

# SHIPPING CASUALTIES.

## (LOSS OF THE STEAMSHIP "LUSITANIA.")

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**REPORT** of a Formal Investigation into the circumstances attending the foundering on 7th May, 1915, of the British Steamship "Lusitania," of Liverpool, after being torpedoed off the Old Head of Kinsale, Ireland.

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**Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.**

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## INTRODUCTION.

On the 18th May, 1915, the Board of Trade required that a Formal Investigation of the circumstances attending the loss of the "Lusitania" should be held and the Court accordingly commenced to sit on the 15th June.

There were six sittings, some of which were public and some of which were in camera. Thirty-six witnesses were examined, and a number of documents were produced. Twenty-one questions were formulated by the Board of Trade, which are set out in detail at the end of this annex.

## THE SHIP.

The "Lusitania" was a Turbine steamship built by John Brown & Co., of Clydebank, in 1907, for the Cunard Steamship Company. She was built under Admiralty Survey and in accordance with Admiralty requirements, and was classed 100 A.1. at Lloyd's. Her length was 755 feet, her beam 88 feet, and her depth 60 feet 4 in. Her tonnage was 30,395 gross and 12,611 net. Her engines were of 68,000 h.p. and her speed  $24\frac{1}{2}$  to 25 knots. She had 23 double-ended and two single-ended boilers situated in four boiler-rooms.

The ship was divided transversely by eleven principal bulkheads into twelve sections.

The two forward bulkheads were collision bulkheads without doors. The remaining bulkheads had watertight doors cut in them which were closed by hand. In places where it was necessary to have the doors open for working the ship they could be closed by hydraulic pressure from the bridge. A longitudinal bulkhead separated the side coal bunkers from the boiler-room and engine-rooms on each side of the ship.

The "Lusitania" was a passenger as well as an emigrant ship as defined by the Merchant Shipping Acts. She fulfilled all the requirements of the law in this connection and had obtained all necessary certificates.

She had accommodation on board for 3,000 persons (including the crew).

### *The Life-Boats and Life-Saving Appliances.*

The ship was provided with boat accommodation for 2,605 persons. The number of persons on board on the voyage in question was 1,959.

The number of boats was 48. Twenty-two of these were ordinary life-boats hanging from davits—eleven on each side of the boat deck. These had a total carrying capacity of 1,323. The remainder (26) were collapsible boats, with a total carrying capacity of 1,282. Eighteen of these collapsible boats were stowed under eighteen of the life-boats. The remaining eight were stowed four on each side of the ship abaft the life-boats.

In addition the ship was provided with 2,325 life-jackets (125 of which were for children) and 35 life-buoys. All these were conveniently distributed on board.

The boats, the life-jackets and the life-buoys were inspected at Liverpool on the 17th March, 1915, by the resident Board of Trade Surveyor, and again on the 15th April, 1915, by the Board of Trade Emigration Officer. Both these gentlemen were called before me and satisfied me that the condition of the different appliances was in every way satisfactory.

The boats were also examined by the ship's carpenter at New York on the commencement of the homeward voyage on the 1st May and found to be in good order.

### *The Captain, the Officers and the Crew.*

The Captain of the ship, Mr. William Thomas Turner, had been in the service of the Cunard Company since 1883. He had occupied the position of Commander

since 1903, and had held an Extra Master's Certificate since 1907. He was called before me and gave his evidence truthfully and well. The "Lusitania" carried an additional Captain named Anderson, whose duty it was to assist in the care and navigation of the ship. He was unfortunately drowned when the ship went down, and I can only judge of his capacity, by the accounts given to me of the work he did. Several of the officers gave their evidence before me and gave it well. I am quite satisfied that the two Captains and the officers were competent men, and that they did their duty. Captain Turner remained on the bridge till he was swept into the sea and Captain Anderson was working on the deck until he went overboard and was drowned.

It appears that since the commencement of the war the Cunard Company has lost all its Royal Naval Reserve and Fleet Reserve men, and the managers have had to take on the best men they could get and to train them as well as might be in the time at their disposal. In connection with this training prizes have been given by the Company to induce the crews to make themselves proficient in handling the boats, and the efforts in this direction seem to have been successful in the case of the "Lusitania's" crew. Mr. Arthur Jones, the First Officer, described the crew on this voyage as well able to handle the boats, and testified to their carrying out the orders given to them in a capable manner. One of the crew, Leslie N. Morton, who, at the time the ship was torpedoed was an extra look-out on the starboard side of the fore-castle head, deserves a special word of commendation. He had been shipped in New York. He was only 18 years of age, but he seems to have exhibited great courage, self-possession and resource. He was the first to observe the approach of the two torpedoes, and before they touched the ship he had reported them to the bridge by means of the megaphone, calling out "Torpedoes coming on the starboard side." When the torpedoes struck the ship, Morton was knocked off his feet, but, recovering himself quickly, he went at once to the boats on the starboard side and assisted in filling and lowering several of them. Having done all that could be done on board, he had, as he expresses it, "to swim for it." In the water he managed to get hold of a floating collapsible life-boat and, with the assistance of another member of the crew named Parry, he ripped the canvas cover off it, boarded it, and succeeded in drawing into it fifty or sixty passengers. He and Parry rowed the life-boat some miles to a fishing smack, and, having put the rescued passengers on board the smack, they re-entered the life-boat and succeeded in rescuing twenty or thirty more people. This boy, with his mate Parry, was instrumental in saving nearly one hundred lives. He has cause for being proud of the work he did. Morton had a good opportunity of judging how the crew performed their duties in the short time which elapsed between the explosion of the torpedoes and the foundering of the ship. He saw the crew helping the women and children into the boats; he saw them distributing life-belts to the passengers. He heard the officers giving orders and he observed that the crew were obeying the orders properly.

Some of the passengers were called, and they confirm this evidence. They speak in terms of the highest praise of the exertions made by the crew.

No doubt there were mishaps in handling the ropes of the boats and in other such matters, but there was, in my opinion, no incompetence or neglect, and I am satisfied that the crew behaved well throughout, and worked with skill and judgment. Many more than half their number lost their lives.

The total crew consisted of 702, made up of 77 in the Deck Department, 314 in the Engineering Department, 306 in the Stewards Department and of 5 musicians. Of these, 677 were males and 25 were females. Of the males, 397 were lost, and of the females, 16, making the total number lost, 413. Of the males 280 were saved, and of the females, 9, making the total number saved, 289.

I find that the conduct of the masters, the officers and the crew was satisfactory. They did their best in difficult and perilous circumstances and their best was good.

#### *The Passengers.*

The number of passengers on board the "Lusitania" when she sailed was 1,257, consisting of 290 saloon, 600 second-cabin, and 367 third-cabin passengers.

Of these, 944 were British and Canadian, 159 were American, and the remainder were of seventeen other nationalities. Of the British and Canadian, 584 perished. Of the American 124 perished, and of the remainder 77 perished. The total number lost was 785, and the total number saved was 472.

The 1,257 passengers were made up of 688 adult males, 440 adult females, 51 male children, 39 female children, and 39 infants. Of the 688 adult males, 421 were lost and 267 were saved. Of the 440 adult females, 270 were lost and 170 were saved. Of the 51 male children, 33 were lost and 18 were saved. Of the 39 female children, 26 were lost and 13 were saved. Of the 39 infants, 35 were lost and 4 were saved.

Many of the women and children among those lost died from exhaustion after immersion in the water.

I can speak very well of the conduct of the passengers after the striking of the ship. There was little or no panic at first, although later on, when the steerage passengers came on to the boat deck in what one witness described as "a swarm," there appears to have been something approaching a panic.

Some of the passengers attempted to assist in launching the boats and, in my opinion, did more harm than good. It is, however, quite impossible to impute any blame to them. They were all working for the best.

#### *The Cargo.*

The cargo was a general cargo of the ordinary kind, but part of it consisted of a number of cases of cartridges (about 5,000). This ammunition was entered in the manifest. It was stowed well forward in the ship on the orlop and lower decks and about 50 yards away from where the torpedoes struck the ship. There was no other explosive on board.

#### *The Ship Unarmed.*

It has been said by the German Government that the "Lusitania" was equipped with masked guns, that she was supplied with trained gunners, with special ammunition, that she was transporting Canadian troops, and that she was violating the laws of the United States. These statements are untrue: they are nothing but baseless inventions, and they serve only to condemn the persons who make use of them. The steamer carried no masked guns nor trained gunners, or special ammunition, nor was she transporting troops, or violating any laws of the United States.

### THE VOYAGE.

#### *The Departure from New York.*

The "Lusitania" left New York at noon on the 1st of May, 1915. I am told that before she sailed notices were published in New York by the German authorities that the ship would be attacked by German submarines, and people were warned not to take passage in her. I mention this matter not as affecting the present enquiry but because I believe it is relied upon as excusing in some way the subsequent killing of the passengers and crew on board the ship. In my view, so far from affording any excuse the threats serve only to aggravate the crime by making it plain that the intention to commit it was deliberately formed and the crime itself planned before the ship sailed. Unfortunately the threats were not regarded as serious by the people intended to be affected by them. They apparently thought it impossible that such an atrocity as the destruction of their lives could be in the contemplation of the German Government. But they were mistaken: and the ship sailed.

#### *The Ship's Speed.*

It appears that a question had arisen in the office of the Cunard Company shortly after the war broke out as to whether the transatlantic traffic would be sufficient to justify the Company in running their two big and expensive ships — the "Lusitania" and the "Mauretania." The conclusion arrived at was that one of the two (the "Lusitania") could be run once a month if the boiler power were reduced by one-fourth. The saving in coal and labour resulting from this reduction would, it was thought, enable the Company to avoid loss though not to make a profit. Accordingly six of the "Lusitania's" boilers were closed and the ship began

to run in these conditions in November, 1914. She had made five round voyages in this way before the voyage in question in this enquiry. The effect of the closing of the six boilers was to reduce the attainable speed from  $24\frac{1}{2}$  to 21 knots. But this reduction still left the "Lusitania" a considerably faster ship than any other steamer plying across the Atlantic. In my opinion this reduction of the steamer's speed was of no significance and was proper in the circumstances.

### THE TORPEDOING OF THE SHIP.

By the 7th May the "Lusitania" had entered what is called the "Danger Zone," that is to say, she had reached the waters in which enemy submarines might be expected. The Captain had therefore taken precautions. He had ordered all the life-boats under davits to be swung out. He had ordered all bulkhead doors to be closed except such as were required to be kept open in order to work the ship. These orders had been carried out. The portholes were also closed. The lookout on the ship was doubled—two men being sent to the crow's nest and two men to the eyes of the ship. Two officers were on the bridge and a quartermaster was on either side with instructions to look out for submarines. Orders were also sent to the engine-room between noon and two p.m. of the 7th to keep the steam pressure very high in case of emergency and to give the vessel all possible speed if the telephone from the bridge should ring.

Up to 8 a.m. on the morning of the 7th the speed on the voyage had been maintained at 21 knots. At 8 a.m. the speed was reduced to 18 knots. The object of this reduction was to secure the ship's arrival outside the bar at Liverpool at about 4 o'clock on the morning of the 8th, when the tide would serve to enable her to cross the bar into the Mersey at early dawn. Shortly after this alteration of the speed a fog came on and the speed was further reduced for a time to 15 knots. A little before noon the fog lifted and the speed was restored to 18 knots, from which it was never subsequently changed. At this time land was sighted about two points abaft the beam, which the Captain took to be Brow Head; he could not, however, identify it with sufficient certainty to enable him to fix the position of his ship upon the chart. He therefore kept his ship on her course, which was S. 87° E. and about parallel with the land until 12.40, when, in order to make a better landfall he altered his course to N. 67° E. This brought him closer to the land, and he sighted the Old Head of Kinsale. He then (at 1.40 p.m.) altered his course back to S. 87° E., and having steadied his ship on that course began (at 1.50) to take a four-point bearing. This operation, which I am advised would occupy 30 or 40 minutes, was in process at the time when the ship was torpedoed, as hereafter described.

At 2 p.m. the passengers were finishing their mid-day meal.

At 2.10 p.m., when ten to fifteen miles off the Old Head of Kinsale, the weather being then clear and the sea smooth, the Captain, who was on the port side of the lower bridge, heard the call, "There is a torpedo coming, sir," given by the second officer. He looked to starboard and then saw a streak of foam in the wake of a torpedo travelling towards his ship. Immediately afterwards the "Lusitania" was struck on the starboard side somewhere between the third and fourth funnels. The blow broke number 5 life-boat to splinters. A second torpedo was fired immediately afterwards, which also struck the ship on the starboard side. The two torpedoes struck the ship almost simultaneously.

Both these torpedoes were discharged by a German submarine from a distance variously estimated at from two to five hundred yards. No warning of any kind was given. It is also in evidence that shortly afterwards a torpedo from another submarine was fired on the port side of the "Lusitania." This torpedo did not strike the ship: and the circumstance is only mentioned for the purpose of showing that perhaps more than one submarine was taking part in the attack.

The "Lusitania" on being struck took a heavy list to starboard and in less than twenty minutes she sank in deep water. Eleven hundred and ninety-eight men, women, and children were drowned.

Sir Edward Carson, when opening the case, described the course adopted by the German Government in directing this attack as "contrary to International Law and the usages of war," and as constituting, according to the law of all civilised countries, "a deliberate attempt to murder the passengers on board the ship." This statement is, in my opinion, true, and it is

made in language not a whit too strong for the occasion. The defenceless creatures on board, made up of harmless men and women, and of helpless children, were done to death by the crew of the German submarine acting under the directions of the officials of the German Government. In the questions submitted to me by the Board of Trade I am asked, "What was the cause of the loss of life?" The answer is plain. The effective cause of the loss of life was the attack made against the ship by those on board the submarine. It was a murderous attack because made with a deliberate and wholly unjustifiable intention of killing the people on board. German authorities on the laws of war at sea themselves establish beyond all doubt that though in some cases the destruction of an enemy trader may be permissible there is always an obligation first to secure the safety of the lives of those on board. The guilt of the persons concerned in the present case is confirmed by the vain excuses which have been put forward on their behalf by the German Government as before mentioned.

One witness, who described himself as a French subject from the vicinity of Switzerland, and who was in the second-class dining-room in the after part of the ship at the time of the explosion, stated that the nature of the explosion was "similar to the rattling of a maxim gun for a short period," and suggested that this noise disclosed the "secret" existence of some ammunition. The sound, he said, came from underneath the whole floor. I did not believe this gentleman. His demeanour was very unsatisfactory. There was no confirmation of his story, and it appeared that he had threatened the Cunard Company that if they did not make him some immediate allowance on account of a claim which he was putting forward for compensation, he would have the unpleasant duty of making his claim in public, and, in so doing, of producing "evidence which will not be to the credit either of your Company or of the Admiralty." The Company had not complied with his request.

It may be worth while noting that Leith, the Marconi operator, was also in the second-class dining-saloon at the time of the explosion. He speaks of but one explosion. In my opinion there was no explosion of any part of the cargo.

#### *Orders given and work done after the torpedoing.*

The Captain was on the bridge at the time his ship was struck, and he remained there giving orders until the ship foundered. His first order was to lower all boats to the rail. This order was obeyed as far as it possibly could be. He then called out, "Women and children first." The order was then given to hard-a-starboard the helm with a view to heading towards the land, and orders were telegraphed to the engine-room. The orders given to the engine-room are difficult to follow and there is obvious confusion about them. It is not, however, important to consider them, for the engines were put out of commission almost at once by the inrush of water and ceased working, and the lights in the engine-room were blown out.

Leith, the Marconi operator, immediately sent out an S.O.S. signal, and, later on, another message, "Come at once, big list, 10 miles south Head Old Kinsale." These messages were repeated continuously and were acknowledged. At first, the messages were sent out by the power supplied from the ship's dynamo; but in three or four minutes this power gave out and the messages were sent out by means of the emergency apparatus in the wireless cabin.

All the collapsible boats were loosened from their lashings and freed so that they could float when the ship sank.

#### *The Launching of the Life-boats.*

Complaints were made by some of the witnesses about the manner in which the boats were launched and about their leaky condition when in the water. I do not question the good faith of these witnesses, but I think their complaints were ill-founded.

Three difficulties presented themselves in connection with the launching of the boats. First, the time was very short: only twenty minutes elapsed between the first alarm and the sinking of the ship. Secondly, the ship was under way the whole time: the engines were put out of commission almost at once, so that the way could not be taken off. Thirdly, the ship instantly took a great list to starboard, which made it impossible to launch the port side boats properly and rendered it very difficult for the passengers to get into the starboard boats. The port side boats were thrown inboard and the starboard boats inconveniently far outboard.

In addition to these difficulties there were the well-meant but probably disastrous attempts of the frightened passengers to assist in the launching operations. Attempts were made by the passengers to push some of the boats on the port side off the ship and to get them to the water. Some of these boats caught on the rail and capsized. One or two did, however, reach the water, but I am satisfied that they were seriously damaged in the operation. They were lowered a distance of 60 feet or more with people in them, and must have been fouling the side of the ship the whole time. In one case the stern post was wrenched away. The result was that these boats leaked when they reached the water. Captain Anderson was superintending the launching operations, and, in my opinion, did the best that could be done in the circumstances. Many boats were lowered on the starboard side, and there is no satisfactory evidence that any of them leaked.

There were doubtless some accidents in the handling of the ropes, but it is impossible to impute negligence or incompetence in connection with them.

The conclusion at which I arrive is that the boats were in good order at the moment of the explosion and that the launching was carried out as well as the short time, the moving ship and the serious list would allow.

Both the Captain and Mr. Jones, the First Officer, in their evidence state that everything was done that was possible to get the boats out and to save lives, and this I believe to be true.

#### THE NAVIGATION OF THE SHIP.

At the request of the Attorney-General part of the evidence in the Enquiry was taken in camera. This course was adopted in the public interest. The evidence in question dealt, firstly, with certain advice given by the Admiralty to navigators generally with reference to precautions to be taken for the purpose of avoiding submarine attacks; and secondly, with information furnished by the Admiralty to Captain Turner individually of submarine dangers likely to be encountered by him in the voyage of the "Lusitania." It would defeat the object which the Attorney-General had in view if I were to discuss these matters in detail in my report; and I do not propose to do so. But it was made abundantly plain to me that the Admiralty had devoted the most anxious care and thought to the questions arising out of the submarine peril, and that they had diligently collected all available information likely to affect the voyage of the "Lusitania" in this connection. I do not know who the officials were to whom these duties were entrusted, but they deserve the highest praise for the way in which they did their work.

Captain Turner was fully advised as to the means which in the view of the Admiralty were best calculated to avert the perils he was likely to encounter, and in considering the question whether he is to blame for the catastrophe in which his voyage ended I have to bear this circumstance in mind. It is certain that in some respects Captain Turner did not follow the advice given to him. It may be (though I seriously doubt it) that had he done so his ship would have reached Liverpool in safety. But the question remains, was his conduct the conduct of a negligent or of an incompetent man. On this question I have sought the guidance of my assessors, who have rendered me invaluable assistance, and the conclusion at which I have arrived is that blame ought not to be imputed to the Captain. The advice given to him, although meant for his most serious and careful consideration, was not intended to deprive him of the right to exercise his skilled judgment in the difficult questions that might arise from time to time in the navigation of his ship. His omission to follow the advice in all respects cannot fairly be attributed either to negligence or incompetence.

He exercised his judgment for the best. It was the judgment of a skilled and experienced man, and although others might have acted differently and perhaps more successfully he ought not, in my opinion, to be blamed.

The whole blame for the cruel destruction of life in this catastrophe must rest solely with those who plotted and with those who committed the crime.