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2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Lusitania.

From an American point of view, the most dramatic event leading to the US entry into World War I, was the sinking of the RMS Lusitania, on the 7 th May 1915.

Counter Blockade

On 4 February 1915, the German government had announced that, in retaliation for the British Navy's blockade of German ports, the Kriegsmarine were going to launch a counter-blockade against the British Isles, using submarine warfare. From 18 February onwards, every enemy merchant vessel in the waters surrounding the British Isles would be targeted. Neutral vessels were warned that they could be exposed to danger in this war zone, in view of the misuse of neutral flags ordered by the British government on 31 January.

Misuse of Neutral Flags

First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Winston Churchill, had encouraged British merchant vessels to fly the flags of neutral countries. Naval personal were also urged to wear civilian clothing to lure German submarines to the surface where they would be vulnerable to being destroyed by concealed surface guns.

Starvation Blockade

Winston Churchill declared that the Royal Navy blockade of Germany was meant to *starve the whole population* men, women and children, old and young, wounded and sound into submission.

Mine Warfare

In addition to the Royal Navy battleships and cruisers, the British mined vast sections of the North Sea to imperil even neutral ships that may be trading cargo with their enemy. Historian John Coogan noted: *By sowing mines in international waters, Britain deliberately replaced the belligerent right of Visit and Search in the North Sea, with a new rule: Explode and Sink!*

Inconsistent

Up until the First World War, food intended for civilian use was not considered contraband by anyone. Therefore the starvation blockade of Germany was in violation of International Law. However, American president Woodrow Wilson refused to draw any connection between the German warning of submarine warfare and the British hunger blockade of Germany using both surface fleet and sea mines.

Falava Incident

On 29 March 1915, the British steam ship *Falava* was sunk by a German U-Boat. According to British propaganda,

the German captain had fired without warning, killing 110 people, including one American. Investigations later established that the German captain had given the *Falava* three warnings, and had fired only after a British war ship had appeared on the horizon. The *Falava* was carrying 13 tonnes of ammunition. Nevertheless, President Wilson sent a warning to the German government that the United States would protect American citizens even if they were sailing on ships belonging to belligerents involved in open war!

Warnings

This was a dramatic change in policy. During previous wars, for example, during the Japanese \diamond Russian war of 1905, the American government had warned its citizens that they travelled in war zones at their own risk. The RMS Lusitania of the Cunard line was known to be carrying thousands of cases of ammunition for the British Army. The German government published warnings in major American newspapers not to book passage on the Lusitania and cautioning American travellers that the waters around the British Isles were a war zone. Those travelling on ships of Great Britain and her Allies, did so at their own risk.

Conspiracy

Documents, which had been sealed for 60 years, were only released in 1975, detailing how First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, had conspired to bring about the sinking of the Lusitania in order to enable the American government to convince their isolationist population of the need for America to enter the war on Britain's side.

Ambushing the Ambushers

Radio signals from the Admiralty even instructed the Lusitania to change course, deliberately leading it into the known location of German U-Boats. U-20 Captain, Walter Schwieger fired a single torpedo in order to give the passengers and crew of the ship sufficient time to lower the life boats and abandon ship.

Disaster at Sea

He was stunned to see the tremendous explosion caused by the single torpedo. The vast cargo of ammunition had clearly been ignited from that single torpedo and the ship sunk in minutes. 1,195 of the ship's 1,959 passengers perished, including over 100 of the Americans on board.

Outrage

The sinking of the Lusitania was fully exploited by the Propaganda Bureaus of Britain and of the United States. The American Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, reminded the president that the investigation confirmed that over 5,000 cases of ammunition and shells had been on board the liner and that the German government had repeatedly offered to end submarine warfare in exchange for the elimination of the Starvation Blockade of Germany. Secretary of State Bryan challenged Wilson's double standards: *Why be shocked at the drowning of a few people, if there is to be no objection to starving a nation?*

Protest

The German government suspended their submarine operations, but Woodrow Wilson demanded further that Americans had the right to

travel on armed, belligerent merchant ships, carrying ammunitions of war through a declared war zone to Britain without the right of the German Navy to interfere with this. Convinced that he was part of an administration hell-bent on war, Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, resigned.

Double Standards

Although President Woodrow Wilson spoke of submarine warfare as *a war against all mankind*, historian Thomas Fleming points out that the United States Navy adopted the same policy as the German Navy during World War II. The US Navy launched more submarines than Germany and throughout its involvement in WWII, adopted a surprise attack approach against all enemy surface ships, torpedoing, without warning, even fishing vessels.

Bombing Cities

Similarly, what the US government condemned as a war crime, Japan bombing the Chinese city of Shanghai, the US Army Air Force undertook as a matter of policy, bombing the cities of Germany in so called *Strategic Bombing Offensives* and *Saturation Bombing Campaigns*.

After the War

The British Navy's Hunger Blockade of Germany continued for 4 months after the end of WWI, 11 November 1918. Hundreds-of-thousands of non-combatants perished from cold and hunger because of that blockade during the winter following the Armistice. It has been pointed out by historians that the Congress of Vienna, 1814-1815, which concluded the 25 years of French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, produced a peace settlement that endured for a full century. The Congress of Vienna was worked out by European powers without any American assistance.

The Disaster of Versailles

However, the Versailles Treaty, with all the meddling by American president, Woodrow Wilson, who claimed to want to *make the world safe for democracy*, spectacularly failed. The punitive and vindictive Versailles Treaty guaranteed an even more terrible conflict would erupt two decades later, leading to the deaths of tens-of-millions more, and a massive expansion of communist control over Eastern and Central Europe.

Deadly Deception

The sinking of the Lusitania provides another tragic example of the deadly consequences of deception and propaganda.

Dr. Peter Hammond

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