

- LEST WE FORGET -

One of the greatest crimes that the Germans ever committed,

THE SINKING OF THE "LUSITANIA."

7th May, 1915.

Being one of the crew at the time of the disaster, I should like to relate the last voyage that the "Lusitania" made.

It was April 1915 when the great liner came alongside the Liverpool landing stage to take aboard the human cargo which was leaving the Old Country for the "New World." Fearless and full of hope they walked up the gangway on to the great ship where comfort and safety were assured, the Cunard Company's motto was always comfort and safety for their passengers. She was indeed a wonderful ship, every home comfort could be found on her, her beautifully furnished rooms and bed-rooms and well appointed Dining-rooms made a passenger feel at ease at a glance.

It was approximately five o'clock in the afternoon when her great sirens echoed the time of departure and all the passengers filed on deck to wave their adieu to the friends and relations who came to see them off. It was, and always is, a moving sight to see. At last one hears the great propellers turning - she is away - steaming down the River Mersey, leaving the landing stage with its mass of people still waving.

It is the general custom of the Cunard Company to serve dinner as soon as the ship leaves the stage and all sat down to a

substantial meal and to retire early, being fatigued by their journey to Liverpool and the excitement of the day. Next morning they got up early, had breakfast which was served at eight o'clock, and then sought their daily routine, some playing games on the deck, others finding solace in the lounges, reading books which the well-stocked library supplied. Many male passengers went to the Smoke-room, where they played a quiet game of cards and light refreshments were served. Beef tea and biscuits were served on deck at ten o'clock. The ship's orchestra played in the Second Class Drawing-room from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Lunch was served at one o'clock, a splendid full course lunch, which everyone was ready for after being out in the beautiful sea air. In the afternoon, a nap was generally the rule and the passengers retired to their rooms or to the cosy corners of the deck or lounge. Dinner was served at six o'clock, another full course meal. The passengers retired for the night between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. This was the general day's routine throughout the voyage to New York. Sometimes a Church Service or a Concert was held, the proceeds going to the Sailors' Homes at Liverpool and New York. At times a real professional Concert was given, as good as they could get in a first class Concert Hall in London.

All went well on this voyage to New York, the only thing to be discovered, appertaining to war, was the dimming of lights at night time, but the passengers understood and felt quite safe on such a great ship. New York was reached at last, the usual

formalities of disembarkation were carried out and the passengers went ashore quite happy and well pleased with the voyage.

I will now relate the homeward voyage. I would like to point out that I was one of the leading Stewards in the Second Class Department of the ship, and it will be chiefly with this Department that I shall deal in my story.

It was May 1st, 1915 that the Lusitania took aboard her 3,000 passengers and crew, although rumours were abroad regarding the ships safety, the people never could think that the Germans would attempt to sink such a ship as the Lusitania, unarmed, and carrying so many women and children. In fact, during the five years that I was on her, I had never seen so many women and children.

We left New York at about ten o'clock that morning, all in the best of spirits. There are two instances that I would like to speak about which happened at the commencement of that voyage. We had a steward in my department - a German Swiss. He had been on the ship two or three years and, on this particular voyage, he deserted in New York. The other was, when passing the Vaterland, which was a German Liner, interned at that port, she dipped her flag in salute to the Lusitania. These two instances seemed very peculiar to me, as if something was known of the deed planned by the Germans. To go on with my story ... We sailed out of the Hudson River and reached the Three Mile limit where the ship stopped. The passengers, anxious to know the reason, rushed on

deck, only to find that papers and letters were being despatched to the lads on the British cruiser, King Edward VII, which was stationed just outside New York. We soon proceeded on our voyage and everything went smoothly for the next two or three days.

Everything was done to keep the passengers in good spirits. Concerts, Whist Drives and Dances took place. Some passengers made enquiries as to the ship's safety and were assured that everything was all right.

At last the fateful day arrived. It was Friday, May 7th, the date that I shall never forget. It was a glorious Spring morning, the sky without a cloud and the sea without a ripple. The passengers were astir early, walking the deck and viewing the beautiful Irish coast as it came into view. The sailors were busy getting the baggage from the hold to the deck ready for removal ashore, anxious eyes watched the busy sight. The gong went for breakfast at eight o'clock, the table talk was about the time of arrival at Liverpool; who would be there to meet them and what fuss would be made of them. Being in an excited mood between breakfast and lunch, they went and packed the bags which they were allowed to have in their bedrooms. At one o'clock the gong went for lunch. There were two sittings in the Second Class Saloon as there were only seats for 250 people at one time. The first sitting enjoyed the splendid lunch, it took about an hour. About two o'clock, the second gong went for the second sitting. It was during this sitting that the awful moment occurred.

I had eight gentlemen at my table, amongst them a well-known Scots Comedian, Mr. Jock Mackay, and a well-known Leeds gentleman, Mr. Kelly, who, during the voyage, kept the passengers in high glee, arranging games, et cetera. These two gentlemen, I am sorry to say, lost their lives. After being at the table about ten minutes, without warning the ship received a terrible shock. Something had struck her. She gave a great shudder and heeled over to Port. The passengers, in great alarm, jumped from their seats and rushed for the deck. I had, at that moment, my arm full of dirty plates which I had just removed from my table. I dropped them quickly and rushed to help pacify the terror stricken people. I was of no use, they rushed hither and thither seeking safety. I went, at once, to the aid of the women and children who were climbing the rigging, endeavouring to gain the boat deck.

The boats, on the starboard side, were inaccessible being inboard owing to the ship being over on the port side. The other boats were partly filled with those who could reach them, being swung so far out that this was almost impossible. The majority of people were jumping overboard. When the command "Everyone for himself" came from the Bridge, I rushed off to find a lifeboat as I could not swim. I went down below to the "Glory Hole" the stewards' sleeping quarters. It was pitch dark down there, but I managed to scramble to my bunk and found my life-belt under the pillow. I made a mad rush back on to the deck only just in time. I put the belt on quickly, having to sit down to do so as the ship

was now too far over to allow standing up. I got to the rail of the ship where I sat until she made her final plunge.

During that anxious time of waiting, I could see those poor people, locked in one another's arms, some jumping to their doom striking floating debris, others stuck to the ship to go down with her to the bottom. At last my turn came. I went down with her, far down into the deep. Thank God I had the life-belt on. It brought me back to the surface. I got my breath and struggled hard for my life. All around were dead bodies, floating in their life-belts. It was a ghastly sight. I kept up for about three hours and then I suddenly went under. When I came round, Thank God, I found that I was in a collapsible boat. I had been rescued unconscious. What a sight before my eyes. Dead and living all around me. Upturned boats with men and women clinging to them. Boats full of water, with their occupants up to their waists, terrified and expecting any minute to go under. In the stillness, I could hear the singing of a Hymn and "Its a Long way to Tipperary" and, intermingled, men and women groaning.

Amongst all that agonizing strain, there was a touch of merriment to be seen for, in the water, was a ship's locker, out of which a man occasionally popped his head for the chance of rescue. It was for nearly seven hours we waited in suspense, suffering from exposure in the cold night air, when suddenly we saw in the distance, a ship. A shout of gladness rent the air. Encouragement went from tongue to tongue and, at last, a British

Cruiser joined by smaller craft, came to our rescue. The armed trawler "Indian Empire" picked us up and, one by one, the boats were emptied of their gladdened crews. What a sight met our eyes. The deck was covered with bodies and sobs could be heard from those whose fate had fared better than theirs. May God punish those responsible for such a deed.

After cruising round with hopes of finding other bodies, the "Indian Empire" set off for Queenstown. The Captain of the trawler was very kind to us, supplying us with hot tea and something to eat, which was very acceptable. We arrived at Queenstown about ten o'clock that night. The Pier was crowded with people and we received a very enthusiastic reception. Our first action was to go to the Telegraph Office to inform our relations and friends of our safety. We were then directed to our shelter for the night. The crew were housed in the Sailors' Home and the passengers were allotted to the several Hotels. Each individual was loudly cheered as he or she passed through the two lines of people. I went to the Sailors' Home and there met a lot of my shipmates. There was much hand-shaking and congratulations, on both sides, of each other's safety. I looked round the company but missed my bosom pal who I had sailed with for twelve years. I went back to the Pier but only to find that the last boat had arrived and that he was not there. I decided not to give up hope until morning. I returned to the Home and was shown to my room, a small room but clean and comfortable. I got into bed but could not sleep for thinking of

the awful scenes that I had just left. The weary hours seemed years but at last the time came to get up. I dressed in the clothes I was pulled out of the water in. I felt I could not take interest in anything. I could not get that awful tragedy out of my mind. I went into the Dining-room and a good breakfast was put in front of me, but I could not eat but just had a cup of coffee. I went out and bought a cap and overcoat to put over my still wet uniform. I again went to hunt for my friend. I visited the temporary mortuaries but could not find him. I gave up all hope then - he had gone beyond all doubt. I walked back, depressed and broken. I again met my mates and was informed that we were being sent to Liverpool at 2 p.m. A special train took us to Dublin and every courtesy was shown us on the journey, refreshments being provided. We arrived at Dublin some time in the evening and we were embarked on the Mail boat for Liverpool.

We arrived there about five o'clock Sunday morning. Lime Street Station was packed with people. It was a sight that I would not care to witness again. Some were overjoyed at finding their dear ones safe in their arms and others were overcome at finding them missing. Several women fainted and had to be cared for.

I write this after five years have passed but still that vivid recollection haunts my mind. Any witness to such a crime would never forget it. It will live in my memory until I pass away. My only hope is that the ones responsible for that dastardly crime get their just deserts at the day of Judgment.

William Rose.