

0. TORPEDO ATTACK on LUSITANIA - Story Preface

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Thomas M. M. Hemy (1852-1937), a British painter, produced this artist's interpretation of the crippled *Lusitania* after her torpedo attack. It is online via [SearleCanada.org](http://SearleCanada.org).

Schwieger knew he had either *Lusitania* or her sister-ship in his sights. When the fog cleared, *U-20* had surfaced. Low on fuel, she was making her way to Fastnet.

A lookout spotted smoke off the starboard bow. Schwieger counted four funnels. He believed the ship was 12-14 miles away. Probably too far for a successful hit, but if she were heading to Queenstown? Maybe. It was 13:20 Greenwich Mean Time.

Schwieger reported what he saw to his pilot:

*Four funnels, schooner rig, upwards of 20,000 tons and making about 22 knots.*

The pilot checked his manuals. He reported to Schwieger:

*Either the Lusitania or the Mauretania.*

*Brassey's Naval Annual* listed both as armed merchant ships:

*Both are cruisers and used for trooping.*

The captain ordered a G-type torpedo to be loaded into a forward tube. Watching the target ship through his binoculars, Schwieger could not believe his eyes. The ship was changing course, putting herself directly where *U-20* needed her to be!

In his logbook, Schwieger noted

*...the ship turns to starboard then takes a course to Queenstown.*

Closing in on each other, the two ships were 650 yards apart.

Traveling at a speed of about 38 knots, the torpedo streaked toward *Lusitania's* starboard side. From the crow's nest, *Lusitania's* lookout spotted the unthinkable:

*There is a torpedo coming, sir!*

There was no time to react. *U-20's* torpedo struck *Lusitania* "between the third and fourth funnels." The ship shuddered. An eyewitness said it sounded like:

*...the sound of an arrow entering the canvas and straw of a target magnified a thousand times.*

Then, nearly instantaneously, the *Lusitania* exploded. Not from a second torpedo. From an internal explosion. Nearly 2,000 people had 18 minutes to get off the mortally wounded, quickly-sinking liner. (Follow the link to a rare copy of the "Annex to the Report," from the official inquiry conducted by Lord Mersey.) Most would not make it.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TORPEDO-ATTACK-on-LUSITANIA-Lusitania-Sinking>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TORPEDO-ATTACK-on-LUSITANIA-Lusitania-Sinking>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### Is It Better to See, or Not See, an Impending Disaster?

*Lusitania's* lookout spotted a torpedo racing toward the ship in May of 1915. Although he shouted a warning, neither Captain Turner nor his crew had time to react.

When the torpedo struck *Lusitania*, an eyewitness said it made the "the sound of an arrow entering the canvas and straw of a target magnified a thousand times."

The ship shuddered and, nearly instantaneously, she exploded and sank in about 18 minutes.

Do you think *Lusitania's* lookout would have ever expected a single torpedo to cause such massive damage to the great ship? Explain your answer.

The eyewitness, who described the sound of the torpedo striking *Lusitania*, was using words which made sense in 1915. How would he have described what he heard, using 21st-century words?

It was the lookout's job to search the sea for potential torpedo strikes, but what about the passengers who may have seen the torpedo racing toward their ship. Is it better to see, or not see, an impending disaster? Explain your answer.

## Media Stream



### TORPEDO ATTACK on LUSITANIA

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### Lusitania - In a Position of Peril

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### Lusitania - Torpedoed by U-20

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### Explosion of the Lusitania

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