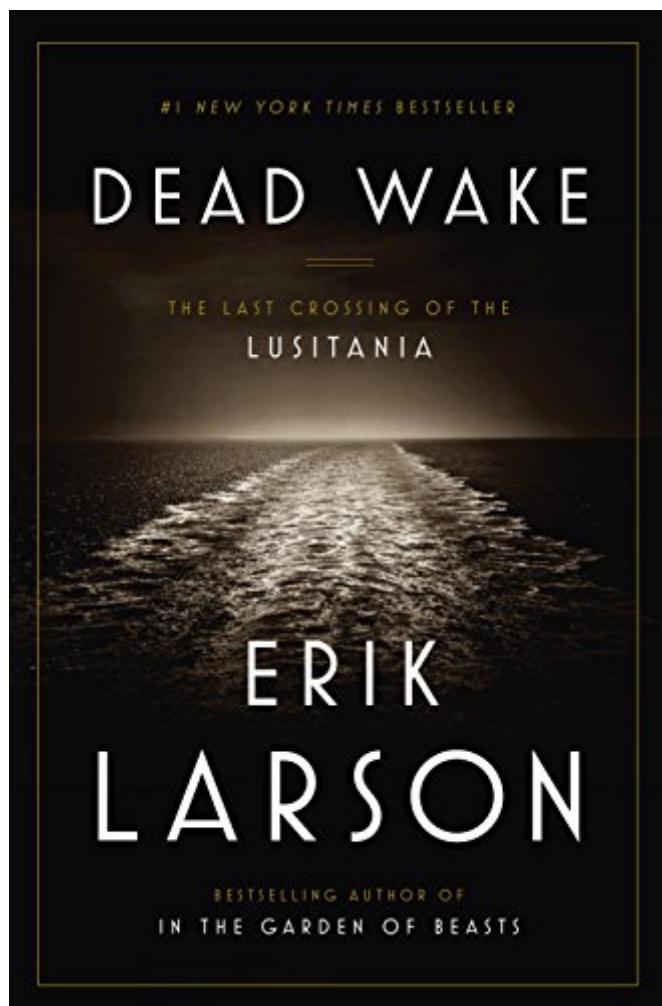


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# Dead Wake: The Last Crossing Of The Lusitania



## Synopsis

#1 New York Times Bestseller From the best-selling author and master of narrative nonfiction comes the enthralling story of the sinking of the Lusitania. On May 1, 1915, with WWI entering its tenth month, a luxury ocean liner as richly appointed as an English country house sailed out of New York, bound for Liverpool, carrying a record number of children and infants. The passengers were surprisingly at ease, even though Germany had declared the seas around Britain to be a war zone. For months, German U-boats had brought terror to the North Atlantic. But the Lusitania was one of the era's great transatlantic "Greyhounds," the fastest liner then in service, and her captain, William Thomas Turner, placed tremendous faith in the gentlemanly strictures of warfare that for a century had kept civilian ships safe from attack. Germany, however, was determined to change the rules of the game, and Walther Schwieger, the captain of Unterseeboot-20, was happy to oblige. Meanwhile, an ultra-secret British intelligence unit tracked Schwieger's U-boat, but told no one. As U-20 and the Lusitania made their way toward Liverpool, an array of forces both grand and achingly small—"hubris, a chance fog, a closely guarded secret, and more" all converged to produce one of the great disasters of history. It is a story that many of us think we know but don't, and Erik Larson tells it thrillingly, switching between hunter and hunted while painting a larger portrait of America at the height of the Progressive Era. Full of glamour and suspense, *Dead Wake* brings to life a cast of evocative characters, from famed Boston bookseller Charles Lauriat to pioneering female architect Theodate Pope to President Woodrow Wilson, a man lost to grief, dreading the widening war but also captivated by the prospect of new love. Gripping and important, *Dead Wake* captures the sheer drama and emotional power of a disaster whose intimate details and true meaning have long been obscured by history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Erik Larson is not capable of writing anything less than a gripping account of history. All of his previous books have been spellbinding accounts of storms, cities, crimes, inventions, ships and/or war. In DEAD WAKE: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania, Larson returns to the subjects of war and ships and stirs in a potent mixture of international politics as well as a little romance to once again seduce his readers with a contemporary view of an historical situation. Written to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the sinking of the Lusitania, a Cunard passenger liner sunk by a German U-Boat, Larson's account differs in several ways from other well-known books produced on the subject. Diana Preston's LUSITANIA: An Epic Tragedy, published in 2002, is one of the best-written accounts of the disaster. The difference between Preston's work and Larson's might be found in the subtitle of the Larson book which emphasizes the crossing while Preston's book is most memorable for its account of the sinking and its aftermath, particularly accounts of survival. No one can read Preston's book without feeling as if he/she is clinging to a piece of wreckage in a cold, spring sea awaiting rescue. No one can read Larson's book and not feel like the proverbial fly on the wall in the infamous Room 40 of the British Admiralty. While Preston addressed Room 40, in Larson's writing, the room takes on a role and becomes a character (albeit not a very appealing one) in its own right. Larson skillfully gets into the mindset of Winston Churchill and how determined he was to see America enter the war. In the States, Larson goes back in time and brings President Woodrow Wilson to life through a love affair that seemed to take up more of his time than thinking about the suitability of America's neutrality. Yet Larson allows readers to see Wilson in a most human light; perhaps the love affair gave him the strength for the decisions he had to make later. While the reader feels a connection with Wilson and also with the much-maligned but ultimately blameless Captain of the Lusitania, Captain Turner, utter horror and strong dislike is brought out when we read about Captain Schwieger of U-Boat 20 and, in a strange way, perhaps even more when we

examine the real-life characters and goings-on within the Admiralty's Room 40. Germany and Britain both emerge as more than a bit despicable. The pluses of Larson's latest work are his acute examination of Room 40, his up-close look at Woodrow Wilson, and his ability to swing between the behind-the-scenes action and balance his discoveries with a conventional but absorbing look at some of the passengers on board the Lusitania all while building a true and terrifying suspense in the narrative. His profile of Charles Lauriat, Boston bookseller and collector of rare documents and drawings, is excellent. One senses that Larson was truly interested in Lauriat and might, having not been faced with producing a book to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Lusitania's sinking, have chosen Lauriat as a sole subject for a book or article. Erik Larson can never disappoint.

Whether one reads a great deal about WWI history, maritime disasters, or early 1900s international politics, there is something new to be learned in DEAD WAKE. For those who have read very little about the Lusitania, this book is an excellent starting point. As mentioned before, Diana Preston's LUSITANIA: An Epic Tragedy tells a similar story but with a slightly different approach. Both books have something to offer, but Larson's, being newer, may include some fresh revelations about the history we thought we knew.

The Lusitania is sunk by German U bait 20 and the US enters WWI almost exactly 2 years later. So now that I have spoiled the ending for you, one can enjoy the journey. Unlike the Devil in the White City, this maritime disaster is well known and there are thousands if not millions of words speculating to the how and why. If one is looking for that, save your time and money, as this a book about the human side of the tragedy and the comedy of errors that led up to it. I am still dumbfounded by the callous attitude of British I telling cel and their zeal to protect their methods to sacrifice the lives of a thousand people on the altar of secrecy.. That in and of itself certainly diminishes the stature of Churchill in my opinion, which is really too bad. The fact that the problems in the British Admiralty would try to pin their callous poor decision making on the Captain of this doomed voyage, does nothing to engender any feeling but disgust for those men. Okay polemic aside. The book is easy to read. The characters well illustrated. The book is a bit bogged down in detail to get started, but soon picks up the pace and becomes more of a tragic story, where this reader developed emotional attachments to many of the passengers on this final journey. What could have been a boring retelling of a story told many times before was an enjoyable escape into a time and place far removed from today and well worth the time and effort I put into it,

DEAD WAKE: THE LAST CROSSING OF THE LUSITANIA is the story of a horrific event that

ended the lives of over 1,000 people. The sinking also played a key role in changing America's view toward Germany, and helped change America's position in World War I. It was two years after this sinking that the United States declared war on Germany. Recall that at this time America was not yet in the war against Germany; America was neutral. Over in England, Churchill hoped this would change: "For our part, we want the traffic--the more the better; and if some of it gets into trouble, better still." Britain had hopes that somehow, the U.S would "feel moved to join the Allies, and in so doing tip the balance irrevocably in their favor." The Lusitania was a gigantic ship. To give you an idea of the size of the ship, there were 192 furnaces on board powering the gigantic turbines. Just to keep the ship running, there were a hundred stokers working each shift, shoveling a thousand tons of coal a day. At the helm of the ship was the experienced Captain Turner. The author notes that the captain was "the most seasoned captain at Canard Lines--the Commodore of the line. He had confronted all manner of shipboard crises, including mechanical mishaps, fires, cracked furnaces, open sea rescues, and extreme weather of all kinds. He was said to be fearless." To set the stage for the U-boat attack, the author gives a background on submarine warfare: "The submarine as a weapon had come a long way by this time, certainly to the point where it killed its own crews only rarely." Life aboard a German U-boat was not very comfortable--hot, humid, and cramped: "When deep underwater the boat developed an interior atmospheric like unto that of a tropical swamp...caused by the heat generated by the men and by the still hot diesel engines." After the torpedo strike, the danger wasn't at first obvious to all passengers; the ship was so huge that some passengers thought it was nothing. One passenger recalled thinking, "Well, that wasn't so bad." On the other hand those near the bridge could sense the danger: "Those closest to the bridge felt the impact in a matter more vivid and tactile." After the attack, families panicked; few knew what to do or where to go. There were many families on board with lots of children, and they were spread throughout the huge ship. When the lights went off, panic settled in. Passengers didn't know where their families were--they didn't know where their spouses were. Up on the bridge, the captain was giving orders to try to maneuver the ship so that the lifeboats could be launched. The lifeboats could not be lowered until the ship's momentum stopped. Plus, the ship's tilting was making deployment of the lifeboats nearly impossible. Even though the lifeboats could not be launched, passengers desperately began to try to get on board: "The first attempts to launch the Lusitania lifeboats revealed the true degree of danger now facing the ship's passengers." Passengers began jumping in the boats, even though they couldn't be lowered yet. One businessman

even took out a pistol and forced a sailor to begin lowering the lifeboat. With the boats not safe for deployment, some passengers fell out of the boats the long ways into the ocean. Ironically, prior to being attacked, Captain Turner had actually ordered lifeboats to be prepared in case of an emergency. *Â¢ÂœTurner was being prudent. If an emergency were to occur, the boats could be launched from this position more quickly, and with less hazard, than if they were still locked in their deep sea positions.*Â¢ÂœAll in all, *DEAD WAKE* is a horrifying story, full of grief and tragedy. The accounts of families struggling to survive after the attack are heart-breaking. Erik Larson does an excellent job at painting this terrible picture, as well as explaining the events surrounding WWI. This book is well-researched and supported by extensive references, providing sources for the main portion of the book. Advance copy provided for impartial review

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