

The sinking of the Lusitania: How the British won American hearts and minds

By John Maxwell Hamilton and Elisabeth Fondren, The Conversation, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.04.18

Word Count 818

Level 820L

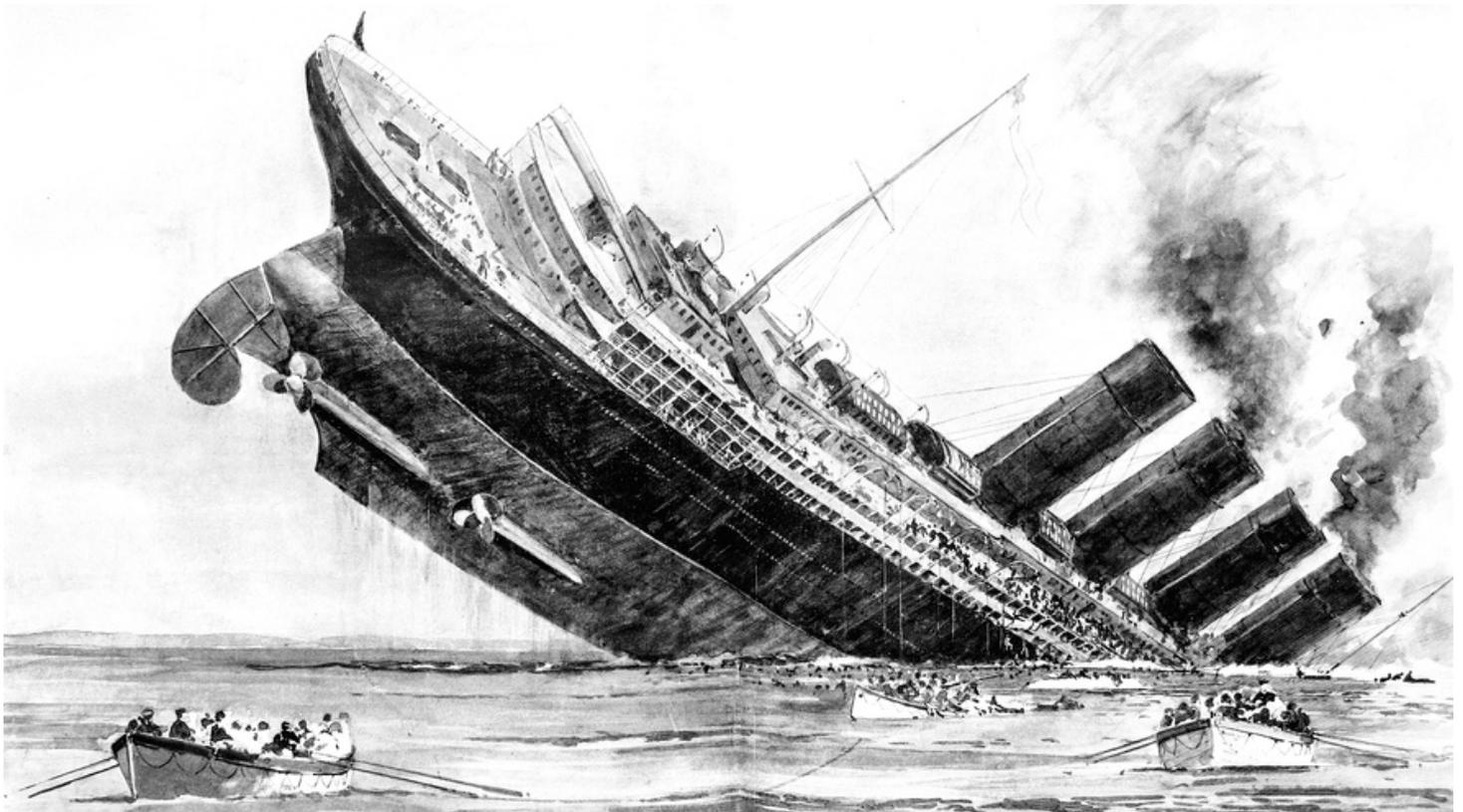


Image 1. Sinking of the Lusitania. Engraving by Norman Wilkinson, The Illustrated London News, May 15, 1915. Image from the public domain.

On May 7, 1915, a German submarine sank the British passenger boat Lusitania. It killed 1,195 people, including 123 Americans.

At this time, the U.S. was not involved in World War I. However, after the ship sank, many Americans wanted to enter the war against Germany.

The ship's sinking was a horrific event. But there is a story behind the story. For the first time, governments used information about the event to try to sway people's opinion. This information is called propaganda.

New Departures In Naval Warfare

World War I was unlike past wars in many ways. At the time, Britain, Italy, Russia and France were fighting against Germany.

In August 1914, the British started a huge blockade against Germany. It used its boats and army to prevent soldiers and food from reaching Germany. This hurt the German people and many of them went without food.

Few Germans truly starved, but many were sick and unhealthy. Perhaps 300,000 people died because of this.

Germans also had submarines that could travel underwater. At the time, this was a new kind of weapon as they could travel without being seen.

Also new was the frequent use of propaganda. Propaganda can mean sharing information to change someone's beliefs, but it can also mean keeping information secret.

Heavy-Handed Messaging From Berlin

The German government kept information from its citizens. It stirred up support from its citizens at home as well as Germans living in America. It wanted to keep the United States out of the war.

After the sinking of the Lusitania, German officials pointed out that the ship was carrying weapons. The German government had also placed advertisements in New York newspapers before the Lusitania sailed. The ads warned that British ships might be destroyed.

The Germans could have said that the British blockade hurt their people. However, this would make them appear weak, which they didn't want. Instead, they took the opposite approach.

The Lusitania was "drilled into the ground," read a headline in one German paper and other headlines celebrated the attack.

The American people were offended by the German government's proud response to the sinking ship and dead civilians.

Dr. Bernhard Dernburg was in charge of spreading pro-German propaganda in the United States. He was correct in saying that Americans could not see the thousands of "German children starving" because of the British blockade. But they could imagine the face of a child who drowned in the Lusitania attack.

After the Lusitania sinking, German diplomats in the United States left. They found it harder to share pro-German propaganda in the U.S.

Subterranean Work By London

The British used propaganda also, and they used it well. Their goal was to get the United States to join the British in the fight against Germany.

The British propaganda team worked very secretly. Even members of the government didn't know the team existed.

In the United States, this work was carried out by writers. They put stories in American newspapers. They successfully made the newspapers focus on how Germans were spying in the United States.

The British had another advantage.

In the first hours of the war, they cut Germany's transatlantic telegraph cable lines. The telegraph sent written messages. To make it work, a cable was placed under the Atlantic Ocean, connecting America and Europe. The cable was thousands of miles long.

With the cable line cut, Germany had trouble sending news to the United States.

The British also took small stories and made them seem like a big deal.

A German merchant created a medal that remembered the Lusitania attack. His business was small — he made fewer than 500 medals. But the British made it appear like all of Germany celebrated the attack.

The British gave out pictures of the medal to newspapers and magazines both inside and outside Britain. They even made thousands of copies of the medal themselves to show them off.

American Reactions

In the end, Britain won the propaganda battle. In April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson took the country into the war. After entering the war, the United States itself used wide-ranging propaganda for the first time in its history and has not stopped since.

The fight for public opinion is today regularly used in matters of war and in peace.

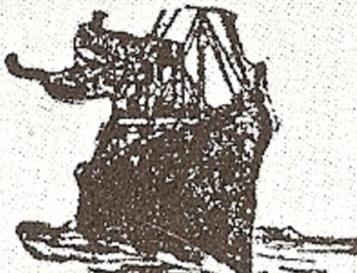
It is said "the state with the largest army prevails," wrote Joseph Nye Jr., an expert in foreign relations. Today, he says, the government "with the best story may sometimes win."

John Maxwell Hamilton is a professor of communications at Louisiana State University.

Elisabeth Fondren is earning her Ph.D. in media and public affairs at Louisiana State University.

OCEAN STEAMSHIPS.

CUNARD



EUROPE VIA LIVERPOOL
LUSITANIA

Fastest and Largest Steamer
now in Atlantic Service Sails
SATURDAY, MAY 1, 10 A. M.
Transylvania, Fri., May 7, 5 P.M.
Orduna, - - Tues., May 18, 10 A.M.
Tuscania, - - Fri., May 21, 5 P.M.
LUSITANIA, Sat., May 29, 10 A.M.
Transylvania, Fri., June 4, 5 P.M.

Gibraltar—Genoa—Naples—Piraeus
S.S. Carpathia, Thur., May 13, Noon

NOTICE!

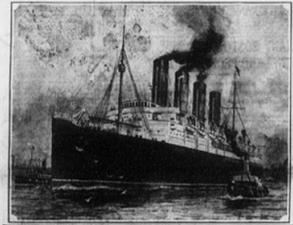
TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY

WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1915.

HUNDREDS OF LIVES ARE LOST ON THE TORPEDOED LUSITANIA

FORMER QUEEN OF THE SEAS SUNK BY TORPEDO IN "WAR ZONE"



CHINA TO ACCEPT WALL ST. GETS BIG SHAKE-UP

Answer to Ultimatum to Be Delivered to Minister Tonight Or Sunday

Beijing, May 8. (A.P.)—China will accept all of Japan's demands without reservation. The cabinet of the Chinese government has decided to accept the ultimatum which was presented to the Chinese government by the Japanese government on May 18. The ultimatum demanded that China should accept all of Japan's demands without reservation. The Chinese government has decided to accept all of Japan's demands without reservation. The cabinet of the Chinese government has decided to accept the ultimatum which was presented to the Chinese government by the Japanese government on May 18. The ultimatum demanded that China should accept all of Japan's demands without reservation. The Chinese government has decided to accept all of Japan's demands without reservation.

Survivors Landed Believed to Number Not More Than 500 Out of Total List of About 2000.

MANY BOSTON PEOPLE ON LINER'S PASSENGER LIST

German Embassy Had Given Warning in Passenger-Schedule Book For Fry Of Irish Coast.

Quincy, May 8. (A.P.)—The names of the passengers of the Lusitania, reported by a German submarine of the Irish coast, have been in the hands of the German government for some time. The names of the passengers of the Lusitania, reported by a German submarine of the Irish coast, have been in the hands of the German government for some time. The names of the passengers of the Lusitania, reported by a German submarine of the Irish coast, have been in the hands of the German government for some time.

GERMANY'S WARNING AND CIRCAD REPLY

The Lusitania's Sinking, According to Reports, Was Caused by a Torpedo Fired from a Submarine.

The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine. The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine. The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine.

STEWARDS REPORTS AT LEAST ONE LOST

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

TRAVELERS AND TUG RESCUE BOAT

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

MANY SENT TO HOSPITALS

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

NEWS CREATED PAINTFUL IMPRESSION

The Lusitania's Sinking, According to Reports, Was Caused by a Torpedo Fired from a Submarine.

The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine. The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine. The Lusitania's sinking, according to reports, was caused by a torpedo fired from a submarine.

BASEBALL RESULTS

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

CITY TAKES SITE

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

TRAVELERS AND TUG RESCUE BOAT

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

MANY SENT TO HOSPITALS

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

TRAVELERS AND TUG RESCUE BOAT

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

MANY SENT TO HOSPITALS

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

TRAVELERS AND TUG RESCUE BOAT

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

MANY SENT TO HOSPITALS

Survivors of the Lusitania, According to Reports, Were Found by a Submarine.

Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine. Survivors of the Lusitania, according to reports, were found by a submarine.

Quiz

1 What is the relationship between the sinking of the Lusitania and propaganda?

- (A) The use of propaganda ended after the sinking of the ship.
- (B) Governments using propaganda caused the sinking of the ship.
- (C) Propaganda was almost able to prevent the sinking of the ship.
- (D) A lot of propaganda was written about the sinking of the ship.

2 What effect did the British blockade have on Germany?

- (A) The German people got angry and declared war against the British.
- (B) The blockade resulted in the deaths of many Germans.
- (C) The German people blamed the Americans for the blockade.
- (D) The blockade resulted in many British people starving.

3 Read the section "Heavy-Handed Messaging From Berlin."

Which sentence from the section supports the idea that the Germans attacked the Lusitania as a response to the British blockade against their country?

- (A) After the sinking of the Lusitania, German officials pointed out that the ship was carrying weapons.
- (B) The American people were offended by the German government's proud response to the sinking ship and dead civilians.
- (C) He was correct in saying that Americans could not see the thousands of "German children starving" because of the German blockade.
- (D) After the Lusitania sinking, German diplomats in the United States left.

4 Read the paragraph from the section "American Reactions."

In the end, Britain won the propaganda battle. In April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson took the country into the war. After entering the war, the United States itself used wide-ranging propaganda for the first time in its history and has not stopped since.

Which conclusion is BEST supported by the paragraph?

- (A) Propaganda helped convince the U.S. to enter the war on the side of Britain.
- (B) The U.S. had to use propaganda to convince Britain to stay in the war.
- (C) Britain stopped using propaganda as soon as the U.S. decided to enter the war.
- (D) The U.S. uses propaganda better than Britain does.