pursue England's violations of American rights.<sup>34</sup>

The Journal again praised Wilson's statesmanship: "Beyond the shadow of a doubt, were there mutual relations reversed, the position that Washington takes is the position that Germany would take."<sup>35</sup>

The Star echoed the Tribune: "My country right or wrong.' Mr. Wilson, in his latest note to Germany, has placed his country unquestionably right."<sup>36</sup> The Constitution though reporting the news of the third note on page one, had no editorial comment.

The end to the diplomatic duel came on February 4, 1916, when Germany - after much discussion with Washington - sent its final response. Berlin said the sinking was an act against the starvation blockade of Germany, but the great loss of life was unintentional. Germany said she would limit her submarine attacks - an act she had already ordered. And the German government expressed "regret" for the loss of

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<sup>33</sup>. "The Last Word," New York Times, 24 July 1915, p.8

<sup>34</sup>. "American Rights," Washington Post, 23 July 1915, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup>. "The Note to Berlin," Milwaukee Journal, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>. "The President's Note," Kansas City Star, 24 July 1915, p. 1.



American lives, agreeing to pay damages. Due reparations were made in the 1920s. Germany was never forced to admit the sinking was illegal.

Though all seven newspapers studied ran news stories of this diplomatic settlement on pages one and two, only three closed the proceedings with editorials. Both the Post and the Examiner called for the same effort against Great Britain. The Times hoped the fight against Germany would continue, though Washington now dropped the matter:

It was unlawful, and the admission of illegality is the essence of our demand. No money indemnity can take its place, no fine-spun phrases will be accepted as satisfactory. There must be an admission of the wrong, of the unlawfulness of the act. Without that the diplomatic interchanges will be discontinued. Responsibility for the consequence must rest with the unrepentant wrongdoer.<sup>37</sup>

Six months later, during the first week of August, 1916, the fate of the Lusitania was all but forgotten. The newspapers studied continued to cover the war in Europe, but were much more interested in the political conflict about to take place in America - the election of 1916. The Republicans, that first week in August, had nominated Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes. The Democrats were ready to renominate Woodrow Wilson for a second term, using the slogan "He kept us out of war."

Though the coming election was beginning to creep into

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<sup>37</sup>. "Freedom of the Seas," New York Times, 6 February 1916, p. 14.



editorials concerning the policies of the Wilson administration, all seven papers remained against American intervention in the European conflict. Their views of Germany had not changed.

On August 3, the Times attacked a recent speech by Kaiser Wilhelm in which he praised the determination of the German people in the righteous cause of their nation. The Times said the Kaiser would be defeated in his quest for world domination:

When the pride of the German rulers is humbled, the fangs drawn from their hatred, the Germany they have deceived and led into a devil's dance will 'live free, secure, and strong among the nations of the world' [the Kaiser's words]; but there will be small recompense for those 'men and women, old and young, all quietly and bravely wearing mourning,' whose loved ones died for a will-o-the-wisp, for a cause not their own, for the gratification of a mad ambition and the glorification of a false god.<sup>38</sup>

While the Times railed against Germany, the Post maintained its independent course during the first week in August, 1916. It continued to attack British trade restrictions against American ships, but was not about to take sides in the European war. On August 4 the paper vented its disgust:

Americans are sick of having one side or the other in the European war trying to work up prejudice and hatred while committing acts just as offensive as those charged against the enemy. 'A plague of both your houses!' cries the

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<sup>38</sup>. "Wilhelm Speaks Again," New York Times, 3 August 1916, p. 10.

disgusted neutral; 'clean the blood off your own hands before you raise them in holy horror at the acts perpetrated by your enemy. Do not try to justify your murders by calling your enemy a murderer. Do not pose to us as an injured party when you are making reprisals that shock mankind.'<sup>39</sup>

Like the Post, the Examiner was disgusted with the bloodshed in Europe. The paper's political cartoons attacked the British trade restrictions, but the editorials were strongly isolationist. On August 6, the Examiner said the nations of Europe had been caught like rats in the trap of war:

But every nation, if it said today what it felt, would say, 'It was not worth it.' The nation that says it fought to defend its commerce knows that it has spent ten times more blood and money than its commerce was worth.

So of every other 'good reason.'

If the nations had thought and taken time for good REASONING, instead of seizing upon the first good reason for war, millions of men dead or wounded would now be well and working usefully; thousands upon thousands of millions squandered would be saved for useful spending.<sup>40</sup>

Though isolationist in line with the Post and Examiner, the Republican Tribune had already decided that Charles Evans Hughes was the best man in the coming presidential election. During the first week of August, 1916, it praised Hughes acceptance speech and criticized Wilson's slogan "He kept us out of war:"

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39. "Both Sides Guilty," Washington Post, 4 August 1916, p. 4.

40. "The Cheese Was Not Worth It," San Francisco Examiner, 6 August 1916, Editorial Section, p. 1.



From this review of four years of unhappy ineptitude we realize that we have been kept perpetually on the rim of war, where courageous firmness would have thrust us safely back from the abyss; we realize that after four years of dizzy balancing we are still in the midst of intolerable complications, still threatened and still unprepared.<sup>41</sup>

The isolationist Tribune said that Wilson's foreign policy favored Britain. The paper wanted Americans to make up their own minds. On August 3, the paper criticized British censorship because it clouded the judgement of the American people:

The British censorship aims to prevent this play of opinion in America. It strikes at our sources of criticism and interpretation. It wishes to deny us the judgments of Americans who are professionally engaged in Germany [reporters]. Cable messages have to pass through British hands. They come to us if the British censor allows them to come and as he allows them to come.

The attempt is one in limitation of American intelligence. It is a restriction of American judgement. It is designed to produce bias. Great Britain may not be starving Germans physically, but it is trying to starve the Americans mentally.<sup>42</sup>

The Constitution of the first week in August, 1916, was primarily concerned with local issues before the state legislature. On August 3, the paper criticized Hughes for attacking Wilson's foreign policy. The Constitution said it was easy for Hughes to criticize Wilson, but much harder to

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41. "Mr. Hughes' Speech of Acceptance," Chicago Tribune, 2 August 1916, p. 6.

42. "Will the British Allow Us to Think?" Chicago Tribune, 3 August 1916, p. 6.



stand in his shoes.<sup>43</sup> Firmly behind Wilson, the paper continued its isolationist stand. Like the Post and Examiner, the Constitution was disgusted with the war that was destroying so many lives:

And the men fighting on to the end share the people's wish for peace; for the home folks are their people; they took home with them when they went to war. In the trenches and in the hospitals, it is said, the literature of home and simple things is that which appeals most to them: They do not read of wars; they have had enough of battles!<sup>44</sup>

Like the Constitution, the Journal continued to stand behind the policies of the Wilson administration. On August 2 it criticized Hughes for trying to be "all things to all men" on the war issue:

Evidently Mr. Hughes has succeeded in his initial effort in pleasing those who will be for him at all events because they have made up their minds to be against Mr. Wilson. But whether the American people will accept a candidate who thus obviously attempts to be on both sides of the principal question in the campaign is another and far different thing.<sup>45</sup>

The Journal praised Wilson for his peaceful policy toward the belligerents in Europe. Throughout the week, the paper also continued to highlight the loyalty of the citizens of Milwaukee.

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<sup>43</sup>. "Where Hughes Stands," Atlanta Constitution, 3 August 1916, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup>. "In The Don't-Know Class," Atlanta Constitution, 5 August 1916, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>. "All Things to All Men," Milwaukee Journal, 2 August 1916, p. 8.

The Star, like the other papers, wanted no part of the war in Europe. The paper was pleased that Wilson's policies had kept America out of the conflict, but echoing Theodore Roosevelt, began to call for more comprehensive preparedness efforts. On August 1 the Star said that many of Wilson's preparedness plans were part of an "eleventh hour pre-election rush."<sup>46</sup>

The opinions reviewed six months after the sinking of the Lusitania closely resembled those of six months before in all seven newspapers studied. All the papers debated the issues involved in the war, but wanted America to stay out of it.

### Conclusion

This study agrees with the public opinion assumptions made by previous scholars about the sinking of the Lusitania, especially those of Bailey and Ryan. There was no great clamor for war among the newspapers studied. Each paper had its own editorial vantage point. Each had its own ax to grind, but none of them called for a military strike against Germany for the loss of American lives.

The New York Times was clearly the most warlike

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<sup>46</sup>. "The Hughes Speech," Kansas City Star, 1 August 1916, p. 14.



newspaper in the group - though its ultimate goals were unclear. It sought a defeat of the German military state, but it was not clear about whether this ultimately meant using the American military. More likely, it sought an open-hearted embrace of the Allies by America - providing them with all the tools necessary to defeat the Germans.

The Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Examiner, and the Washington Post all held the most even-handed editorial policy. Though often criticized for their sensational, or biased reporting, these papers were willing to outline policies of strict neutrality that even the Wilson administration avoided. Seeking to keep America out of an unpopular war, these pro-American papers outlined policy choices to keep the U.S. out of the quagmire. Each wanted Americans off belligerent ships carrying munitions of war, contending this country's citizens should no longer be "guardian angels." They also wanted the administration to protest British violations of American neutral rights as vigorously as it pursued the Germans.

The Atlanta Constitution, Kansas City Star, and Milwaukee Journal were the papers most loyal to the president. Though wanting to avoid war, each trusted Wilson to make the right choice. Much of this trust in Wilson was due no doubt to the fact that all three papers shared his political affiliations. The Constitution was firmly behind Wilson, a Democrat and a southerner - the first to be

elected president since the Civil War. The Star was an unfailing advocate of the progressive cause, and Wilson's domestic program by 1915 was progressive beyond the accomplishments of the Roosevelt administration. The Journal was essentially a Democratic paper against the socialists and LaFollette Republicans of Wisconsin. The Journal's publisher, Lucius Nieman, also shared Wilson's dislike for German militarism. The Journal's position was unique, however, representing a city whose majority was of German birth - half of them unable to speak English. The paper backed Wilson, at the same time urging its population to remain behind the American cause.

The key finding to this study is that all seven newspapers maintained the editorial viewpoints they held before the crisis. All were angered by the sinking of the Lusitania and the loss of American lives, but none of them radically changed their opinion of Germany because of it. The Times despised all things German before the sinking, and continued to do so afterward.

Six months before the sinking, the Post, Examiner, and Tribune, all thought Germany an underrated power in the war, capable of striking with devastating military force. The papers also felt the United States was not doing enough to stay out of the conflict - either through military preparedness, or more vigorous action against British violations of neutral rights. The sinking did not change



these basic opinions of the three papers. They stressed that the Germans had struck with the brutal force they were capable of, and that by not keeping Americans off ships like the Lusitania, the United States government had shirked its neutral duty.

The Constitution, Journal, and Star were loyal to Wilson both before and after the crisis. They held that the sinking of the Lusitania was just one (though a large one) of the many policy decisions he would face as president.

All seven papers felt the loss of American lives on the Lusitania was not the casus belli for an American plunge into war against Germany. The papers did not seek peace at any price, but they found the circumstances of the sinking too murky to martial a justified, and united effort, on the part of the nation.

The sinking of the Lusitania brought the war home to many Americans, but this study of seven newspapers shows they failed to embrace it. The tragedy would eventually become a link in a chain of events that would draw the United States into the war. Certainly it did nothing to improve U.S. relations with Germany. But in this case, it appears the Lusitania was not the driving force, or key event, behind sending Americans to fight in Europe.

Other observations can be made from this study. Probably the most interesting relates to the news coverage of each paper. All the newspapers had access to essentially

the same information regarding the disaster. They shared many of the same news sources. Yet each paper made independent news judgments, and the coverage varied from each paper.

Most of the newspapers studied took their news of the disaster from a limited number of sources. Only three of the newspapers had overseas correspondents - the Times, Tribune, and Examiner. All three were subject to the same British censorship policy. All seven newspapers shared access to the Associated Press and United Press. Three of the papers - the Constitution, Star, and Journal - received news from the New York news services of the Times, Herald, and World. Like the Queenstown reporters of the Times, Tribune, and Examiner, the reporters of the Associated Press, United Press, Herald, and World news services on the scene were also subject to the same British censorship policy. So the news sources available to the seven papers were limited, and those sources were affected by the British censor.

The information about the disaster was also limited in scope. All seven papers had much of the same information regarding the sinking itself, where it happened, and approximately how long it took. They all knew that the disaster was the result of a U-boat attack - though the number of U-boats and torpedoes was in doubt. All seven papers had access to the same lists of dead and missing. The manifest, and other maritime documents were readily



available in New York and Liverpool. Reporters in Queenstown all had the same access to survivors - passengers and crew- and wired their stories to America in the same way. Germany did not deny the sinking, and both Berlin and London released official statements to the press. Aside from classified information - which would not be cleared by British censors anyway - essentially the same facts were available to all seven newspapers. The only difference came in the selection of "experts" for analysis, or reports of the reaction of officials in London, Berlin, and Washington.

With all these facts largely the same, it is amazing to see the wide differences in news coverage. The Times, Constitution, and Star, all emphasized the brutality of Germany in the sinking of the Lusitania. The stories of death at sea were told more vividly in these newspapers. Readers learned that the German U-boat (or U-boats) had surfaced to allow its crew to laugh at the survivors struggling for their lives. The fact that the ship carried munitions, was possibly armed, or moving too slowly for evasive action, was downplayed.

The coverage was reversed in the Tribune, Post, and Examiner. The failures of the British Admiralty and Cunard, and the accusations that the ship was armed and loaded with munitions were all highlighted, while the horrific stories of death at sea, heroic crew members, or laughing U-boat crews were downplayed. Only the Journal seemed to cull the

facts to achieve a balanced news product. Anyone perceiving the American press in monolithic terms would be surprised by this study.

Another interesting observation involves those papers that published letters to the editor. Rather than providing a lively dialogue or spirited debate between the paper and its readers, the letters column was used as an extension of the views of the editorial staff. The majority of letters published usually agreed with the editorial opinion of the paper. The Times's letters registered the most rebuke against Germany. Most of the Tribune's questioned the wisdom of U.S. policies regarding travel on belligerent ships. Letters from the Constitution and Star displayed isolationism and support of the president. Only the Journal's letters appeared balanced. Like the paper's news coverage, its letters reflected both sides of opinion. After study of the letters in these newspapers, it appears their selection had more to do with editorial bias, than with the true sentiments of their cities' population.

In sum, the reaction of these seven newspapers to the sinking of the Lusitania was far from black and white. The opinions contained shades of gray, and were marked by a distinct isolationist hue.

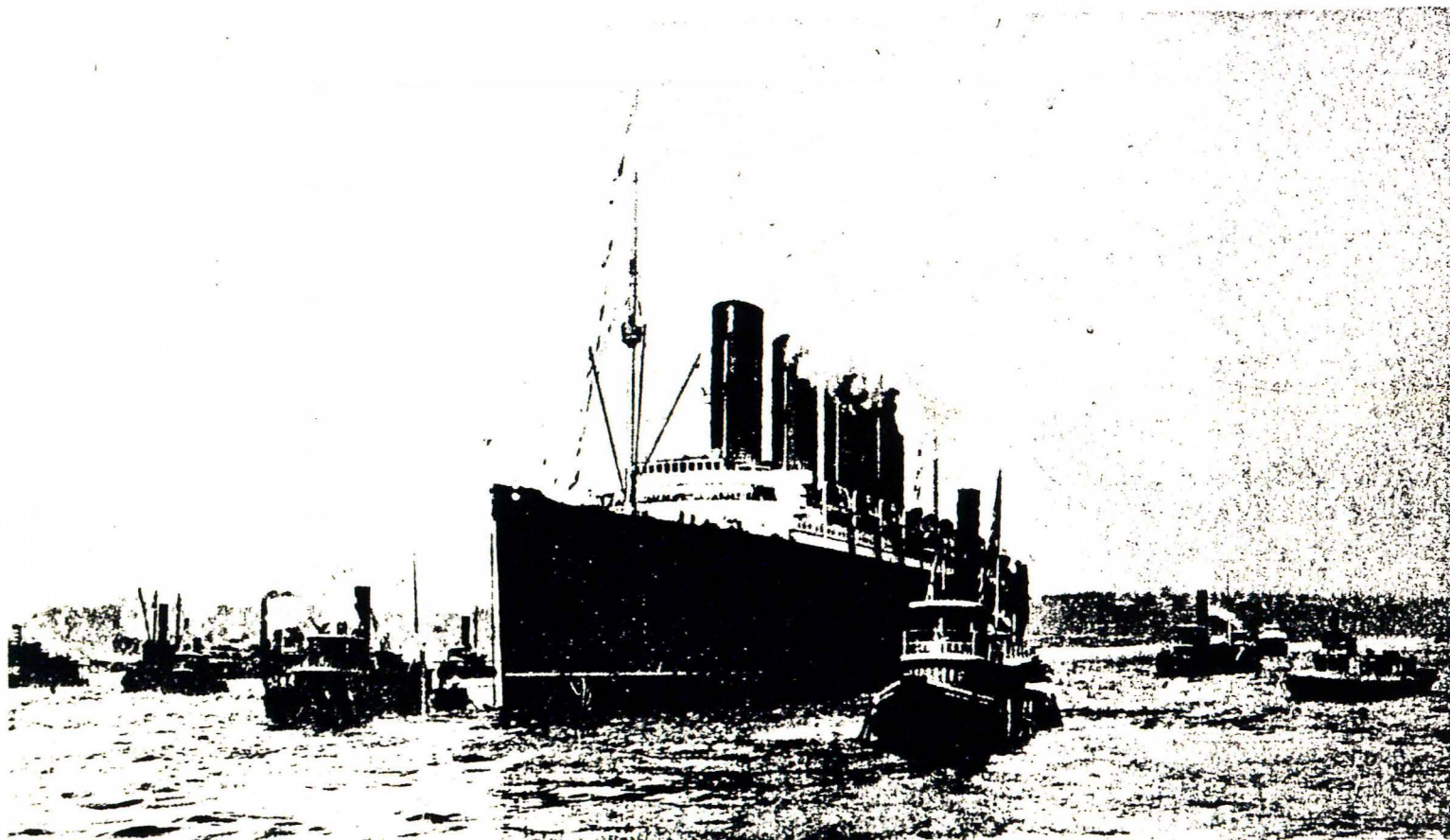
The sinking of the Lusitania did not bring calls for military retaliation from the newspapers studied. Each paper was angered by the loss of life, but reacted in a way



consistent with its political beliefs before the crisis. The sinking did not change the editorial views toward Germany in any of the papers studied. These editorial viewpoints guided the papers in their story selection and news coverage of the crisis, even in the selection of letters to the editor. Though the papers held differing views over the sinking itself, one thing was clear: a declaration of war was not the answer.

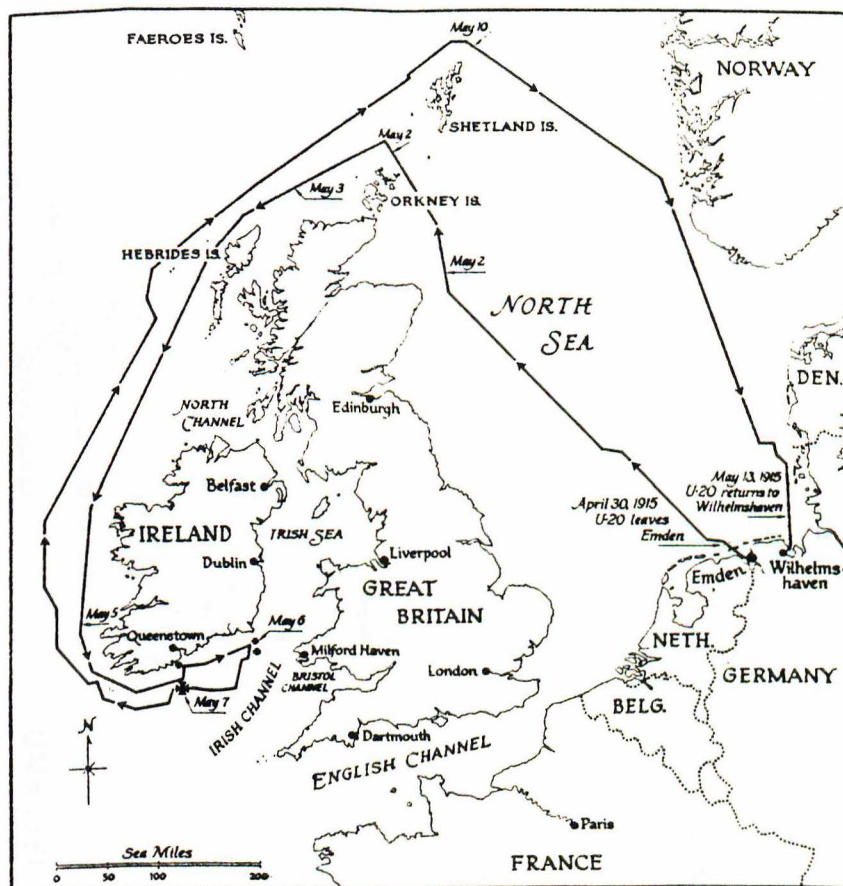
APPENDIX





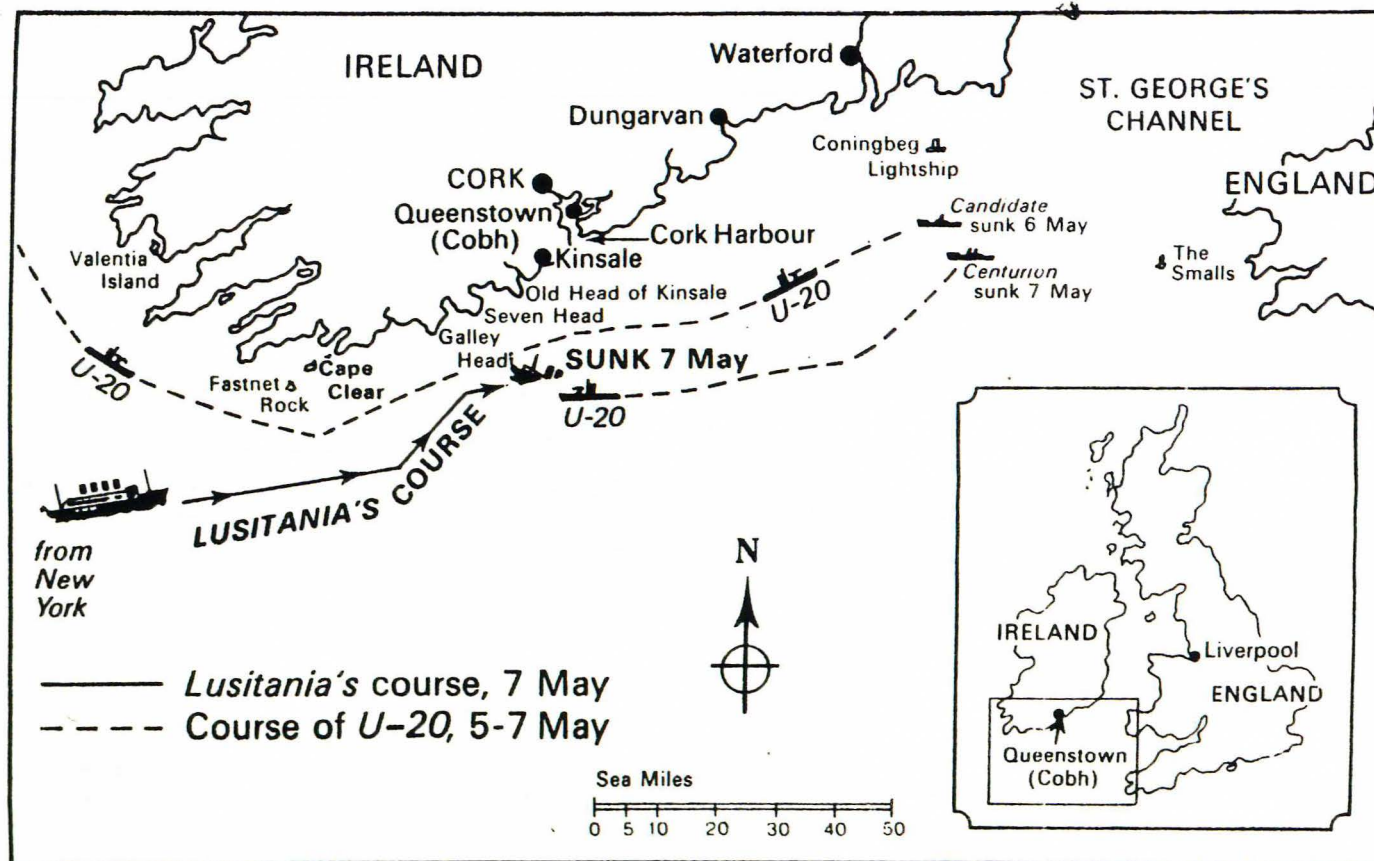
The gunless *Lusitania* leaves New York on her final voyage. *National Archives*

From Bailey and Ryan, *The Lusitania Disaster*, p. 147.

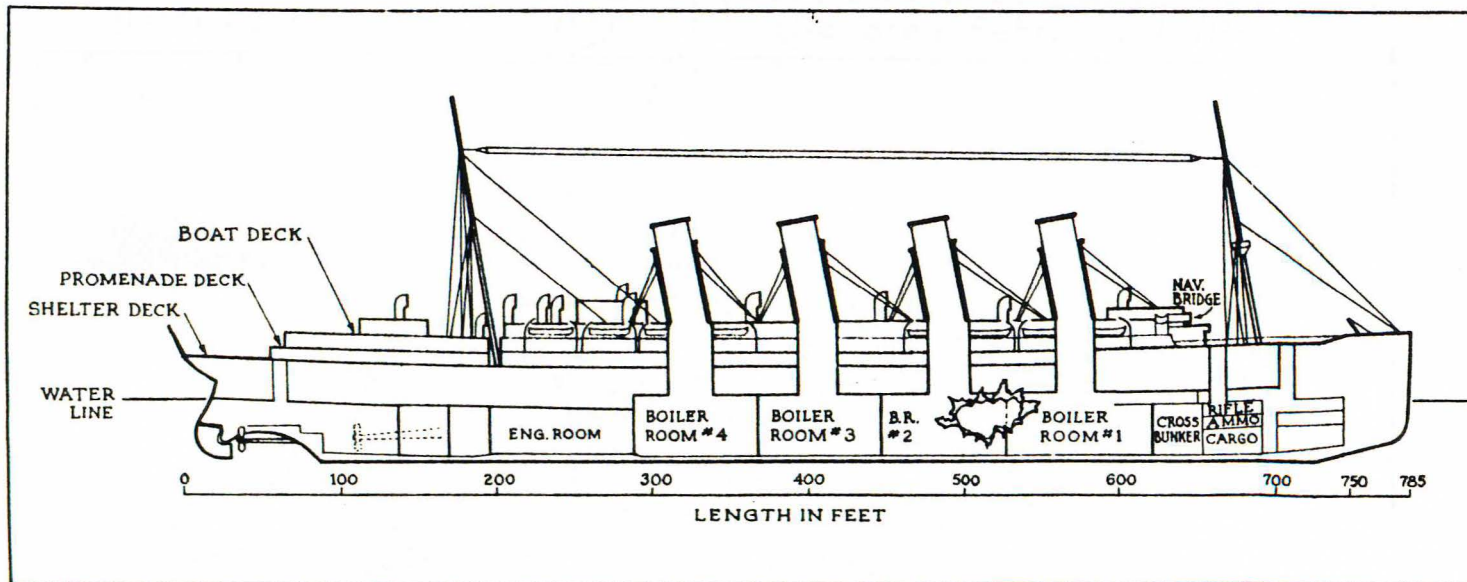


The Cruise of the U-20—May, 1915  
 From Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 121.





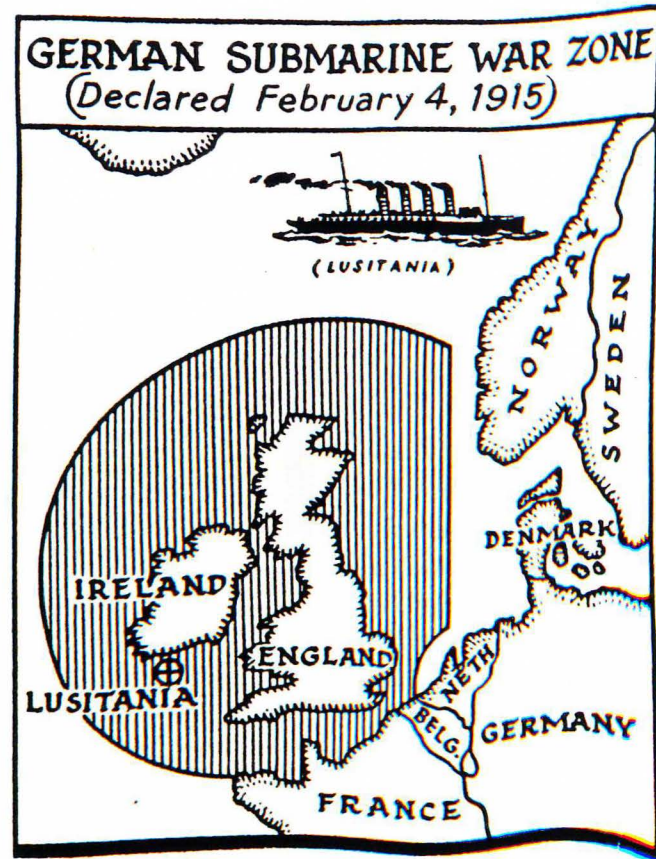
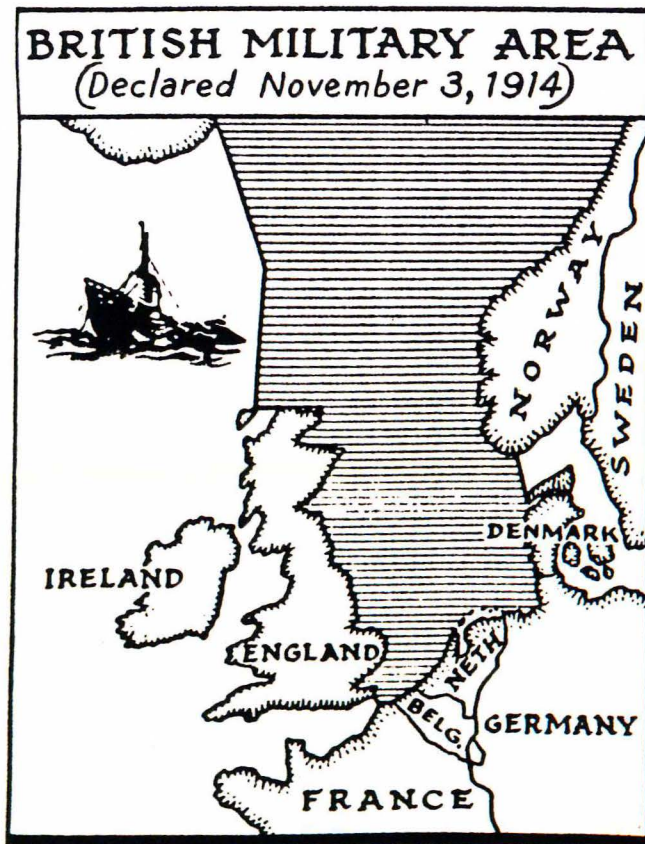
From Hickey and Smith, Seven Days to Disaster.



*The Lusitania's Profile*

(Note the approximate position below the water line of the torpedo explosion; the damage to the two boiler rooms; the distance of the ammunition from the explosion [about 150 feet], and the three steel bulkheads between the point of impact and the ammunition.)

From Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p. 7.



The Two Blockaded Zones

From Bailey and Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster, p.37.



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