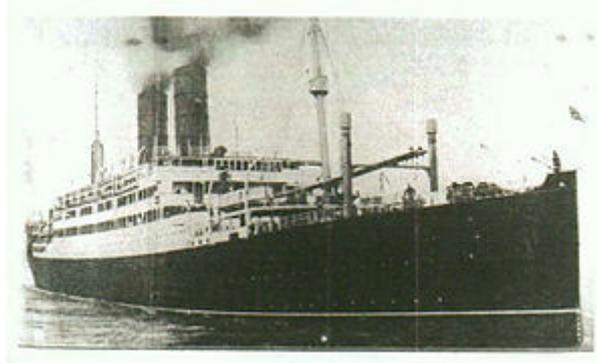


SS Tuscania



The Tuscania carried passengers between New York City and Glasgow while in service with the Anchor Line, on a route that had previously been assigned to her sister ship Transylvania. She continued to run this route even as World War I broke out in Europe and Germany initiated. She also made at least one run from Bombay to Liverpool. Unrestricted submarine warfare in British territorial waters put neutral ships like the Tuscania at risk of being misidentified and attacked. The Tuscania made international headlines for rescuing passengers and crew from the burning Greek steamer SS Athinai on September 20, 1915 and made the news again in March 1917 by evading a submarine and a suspected German commerce raider

Last voyage

On the morning of February 5, 1918, carrying over 2,000 American troops, the Tuscania turned south for the North Channel en route to Liverpool. After an arduous voyage across the North Atlantic, most of those aboard, in sight of the Irish coast to starboard and the Scottish coast to port, surely believed the worst part of their journey was behind them. Spotted by German submarine UB-77 earlier in the day, however, their convoy was stalked until early evening and the cover of darkness. Then, at about 6:40 pm, submarine captain Lt. Cdr. Wilhelm Meyer ordered two torpedoes fired at the Tuscania. The second of these struck home, sending her -- within about four hours -- to the bottom of the Channel.

It was on February 6, 1915, almost exactly three years before the fatal day, that Tuscania had made her maiden voyage as a passenger liner serving the North Atlantic routes between New York and Great Britain. In 1916, though, she had been refitted and pressed into service as a troop carrier, and on her final voyage she had departed Hoboken, New Jersey 12 days earlier with 384 crew members and 2,013 American troops aboard. Approximately 210 of the troops and crew were lost while many others were rescued by two British destroyers, Mosquito and Pigeon

Today she lies between Scotland's Islay Isle and Ireland's Rathlin Island, about 7 miles north of Rathlin lighthouse, at roughly 55.41°N 06.185°W under 100 metres (330 feet) of water.

SS *Tuscania* (1914)

| Career | Anchor Line |
|------------|---|
| Builder: | Alexander Stephen & Sons, Ltd., Linthouse, Govan |
| Laid down: | 1914 |
| Launched: | September 1914 |
| Fate: | Sunk 5 February 1918 |

General characteristics

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Tonnage: | 14,348 gross tons |
| Length: | 567 ft (173 m) |
| Beam: | 66 ft 4 in (20.22 m) |
| Draught: | 45 ft (14 m) |
| Propulsion: | Parsons steam turbines - twin screw ^[1] |
| Capacity: | 2,500+ passengers |
| Armament: | 4-inch naval gun (fitted October 1916) ^[2] |

HMS *Otranto*



HMS *Otranto* was an armed merchant cruiser requisitioned by the Royal Navy when World War I began in 1914. Built before the war for the UK–Australia run as the SS *Otranto*, she was primarily used during the war to search for German commerce raiders. She played small roles in the Battle of Coronel in November 1914 when the German East Asia Squadron destroyed the British squadron searching for it and in the Battle of the Falklands the following month when a British squadron annihilated the Germans in turn.

Last voyage

Serving as the convoy flagship for Convoy HX-50, *Otranto* departed New York on 25 September. Six days later, on the evening of 1 October, the ship accidentally rammed the French fishing schooner *Croisine* off Newfoundland while the latter was returning home to St. Malo with a full load of cod. The fishing boat passed down the liner's port side and its masts destroyed some of the liner's lifeboats on that side. Captain Ernest Davidson, who was also commodore of the convoy, ordered the convoy to continue while *Otranto* stopped to rescue the 37 survivors. The

derelict Croisine was now a menace to navigation and Davidson ordered his gun crews to sink her later that evening. The liner caught back up with the convoy by daybreak. The following day, the first death from the influenza pandemic occurred and the soldier was buried at sea. Only one other flu death aboard Otranto is recorded, but others may have occurred before she met her end.

The convoy encountered a strong storm on 4 October that got even stronger over the next several days; by the morning of 6 October it was assessed as a Force 11 storm on the Beaufort scale with mountainous seas. The storm forced the British destroyers that were to rendezvous with them back into port on 5 October and the last American escort departed at 06:00. The weather prevented accurate navigation and the convoy was forced to proceed by dead reckoning. The ship's officers were uncertain if they were off the northern coast of Ireland or the western coast of Scotland. When dawn broke it revealed a rocky coastline 3 to 4 miles (4.8 to 6.4 km) to their east, just ahead of the convoy. Most of the ships correctly thought this was the Scottish coast and turned south, but Otranto's officer of the deck thought that it was the Irish coast and turned north. HMS Kashmir, another liner turned troopship, was only about a half mile (0.80 km) to Otranto's north and the turns placed them on a collision course. Both ships attempted to avoid the collision, but their efforts cancelled out and Kashmir rammed Otranto on the port side amidships, a few miles off the rocky coast of Islay.]

The impact punched a hole some 20 feet (6.1 m) deep and 16 feet (4.9 m) wide in Otranto, from below the waterline up to the boat deck. The hole was right at the bulkhead between the fore and aft stokeholds (boiler rooms) and both instantly flooded, killing most of the crewmen in those spaces. When the engine room flooded shortly afterwards, Otranto lost all electrical power and began to drift towards the cliffs of Islay. The water pressure caused other bulkheads to collapse, quickly flooding other spaces below the waterline and giving the ship a massive list to starboard. The impact also damaged many of the remaining lifeboats on that side. The crew attempted to use collision mats to cover the hole in the ship's side, but it proved to be too large. Kashmir's bow was crushed by the impact, although she was able to steam off when a wave forced the two ships apart soon after the collision.

The high winds and heavy seas prevented the launching of any lifeboats and Davidson had decided not to abandon ship just yet in the faint hope that some passengers and crewmen might be able to swim ashore once the ship got closer. About a half hour after the collision, the British destroyer Mounsey appeared after searching for the convoy during the night. Despite Davidson's order to stand clear, Mounsey's captain, Lieutenant Francis Craven, positioned his ship on Otranto's lee side to allow the men aboard the liner to jump aboard. Several times the two ships struck and the destroyer's hull was holed, her bridge smashed, two of three boiler rooms flooded, and many hull frames were broken by the force of the impacts. Nonetheless Craven kept his small ship close and was able to rescue 300 American troops, 266 officers and crewmen from Otranto, one YMCA morale officer and 30 French fishermen, although many more men had been washed from the decks or crushed between the two ships. Despite the weight of the rescued men and the damage sustained during the rescue, Mounsey was able to reach Belfast safely although she was too badly damaged to return to her own home port against the storm.

About three hours after the collision, a large wave dropped Otranto onto "Old Women's Reef", about three-quarters of a mile (1.2 km) offshore, near the entrance to Machir Bay, missing a sandy beach just north of the reef. The action of the enormous waves quickly broke the ship in half and then ripped her bottom out. Of the roughly 489 men aboard after Mounsey departed, only 21 (17 of these were American) were able to successfully swim ashore, although 2 of these, including 1 American, later died of their injuries. The islanders were able to rescue some of these

men by pulling them up the coastal cliffs or from rocks just offshore. By the following morning, the liner had been completely demolished by the heavy seas and the coastline was strewn with wreckage and hundreds of bodies in piles up to 15 feet (4.6 m) deep. A total of 316 Americans were found and buried on Islay and the nearby island of Muck.

Aftermath

The best estimate of the casualty toll from the disaster is a total of 470 men: 12 officers and 84 crewmen from Otranto, 1 officer and 357 American enlisted men, and 6 French fishermen. After the war, most of the American bodies were reinterred at Brookwood American Cemetery and Memorial in Surrey, England or repatriated to the United States. And a 80-foot (24.4 m) stone tower was built on the Mull of Oa by the American Red Cross to commemorate the men lost aboard Otranto and SS Tuscania which was sunk by a German U-boat nearby.

Career (United Kingdom)



| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Name: | <i>SS Otranto</i> |
| Namesake: | <u>Otranto</u> |
| Owner: | <u>Orient Steam Navigation Company</u> |
| Port of registry: | <u>London</u> |
| Route: | UK–Australia |
| Ordered: | c. 1908 |
| Builder: | <u>Workman Clark & Co., Belfast</u> |
| Yard number: | 278 |
| Laid down: | c. 1908 |
| Launched: | 27 March 1909 |
| Completed: | 20 July 1909 |
| Maiden voyage: | 1 October 1909 |
| Identification: | <u>Official number</u> : 124675 ^[1] Signal letters: HPKD |
| Fate: | Requisitioned by the <u>Admiralty</u> , 4 August 1914 |

Career (United Kingdom)



| | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name: | <i>HMS Otranto</i> |
| Acquired: | 4 August 1914 |
| Commissioned: | 14 August 1914 |
| Fate: | Sank after collision, 6 October 1918 |

General characteristics

| | |
|----------|---|
| Type: | <u>Passenger liner / armed merchant cruiser</u> |
| Tonnage: | 12,124 <u>gross register tons (GRT)</u> 7,433 <u>net register tons (NRT)</u> |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Length: | 535 ft 4 in (163.2 m) |
| Beam: | 64 ft (19.5 m) |
| Depth: | 38 ft 8 in (11.8 m) |
| Installed power: | 14,000 <u>ihp</u> (10,000 kW) |
| Propulsion: | 2 × screws 2 × <u>quadruple-expansion steam engines</u> |
| Speed: | 18 <u>knots</u> (33 km/h; 21 mph) |
| Capacity: | Passengers: 235 1st class 186 2nd class 696 3rd class |
| Armament: | 8 × 4.7 in (120 mm) guns |

With grateful thanks to Wikipedia