

# This Week In History



## FRAME 14

On May 7, 1915, the Lusitania sank in the Irish Sea.

## GENERAL LEVEL

At the beginning of World War One in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson promised that the United States would remain neutral.

**What does this mean?** (Not taking part in the war and not taking sides.) At the time, most Americans agreed. Britain, however, was one of America's closest trading partners, and when Germany got in the way of that trade, public opinion began to change. Several U.S. ships traveling to Britain were damaged or sunk by German mines, and in February 1915, Germany announced it would carry on submarine warfare in the waters around Britain. The German Embassy published warnings in several New York newspapers. They warned Americans traveling on British or Allied ships in the war zone that they did so at their own risk. **Who were the Allies in World War One?** (Russia, France, Britain, Italy, and the United States.) The announcement was placed on the same page as the notice of the sailing of the British-built luxury liner Lusitania from New York back to Liverpool. **Where is Liverpool?** (In Britain.)

By the time the Lusitania set sail from New York, a number of British merchant ships had been sunk by German subs, but people thought that a passenger ship would not be a target. Also the Lusitania's great speed seemed to guarantee a safe passage. But as the Lusitania entered the Irish Sea, Captain William Turner actually slowed down, apparently because of patchy fog. Turner was ignoring all of the British Admiralty's advice for staying clear of German sub-

marines. He was sailing too close to shore, where U-boats loved to hide, instead of in the relative safety of the open channel. He was traveling at less than top speed, and he wasn't zigzagging. **How do you think zigzagging would have helped?** (It's harder to hit something that isn't traveling in a straight line.)

When a U-boat found the Lusitania in its sights just south of Queenstown, Ireland, it was able to sink her with a single torpedo, penetrating the hull just below the waterline. **What part of a ship is the hull?** (The frame or body of a ship.) The initial explosion set off a violent secondary blast. The ship sank in 18 minutes, with a loss of 1,195 of the 1,959 on board, including 123 Americans. Captain Turner was washed clear of the bridge as the ship sank, and survived after spending more than three hours in the water. **Can you name some other famous ships that sank? What were the causes?**

There was some talk that the Lusitania was carrying about 173 tons of weapons and ammunition for Britain. The Germans used this as further reason for the attack. If this is true, these materials were forbidden by American law from being placed on a passenger liner. Americans were very angry over the sinking of the Lusitania and that event helped sway public opinion in favor of America joining the war. German submarines sank many more ships over the next two years. Two years after the sinking of the Lusitania, in April 1917, America entered World War One. **What were some of the other reasons the United States entered World War One?**  
END OF STORY