

= SS Tubantia =

SS Tubantia was an ocean liner for Royal Holland Lloyd (Dutch : Koninklijke Hollandsche Lloyd) built in 1913 by Alexander Stephen and Sons of Glasgow . She was built as a fast mail and passenger steamer for service between the Netherlands and South America . Tubantia was a sister ship of Gelria , also of Royal Holland Lloyd .

Tubantia was torpedoed and sunk by German submarine UB 13 on 16 March 1916 . As a vessel of the neutral Netherlands , her sinking caused great fury amongst the Dutch public . The Germans initially claimed that Tubantia must have been sunk by a mine or a British torpedo , but when fragments of a German torpedo were found in one of Tubantia 's lifeboats , the Germans claimed that UB 13 had fired the torpedo on 6 March at a British warship but it had remained active until hitting Tubantia ten days later . To redirect Dutch anger over Tubantia 's sinking , Germany spread rumors of an impending British invasion of the Netherlands , which one author called a " propaganda coup " .

Germany initially offered a settlement of £ 300 000 ? the ship 's original cost ? to Royal Holland Lloyd , but was rejected . In 1922 , an international arbitration committee awarded the company £ 830 000 compensation from Germany for the loss of the ship .

This was followed by an attempt to recover a fortune in gold coins from the wreck , which was the subject of a landmark court case , but the salvage operation was unsuccessful .

= = Design and construction = =

Tubantia was ordered by Royal Holland Lloyd from the Scottish shipbuilding firm Alexander Stephen and Sons of Glasgow . The 13 911 GRT ship was about 560 feet (170 m) long (overall) and 66 feet (20 m) abeam . She was powered by twin quadruple expansion steam engines powered by three double ended and six single ended boilers . Her top speed of 17 . 5 knots (32 . 4 km / h) exceeded the design requirements .

Built at a cost of about £ 300 000 , Tubantia was , according to author Nigel Pickford , one of the most luxurious passenger ships of the era . Royal Holland Lloyd made extensive use of electricity throughout Tubantia , powering everything from fans and ventilation , to laundry equipment , to cigar lighters for passengers . The ship also boasted her name spelled out in lights , suspended between the two funnels . Tubantia could accommodate up to 1 520 passengers : 250 first class , 230 intermediate class , 140 special third class , and 900 third class passengers . The liner was launched on 13 November 1913 , and completed trials in the River Clyde in March 1914 .

= = Career = =

Upon completion and acceptance by Royal Holland Lloyd , Tubantia was used in service between Amsterdam and Buenos Aires . At the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 , Tubantia was returning from South America with £ 500 000 in gold destined for banks in London , a large portion of which was intended for the German Bank of London . She was also carrying about 150 German reservists in steerage and a cargo of grain destined for Germany . After making an intermediate stop in Vigo , Spain , Tubantia was stopped and boarded by an officer and crewmen from the Royal Navy cruiser Highflyer , and escorted into port at Plymouth . There , the German reservists were taken off Tubantia by Royal Marines ; the gold was confiscated and removed from the ship . Although news accounts do not report when it occurred , Tubantia was released from Plymouth and allowed to resume her Royal Holland Lloyd service .

On 18 October , The New York Times carried a report that indicated Tubantia had run aground on the coast of Kent the previous day . According to the report , Tubantia was returning from Buenos Aires and suffered the accident while heading for Rotterdam with a large number of passengers . Although the article also reported that aid had been summoned from Dover , there was no indication of the extent of damage , if any , to Tubantia .

In December 1915 , Tubantia again made news when the Overseas News Agency in Berlin released a report saying that the British had seized all South America mail and parcels from the ship . After the United States expressed concerns about related seizures from two other Dutch ships in service to the United States ? Nieuw Amsterdam and Rijndam ? the British Foreign Office issued a statement that reported that contraband intended for Germany ? which included four packages of rubber , and seven containers of wool ? had been found among Tubantia 's mail .

= = Sinking = =

Tubantia began her regularly scheduled voyage from Amsterdam to Buenos Aires on 15 March 1916 nearly empty of passengers , despite Royal Holland Lloyd advertisements that boasted of " submarine signalling apparatus " on their passenger ships . After sailing to a position about 4 nautical miles (7 @. @ 4 km) from the North Hinder Lightship , about 50 nautical miles (93 km) off the Dutch coast , Tubantia anchored at about 02 : 00 on 16 March to wait for daylight and avoid any chance of misidentification or attack . To that end , the ship was completely illuminated .

At about 02 : 30 , crewmen aboard Tubantia spotted a stream of bubbles rapidly approaching the ship 's starboard side , followed by an explosion . The ship quickly began sinking . Distress calls sent out by Tubantia were answered by three ships , Breda , Krakstau , and La Campine , which between them rescued all 80 passengers and all 294 members of the crew . The ship and her cargo were a total loss . Tubantia was the largest neutral vessel sunk during the entire war .

= = Aftermath = =

A war in the British and German press erupted , with vigorous attempts to blame the British by the Germans , and angry rebuttals by the British . Both sides had in mind the egregious violation of Dutch neutrality . The German press first proffered the explanation that Tubantia must have been sunk by a British mine . The British reported that the liner had been sunk by a German torpedo ; the German press countered by saying that if it were a torpedo that sank the ship , it had to have been a British one . The matter was seemingly settled when a stray lifeboat of Tubantia 's was examined and torpedo fragments made of bronze were found embedded in it ; Germany was the only country that used bronze in its torpedoes .

Presented with evidence that it was torpedo no . 2033 which had been assigned to the small , coastal submarine UB @-@ 13 , the Germans presented a forged log from UB @-@ 13 that showed her nowhere near Tubantia at the time of the attack . Further , they reported , UB @-@ 13 had fired that specific torpedo at a British warship on 6 March , ten days before Tubantia was sunk . The U.S. Minister to the Netherlands , Henry van Dyke , writing in Fighting for Peace in 1917 , called this explanation " amazing " and derided it :

This certain U @-@ boat had fired this particular torpedo at a British war @-@ vessel somewhere in the North Sea ten days before the Tubantia was sunk . The shot missed its mark . But the naughty undisciplined little torpedo went cruising around in the sea on its own hook for ten days waiting for a chance to kill somebody . Then the Tubantia came along and the wandering @-@ Willy torpedo promptly , obstinately , ran into the ship and sank her . This was the explanation . Germany was not to blame .

The Dutch public was furious at what they believed a hostile German act . To help divert the public anger against his country , German diplomat Richard von Kühlmann began a coordinated campaign to spread rumors of an impending British invasion of the Netherlands . Author Hubert van Tuyll van Serooskerken called the German plan a " propaganda coup " , and reports in his book The Netherlands and World War I that the rumors caused some panic in the streets and forced the government to declare a four @-@ day emergency from 30 March to 2 April .

Despite denials and rumor @-@ spreading , Germany nevertheless offered compensation in the amount of £ 300 @, @ 000 , Tubantia 's original cost . Rejected by the Dutch , the two countries agreed to have the issue arbitrated after the end of the war . The dispute was finally settled in 1922 , when compensation in the amount of £ 830 @, @ 000 was awarded to Royal Holland Lloyd .

= = = Salvage attempt = = =

In 1924 the wreck was the subject of a salvage dispute between two sets of salvors , both seeking to recover a reputed £ 2 million worth of gold coins from it (£ 100 million in 2012 prices) . This was resolved in the English court decision *The Tubantia* [1924] P 78 , and remains the leading authority under English law as to when a salvor takes possession of a sunken shipwreck . The winning party , war hero Sydney Vincent Sippe , spent three years and £ 100 @, @ 000 trying to access the gold , but abandoned the attempt after concluding that it was too dangerous for divers to recover it .