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This image, online via the BBC, depicts how *Lusitania's* sinking may have appeared to observers on the 7th of May, 1915. The ship's extreme list, which happened soon after a U-Boat's torpedo struck the vessel, caused an insufficient number of life boats to be launched. Click on the image for a better view.

On her 202nd Atlantic crossing, *Lusitania* sank in the Irish Channel at a depth of 295 feet. Kptlt Walther Schwieger was surprised by the magnitude of the explosion. He wrote his observations in his log book

...an unusually heavy detonation.

What could have caused the massive internal explosion? There have always been controversies about the sinking. At the time, Schwieger attributed it to

boilers, coal or powder.

Later diving expeditions, by Dr. Robert Ballard and his crew, would reveal which of those three scenarios may have occurred.

Captain Turner knew his ship was doomed. He gave the order to board lifeboats and abandon ship. Lifeboats on the port side had swung inward and were unusable because they couldn't be launched. The crew had to get as many people as possible into the starboard boats.

But ... there was no time.

Using the ship's call signal, "MFA," the Marconi operator sent out a distress:

SOS, SOS, SOS. Come at once, big list, 10 miles south Head Old Kinsale. MFA.

One of the lifeboats, holding more than 50 passengers, fell to the boat deck crushing those unfortunates who were below it. Another lifeboat similarly crashed.

In what must have seemed like no time at all, sea water was on the bridge floor. As the stern of the ship settled back, the bridge was awash and the Captain was swept into the Irish Sea. He, unlike most others, survived.

Lusitania went to the bottom at 14:28 GMT.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DEATH-OF-A-SHIP-Lusitania-Sinking)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-OF-A-SHIP-Lusitania-Sinking)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-OF-A-SHIP-Lusitania-Sinking>

Questions 2 Ponder

Are Lifeboats Always Safe?

When a single torpedo caused a massive explosion aboard *Lusitania*, in May of 1915, the ship's lifeboats became a liability for some of the passengers.

Lifeboats on *Lusitania's* port (left) side had swung inward and were unusable because they couldn't be launched. The crew had to get as many people as possible into lifeboats on the ship's starboard (right) side.

One of the sinking ship's lifeboats, holding more than 50 passengers, fell to the boat deck. It crushed people who were below it. Another lifeboat similarly crashed.

Because the *Lusitania* was sinking so quickly, after the torpedo strike, there was not enough time to fully and safely launch all available lifeboats.

What does the word "lifeboat" mean to you?

Are lifeboats always safe?

Do you think passengers traveling aboard a large ship like *Lusitania*, which is actually smaller than many of the 21st-century's cruise ships, should practice getting into lifeboats while at sea? Explain your answer.

Media Stream

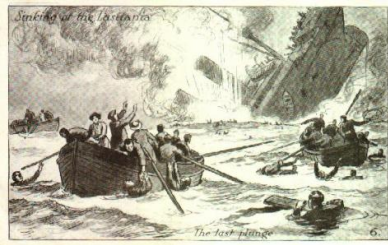


Boarding the Lifeboats

Image online, courtesy the ww1-propaganda-cards.com website.

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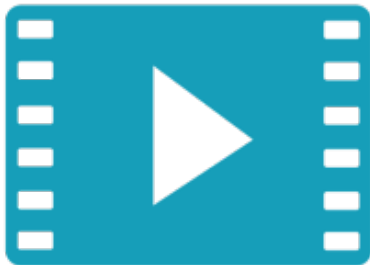
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Boarding-the-Lifeboats>



Lusitania Sinking

Image online, courtesy the ww1-propaganda-cards.com website.

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Lusitania - Disaster at Sea

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Lusitania - Sinking and Aftermath

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Lusitania - Winsor McCay Animation, 1918

1918 animation by Winsor McCay.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lusitania-Winsor-McCay-Animation-1918>