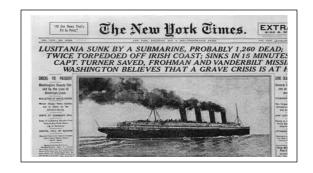**World War I**

Sinking of the Lusitania

The sinking of the Lusitania was an important event in World War I. The death of so many innocent civilians at the hands of the Germans galvanized American support for entering the war, which eventually turned the tide in favor of the Allies.

What was the Lusitania?

The Lusitania was a British luxury cruise ship. At one point in 1907, it held the title as the largest ship in the world. It mostly traveled across the Atlantic Ocean between Britain and the United States carrying passengers and cargo. The ship was 787 feet long and could carry 3,048 passengers and crew.

The dining room in the Lusitania

Leading up to the Attack

World War I had begun in 1914. On the western front, the British and the French were fighting against the advancing Germans. New supplies for the war effort were transported using shipping lanes around Britain. At first, the Germans tried to gain control of the shipping lanes using their navy, but the British managed to keep the German navy in check

The situation in the waters around Britain changed as the Germans began to use submarines to attack ships. They called their submarines "Unterseeboots" or "undersea boats". This name was shortened to U-boats. On February 4, 1915, the Germans declared the seas around Britain a war zone and said they would attack any Allied ship that entered the region.

The Lusitania Departs

Despite the German warning, the Lusitania departed from New York on May 1, 1915 on its way to Liverpool, England. The German Embassy even took out an advertisement in many of the US papers warning people that the ship may be attacked when it entered British waters. It seems that many people didn't really believe that the Germans would attack a luxury cruise ship because 1,959 people boarded the ship, including 159 Americans.

The Germans Attack

On May 7, 1915 the Lusitania was approaching the coast of Ireland. The voyage was almost over, but it had reached its most dangerous point. It was soon spotted by the German u-boat U-20. The u-boat moved in to attack and fired a torpedo. A lookout on the Lusitania spotted the wake of the torpedo, but it was too late. The torpedo made a direct hit on the side of the ship and a huge explosion was felt throughout the ship.

The Lusitania Sinks

 The Lusitania immediately began to sink. The captain of the Lusitania, Captain William Turner, ordered that the ship head for the Irish coast, but it was no use. Within a few minutes the captain gave the order to abandon ship. Many people had difficulty in getting off the ship because it was tilted so far to the side and sinking so fast. Within twenty minutes of being struck, the Lusitania had sunk. Of the 1,959 people on board, only 761 survived and 1,198 were killed.

The killing of so many innocent people by the German u-boat caused outrage in many countries of the world. Support for the Allies against Germany grew in many countries including the United States, who later joined the Allies in the war against Germany.

Interesting Facts about the Sinking of the Lusitania

The captain of the Lusitania had shut down one of the ships boilers to save costs. This reduced the speed of the ship and may have made it more vulnerable to torpedo attack.

The phrase "Remember the Lusitania" was used as a battle cry both by Allied soldiers and on posters used to recruit new soldiers to the army.

The Germans claimed that sinking the Lusitania was justified in a war zone because its cargo included ammunition and shell casings to be used in the war.

Of the 159 Americans on board the ship, only 31 survived. Several children who were on board died as well.