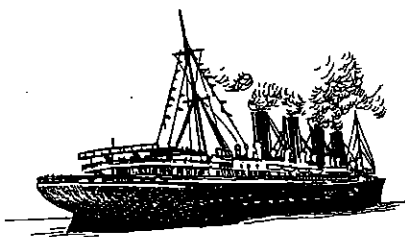


The Sinking of the *Lusitania*



Shortly after World War I began, the British blockaded German seaports in an attempt to prevent war supplies from reaching the Central Powers. The British reasoned that if Germany and its allies did not receive the necessary supplies, they would grow weak and would have to stop fighting.

While carrying out its plan, the British navy stopped all ships from entering Germany. British sailors removed anything they thought would contribute to Germany's war effort, including food and machinery. At the same time, they destroyed most of the German merchant fleet.

Germany retaliated in February 1915 by declaring the waters surrounding the British Isles a "war zone." They warned that any merchant ship that ventured into the zone was in danger of being sunk. The United States issued a vigorous protest to Germany and warned of the consequences if an American vessel was attacked.

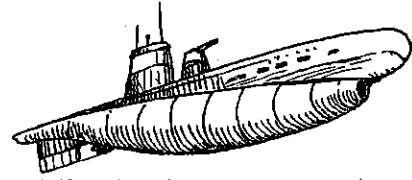
A few months later an incident occurred that turned American opinion against Germany and later helped bring the United States into the war. On May 7, 1915, the British liner *Lusitania* was traveling from New York to England when it was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland. Of the nearly 1200 passengers who drowned, 128 were Americans. President Woodrow Wilson was outraged, and there was strong support in the United States for a declaration of war. This declaration was avoided when Germany announced it would cease attacking neutral or passenger ships. Germany kept this promise for nearly two years.

Determine whether the statements below are true or false. Write T or F in each blank.

1. _____ The purpose of the British blockade was to render Germany and its allies incapable of continuing the war.
2. _____ The war zone declared by Germany in response to the British blockade included the entire coast of western Europe.
3. _____ The *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Ireland.
4. _____ Most of the passengers on the *Lusitania* were Americans.
5. Before the *Lusitania* sailed from New York on May 1, 1915, Americans were warned by the German embassy not to sail on any ship bound for England. The warning appeared in numerous newspapers. Furthermore, the *Lusitania* was carrying military supplies, a fact at first denied by the British but later proven to be true. In your opinion, was Germany justified in sinking the ship? Explain.

6. Should the German submarine have surfaced and allowed the crew and passengers aboard the *Lusitania* to leave the ship before it was torpedoed? Why or why not?

U-Boats



On February 1, 1917, Germany announced a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. An order went out to all German submarines to sink any vessel on sight. The order included neutral and passenger ships as well as ships of war.

Although the German navy was strong, it could not compete in numbers with the powerful British navy. To offset this imbalance, the Germans had built a large number of U-boats, or submarines. *U-boat* was short for *unterseeboot*, or "undersea boat." The Germans hoped the U-boats would enable them to sink enough Allied ships to turn the war in their favor.

Unrestricted submarine warfare ended Germany's compliance with "cruiser rules." According to cruiser rules, before a submarine could sink a ship, it had to surface and allow the passengers to leave the ship. The Germans followed this rule for almost two years after the *Lusitania* was torpedoed. However, they discontinued the policy when the British began to disguise warships as merchant vessels and blasted a number of U-boats out of the water. (The Germans resorted to the same deception and sank Allied merchant ships in record numbers.)

The Germans had hoped their U-boats would end the war before the United States had a chance to enter on the side of the Allies. However, this did not happen. Allied ships traveling in convoys (groups of merchant ships escorted by warships) succeeded in getting necessary supplies to the battlefield. Some of these ships were equipped with depth charges, drums of explosives that blew up at a certain depth. The depth charges destroyed many U-boats and helped bring the submarine threat to an end.

Solve the following math word problems to gain a better understanding of the destruction caused by German U-boats.

1. From February 1, 1917, until the end of the war, a period of about 21 months, German U-boats sank almost 3000 Allied and neutral ships.

This was an average of _____ ships a month. (Round your answer.)

2. More than 5000 Allied and neutral ships fell prey to German U-boats throughout the course of the war.

_____ percent of these losses occurred after February 1, 1917.

Answer the following questions.

3. What were "cruiser rules"?

4. Why did Germany work so hard to gain control of the seas?

