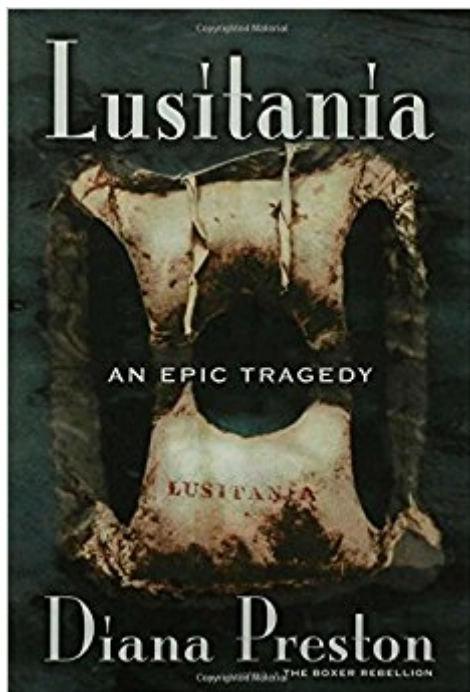


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# Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy



## Synopsis

On May 7, 1915, toward the end of her 101st eastbound crossing, from New York to Liverpool, England, R.M.S. Lusitania-- pride of the Cunard Line and one of the greatest ocean liners afloat-- became the target of a terrifying new weapon and a casualty of a terrible new kind of war. Sunk off the southern coast of Ireland by a torpedo fired from the German submarine U-20, she exploded and sank in eighteen minutes, taking with her some twelve hundred people, more than half of the passengers and crew. Cold-blooded, deliberate, and unprecedented in the annals of war, the sinking of the Lusitania shocked the world. It also jolted the United States out of its neutrality-- 128 Americans were among the dead-- and hastened the nation's entry into World War I. In her riveting account of this enormous and controversial tragedy, Diana Preston recalls both a pivotal moment in history and a remarkable human drama. The story of the Lusitania is a window on the maritime world of the early twentieth century: the heyday of the luxury liner, the first days of the modern submarine, and the climax of the decades-long German-British rivalry for supremacy of the Atlantic. It is a critical chapter in the progress of World War I and in the political biographies of Woodrow Wilson, William Jennings Bryan, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill. Above all, it is the story of the passengers and crew on that fateful voyage-- a story of terror and cowardice, of self-sacrifice and heroism, of death and miraculous survival. With a historian's insight and a novelist's gift for characterization and detail, Preston re-creates the events surrounding the Lusitania's last voyage, from the behind-the-scenes politics in each country and the German spy ring in New York, to the extraordinary scene as the ship sank and the survivors awaited rescue, to the controversial inquests in Britain and the United States into how the ship came to be hit and why she sank so quickly. Captain William Turner, steadfast and trustworthy but overconfident, believed that "a torpedo can't get the Lusitania-- she runs too fast." The passenger list included the rich and powerful (American millionaire Alfred Vanderbilt, theater producer Charles Frohman, Boston bookseller Charles Lauriat) as well as newlyweds and nursemaids, galley cooks and stokers, Quakers and cardsharps, ship's detectives and German stowaways. Preston weaves their voices throughout her compelling narrative, giving it a powerful immediacy. Drawing on a vast array of sources-- including interviews with survivors, letters and memoirs, recently released American and Admiralty archives, and previously untranslated German documents-- Diana Preston has resolved the controversies surrounding the Lusitania and written the definitive account of this pivotal event in western history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

On May 7, 1915, a German submarine sank the British passenger ship Lusitania on the high seas, killing some 1,200 people, among them the magnate Alfred Vanderbilt and the renowned author Elbert Hubbard. In this swiftly paced reconstruction, Diana Preston examines the events of that day and its aftermath--and hints at some tantalizing secrets. Among other things, the sinking of the Lusitania and the death of scores of American passengers helped draw the United States into World War I. Yet, Preston observes, it was no sneak attack; the German government had gone out of its way to warn prospective passengers that the English ship, as a military reserve vessel, was a fair target. And for good reason, though the Germans may not have known it; Preston suggests that it may well have been carrying armaments, which does much to explain why the British government suppressed a fact-finding inquest following the sinking. Whatever the truth, the destruction of the Lusitania had far-reaching effects--not least of them the Kaiser's ordering a stop to unrestricted submarine warfare. Preston's richly detailed, highly readable history sheds new light on the incident and the conduct of modern war. --Gregory McNamee

Following her previous title for Walker, *The Boxer Rebellion*, Preston, an Oxford-trained historian, writer and broadcaster, provides more thrills and chills with this tale of the May 1915 sinking of the Lusitania, one of the jewels of Cunard's fleet of ocean liners, during a crossing from New York to Liverpool. Hit by a German submarine's torpedo, it sank in 18 minutes, with 1,200 casualties. The tragedy was a major motivation for America's entering WWI against Germany, as 124 U.S. citizens

were among the dead. Preston offers myriad details to recreate the look and feel of the Lusitania's last voyage. Beyond that, she judiciously marshals German accounts at the time of the sinking and since to "justify" the attack, such as the charge that the Lusitania was carrying Canadian soldiers or contraband weapons, but she finds no evidence that soldiers were present, although a cache of weapons was carried. With a realistic view of the tangle of world politics in the WWI era, she concludes: "... no government, British, German, or American, was entirely free of blame for the situation leading up to the attack. Nor, in its wake, was any government hesitant to twist the facts, or use the disaster, to its own political ends." Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

"When the Lusitania went down!"- snippets from lyrics from "When the Lusitania went down" written in 1915

Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy is an informative work that captures multiple points of interest and history regarding the sinking of the RMS Lusitania. At times harrowing and at others a little exhausting but above all fascinating, as this book takes the reader back to a time of a war of nations, empires and acts of human nature and sometimes questionable responses. In the forefront are the details of the last voyage of the RMS Lusitania, the voices of those that boarded and later those that never left her. Above and below the ocean the chapters flow as we continue to follow daily life on the majestic ship and the terror waiting just beneath the waves. Alarm and suspense builds as time slowly moves from April 29, 1915 to the fateful date of May 7, 1915. Passages dedicated to that May afternoon and following days are especially poignant and illustrate everything that could go wrong did in so many ways. Almost a hundred years have passed since that terrible spring day and we still try to explain logically what went so horribly wrong and the reasons why the Lusitania is now resting peacefully at the bottom of the Irish Sea and why we should never forget her story and those brave hearts. The truth is, we may never know all the answers or receive any type of satisfying conclusions to the mysteries of the drama that played out in the background and foreground in 1915. Although Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy was educational and impressive (especially the chapters concerning the sinking and devastating aftermath) I did notice one or two minor incorrect facts and agree with other readers on a few other negatives they have noted including distracting tangents of topics and an obvious bitter tone toward certain figures involved with the tragedy. I did find the before and after accounts about the typical search of scapegoats, political ambitions, espionage and the obvious company loyalty to the Cunard Line very intriguing and the way the book presents these accounts possibly shows why so many conspiracies and mysteries still surround the Lusitania. I also appreciated the valuable photographs throughout this book that really brought events and voices to reality; especially the pictures of the ship, passengers,

crew and political figures. Overall, not exactly an easy read with its broad explanations of historic events, deliberate pacing and tragic details but a part of a true story that needs to be recounted for new and future generations.

The Gold Standard. I really enjoyed this book. The author has a very nice way of combining technical stuff about the ship with all the political maneuvering and the stories of all the participants in the drama including many of the luckless passengers. I cannot imagine better book on the sinking of the Lusitania. She is evenhanded and though the Germans definitely come out on the short end of her analysis, there was a lot of blame to go around. Unqualified recommendation !

98 years ago this week --- May 1 to May 7, 1915 --- the Lusitania was making its final voyage, and no one recounts it better than Diana Preston in her epic work, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*. This was the work I chiefly relied upon in my research project about the subject. It provided all the known details about the last first class passenger list of this great ocean liner. The reader gets to know such maverick personalities as Elbert Hubbard, the country philosopher and best-selling writer who was the bohemian among the rich and well-connected. He brought his essay about the Kaiser aboard entitled, "Who Lifted the Lid Off Of Hell?" and challenged all the passengers to read it. He constantly joked that the Kaiser would be found aboard with his torpedo just to claim he torpedoed the ship. Meet the famous Broadway producer of many plays, Charles Frohman, who just before the waves washed him off the listing Boat Deck recited lines from Peter Pan, "Why should we fear death? It's the greatest adventure life presents to us." Socialize with Alfred Vanderbilt, one of the wealthiest men in America who was going to England to donate cars to the British Red Cross and who gave his lifejacket away to a lady at the last moment. Encounter the French-American actress, Rita Jolivet, who was to survive. She made reservations at the last moment to see her brother in France who was about to leave for the Front. She declared that she would shoot herself with her pearl-handled pistol if she landed in the ocean. She couldn't swim. In only eighteen minutes the great ocean liner was to turn on its starboard side and vanish under the waves. During that short space of time between the torpedo striking at 2:10PM right after lunch on May 7 and the end a world of drama took place worthy of Shakespeare. Get your first row seat when you purchase this book. *Who Lifted the Lid Off of Hell?* by Linda Cargill, author of *The Key to Lawrence*

Good but lengthy read. Probably the best I have ever read on the tragic sinking of this ship. Well researched~

This is a splendid book: engaging, thorough, even-handed, fascinating and beautifully written. One note of warning: the chapters describing the actual sinking and the suffering of the passengers and crew is grim and painful to read (yet necessary). Even with that, this is an immensely valuable book and one well worth reading. A reader's understanding of the forces which caused the tragedy and the propaganda uses to which it was put will be greatly enhanced by this book.

Excellent account of the Lusitania tragedy. Not so much detail that the reader gets bogged down. This is a tragedy that in my lifetime has never been made as public as the Titanic. I plan on traveling to Ireland next year and one of my stops will be in the Queens Town area so that I may pay my respects to those who perished in this tragedy.

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