



- 0. FATAL RUMORS - Story Preface
- 1. A WORLD AT WAR
- 2. THE LUSITANIA
- 3. MUNITIONS ON BOARD?
- 4. A TERRIBLE COINCIDENCE
- 5. TORPEDO ATTACK on LUSITANIA
- 6. DEATH OF A SHIP
- 7. VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS
- 8. AMMUNITION ON BOARD?
- 9. WAR MOMS
- 10. A BELLIGERENT MILITARY
- 11. FATAL RUMORS**
- 12. ALL IN THE FAMILY
- 13. AMERICA ENTERS WWI
- 14. THE WAR EFFORT
- 15. END OF THE WAR

To send its troops to France, Germany violates Belgium's neutrality. In the process, many Belgian refugees flee their country. This image depicts Belgian refugees arriving in nearby Holland (The Netherlands). Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

Belgium was neutral. The Kaiser says her "neutrality had to be violated by Germany on strategical grounds." What strategic reasons did Germany have to send soldiers, like Peter Kollwitz, into a country which didn't want to take sides in a war?

A potential war with France was a significant reason, according to the German ruler himself (in his personally penned letter to President Wilson):

...news having been received that France was already preparing to enter Belgium, and the King of Belgians having refused my petition for a free passage under guarantee of his country's freedom...

Germany's troops rolled through Belgium, without permission, on their way to fight against France because France was "preparing to enter Belgium" to fight against Germany. Or...so the Kaiser said.

But ... did he know for certain French troops were "preparing to enter Belgium," on their way to Germany ... or ... was the "news," which he referenced, just a rumor (convenient or otherwise)?

To answer that question, let's examine *all* the words which Wilhelm II personally selected as he wrote his letter to the American president.

When text is printed, crossed-out words (from the original manuscript) are not included. Sometimes those deleted words tell us more than the words which remain. When the Kaiser wrote to President Wilson, he initially said:

...knowledge having been received that France was already preparing to enter Belgium...

"Knowledge" is a fact one knows with certainty. (The Kaiser deleted that word from his letter.)

"News" may, or may not, be fact. (The Kaiser used *that* word, instead of "knowledge," in his letter.)

So ... German troops were sent into Belgium based on *news*, not on knowledge. And ... as it happened ... the news was wrong. Wars, and rumors of wars, once again pushed people toward a seemingly unstoppable, man-made disaster.

King Albert and his Belgian troops tried to resist the German invasion. Their efforts did little good. Thousands of neutral Belgians, with little choice but to flee their country, became refugees.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FATAL-RUMORS-Lusitania-Sinking>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/FATAL-RUMORS-Lusitania-Sinking>

Questions 2 Ponder

Is It Acceptable to Violate Neutrality - Ever?

At the beginning of WWI, Belgium declared its neutrality. German soldiers, however, needed to go through Belgium to reach France.

Kaiser Wilhelm, then Germany's leader, said that Belgium's "neutrality had to be violated by Germany on strategical grounds."

What do you make of the Kaiser's argument?

If a country declares that it is neutral, effectively stating that it will not take sides in a coming war or conflict, is it ever acceptable for a warring country to violate that neutrality? Explain your answer.

What Is the Difference between Knowledge and News?

Kaiser Wilhelm first said he had "knowledge" that French soldiers were preparing to enter Belgium, but he changed that word to "news" in a message he penned to U.S President Wilson.

Why was the Kaiser writing to the President? Because he was explaining why Germany's troops had rolled through Belgium, without permission, on their way to fight against France.

In the days before typewritten documents, which only reveal the final copy after all changes are made, handwritten notes - with scratched-out words - revealed interesting information. A great example is in Kaiser Wilhelm's letter to Woodrow Wilson.

From it, we learn that German troops were sent into Belgium based on news, not on knowledge. And ... as it happened ... the news was wrong.

Can you think of events, in the recent past, where countries went to war based on "news" as opposed to "knowledge?" Explain your answer.

What were the consequences of those news-based decisions?

Why do you think Kaiser Wilhelm edited his letter to President Wilson, changing "knowledge" to "news?"

What is the difference between "knowledge" and "news?" Which of the two is more reliable?

Is it appropriate to take action, leading to war, if a country's rulers have information based on "news" instead of "knowledge?" Explain your answer.

In today's world, the edit would not have been seen because the Kaiser would have sent a "clean copy" of his words to Wilson. Is it better for the person receiving the communication to see the edited version (instead of the clean version) to better-assess the mind set of the writer? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Albert I - King of Belgians

Image online, courtesy the firstworldwar.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Albert-I-King-of-Belgians>



Belgian Resistance Cartoon

Image online, courtesy the punchcartoons.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Belgian-Resistance-Cartoon>



Belgians Flee Their Country during WWI

Image online, courtesy forumeerstewereldoorlog.nl - a dutch website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Belgians-Flee-Their-Country-during-WWI>



Belgians Boarding Ships at the Start of WWI

Image online, courtesy kingsacademy.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Belgians-Boarding-Ships-at-the-Start-of-WWI>



Belgian Refugees during WWI

Image online, courtesy the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Belgian-Refugees-during-WWI>



FATAL RUMORS

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/FATAL-RUMORS>