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*Lusitania* rests in about 309 feet of murky water, in the Celtic Sea, off the southern coast of Ireland. This image depicts James Jarret, the first person to dive and locate the wreck, wearing a 1-atmosphere JS Peress Tritonia dive suit. Diving to 312 feet, Jarret locates *Lusitania* (with the help of a [recording echo-sounder](#)) in October of 1935. Image online, courtesy NOAA/OAR/National Undersea Research Program (NURP). Click on it for a better view.

Did ammunition aboard the ship cause the second explosion? Although the actual manifest for the New York/Liverpool passage has never been made public, thanks to "Lusitania.net" we can examine Lord Mersey's [official](#) description of the facts.

*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.*

At the time of [the inquiry](#), of course, [Lord Mersey](#) did not have access to Schwieger's notes or testimony. He concluded that the [second explosion](#) was caused by a second torpedo. He was incorrect.

Did the presence of 5,000 cases of cartridges in any way contribute to the explosion that destroyed the ship? Dr. Robert Ballard, in a recent diving expedition to the wreck site, has reached some [conclusions](#) that implicate coal dust, not cartridges.

*Lusitania*'s munitions cargo hold was empty. Ballard found coal scattered over the site. He concluded the torpedo struck the starboard coal bins, after it had penetrated the ship's starboard side, instantly beginning a chain of fatal events.

Sparks from the torpedo strike may have ignited coal powder. And the ignited coal powder, in Ballard's judgment, caused the fatal explosion. His fascinating account is detailed in [Ghost Liners](#) and [Exploring the Lusitania](#) as well as in a PBS [documentary](#).

While both sides were fighting on land and sinking ships at sea, what were women and children doing and thinking? How were their daily lives impacted by the Great War?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/AMMUNITION-ON-BOARD-Lusitania-Sinking>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/AMMUNITION-ON-BOARD-Lusitania-Sinking>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### Can We Solve Science Mysteries with Decades-Old Evidence?

*Lusitania* rests in about 309 feet of water in the Celtic Sea where scientists, using sophisticated equipment, investigated why the vessel exploded.

For years, people suspected the ship was carrying munitions which America was providing for Britain during World War One. The cargo manifest did not reveal such weapons, however.

Dr. Robert Ballard, who located the *Titanic*, led a diving expedition to *Lusitania's* wreck site. He and his team found that *Lusitania's* munitions cargo hold was empty. He also found coal scattered over the site.

After examining the evidence, Ballard concluded that *U-20's* torpedo struck *Lusitania's* starboard coal bins, leading to a chain of fatal events. Sparks from the torpedo strike may have ignited coal powder. And the ignited coal powder, in Ballard's judgment, caused the fatal explosion.

Do you think that Ballard's scenario makes sense? Why, or why not?

Is it significant that the dive team observed *Lusitania's* munitions cargo hold was empty? Explain your answer.

Do you think we can rely on evidence, from decades or centuries ago, to solve science mysteries? Why, or why not?

## Media Stream

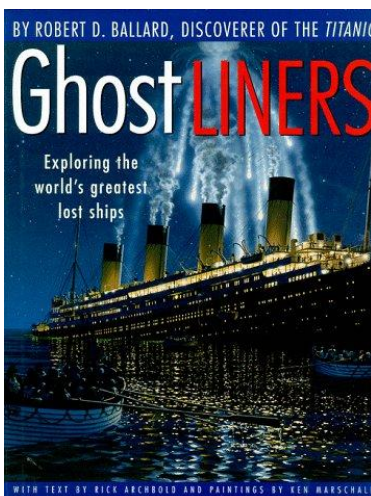


Sir John Charles Bigham, Lord Mersey, Head of The Court of Inquiry on the loss of the Empress of Ireland, earlier headed the Inquiry of the Titanic sinking, and later Head of Inquiry of the Torpedoing of the Lusitania.

### Lord Mersey

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lord-Mersey>



### Ghost Liners: Exploring Lost Ships

Image online, courtesy the [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ghost-Liners-Exploring-Lost-Ships>



### AMMUNITION ON BOARD?

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### Lord Mersey and the Lusitania Wreck Inquiry

This video clip is from the BBC's recreation of the ship, and the story of her 1915 sinking, entitled *Lusitania: Murder on the Atlantic*.

View this asset at:

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### Wreck Inquiry - Lusitania Findings

This video clip is from the BBC's recreation of the ship, and the story of her 1915 sinking, entitled *Lusitania: Murder on the Atlantic*. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the production.

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