

Because of *Lusitania's* massive second explosion, people have always wondered whether the ship was carrying military supplies for Great Britain. Did something in her cargo hold cause the ship to explode and sink in eighteen minutes?

This image depicts the *Lusitania's* manifest which was in place for her fatal voyage. It was the document which *Lusitania's* underwriters released to news media after the ship sank on May 7, 1915. While it reflects some military items, the manifest does not reveal significant items of war materiel.

What do we learn from primary sources about *Lusitania's* cargo? *Documents on the War of the Nations, The Lusitania Case* contains a chapter on *Lusitania's* manifest. Among others are these words:

...Most of her cargo was for military purposes, but she carried no ammunition that might have assisted the damage of the German torpedoes. Captain D.G. Roberts, the Cunard pier captain in this city, said she had a few cases of small-arms ammunition, but not enough to have done any damage. She also had a large consignment of big-gun shells, empty, and of course, harmless. (See Documents on the War of the Nations: The Lusitania Case, Volume II, Collected and Published, in 1915, by C. L. Droste, at page 57.)

The conclusion reached, at the time, was that the cargo's military items could not have contributed to the ship's demise:

... Military Cargo Included Small Arms, Ammunition, and Some Empty Big Gun Shells - Such Material Could not Have Furthered Destruction of Vessel after Torpedo Struck ... (See Droste, at page 57.)

All of the cargo items, allegedly carried by *Lusitania* during her final voyage, were published in the *Evening Post* on May 8, 1915 (the day after the sinking). But ... were those items listed in the publicly released manifest, and published by various news sources, accurate?

During recent years, diving expeditions at the wreck scene (and of the ship herself) have produced contrary evidence.

In 2008 - as reported in the January/February 2009 issue of *Archaeology* (published by the Archaeological Institute of America) - a team directed by Eoin McGarry (a County Waterford-based diver), using a remotely operated vehicle, found live ammunition:

They were able to clearly identify a vast amount of ammunition in an area of Lusitania not believed to have carried cargo. The Remington .303 caliber bullets the team discovered on the ship had been used by the British military during World War I. Ten of the bullets were brought to the surface.

The bullets were delivered to the Irish Department of Environment's Underwater Archaeology Unit which has jurisdiction over the *Lusitania* artifacts. Fionnbar Moore, one of the Unit's senior archaeologists, commented on the findings:

Further research needs to be conducted, but if the discovered ammunition was found in an area where cargo was not known to be stored on board, it strongly supports the argument that the Lusitania was functioning as more than a passenger liner.

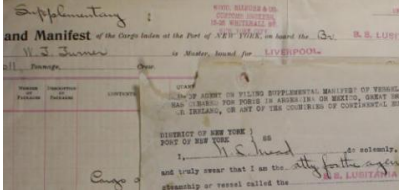
If, in fact, *Lusitania* carried significant amounts of war materiel for Britain, a key question will be asked: Was she a legitimate target for a lurking German U-boat?

Credits:

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