



MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



NEWS RELEASE

SAILING SHIP WILLIAM P. FRYE FIRST AMERICAN MERCHANT VESSEL CAPTURED AND SUNK IN WWI BY THE IMPERIAL GERMAN NAVY

JANUARY 27, 2018

Today – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), acknowledged this important date in history that marked the first American merchant vessel lost to the German Empire during the Great War.

On January 27, 1915, the four-masted steel barque *William P. Frye* was intercepted by the German auxiliary merchant cruiser *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* in the South Atlantic Ocean (off the Brazilian coast). The *William P. Frye* was bound for the United Kingdom with a cargo of wheat consigned to an English firm. The following day, the Captain of the German cruiser, Lieutenant Commander Max Thierichens, ordered the sinking of the *William P. Frye*, when her crew refused to jettison its cargo as contraband. Shortly thereafter, the German Empire admitted wrongdoing and apologized, yet this did nothing to assuage the American fury over the incident.

In early February 1917, the German Empire announced a return to unrestricted submarine warfare, and the United States severed all diplomatic ties with the country. By the end of March, the Imperial German Navy had sunk several ships with Americans aboard, which prompted Congress to declare war on April 2, 1917.



AMERICAN-REGISTERED SHIPS SUNK BETWEEN FEBRUARY 3, 1917 TO APRIL 4, 1917						
Ship Name (type)	Date	Place	Crew	Dead	U.S. Killed / Total U.S.	Sunk by
<i>Housatonic</i> (freighter)	3 Feb.	Off Scilly Isles	37	0	0/25	<i>U-53 Hans Rose</i>
<i>Lyman M. Law</i> (schooner)	12 Feb.	Off Sardinia	10	0	0/9	<i>U-35 Von Arnauld</i>
<i>Algonquin</i> (freighter)	12 Mar.	Off Scilly Isles	26	0	0/11	<i>U-62 Ernst Hashagen</i>
<i>Vigilancia</i> (freighter)	16 Mar.	Off Plymouth	45	15	6/20	<i>U-70 Otto Wunsch</i>
<i>City of Memphis</i> (freighter)	17 Mar.	Off Ireland	57	0	0/30	<i>UC-66 Herbert Pustkuchen</i>
<i>Illinois</i> (tanker)	17 Mar.	Off Alderney	34	0	0/16	<i>UC-21 R. Saltzwedel</i>
<i>Healdton</i> (tanker)	21 Mar.	Off Holland	41	21	7/13	Mine
<i>Aztec</i> (freighter)	1 Apr.	Off Brest	47	28	11/28	<i>U-46 Leo Hillebrand</i>
<i>Marguerite</i> (schooner)	4 Apr.	Off Sardinia	12	0	0/1	<i>U-35 Von Arnauld</i>
<i>Missourian</i> (freighter)	4 Apr.	Mediterranean Sea	53	0	0/32	<i>U-52 Hans Walther</i>
Totals			362	64	24/185	

Quote

"Since the Revolutionary War of 1775, the American Merchant Marine have played, and continue to play a vital role in providing civilian services in areas of national security, and in supporting the economic needs of the United States of America. During WWI and WWII, the women and men of the American Merchant Marine and the Allied Merchant Navy transported troops, and delivered military equipment, food and provisions, fuel, and other supplies to the battle fronts worldwide. Indeed, the American Merchant Marine and the Allied Merchant Navy were the mainstay of the Allied Forces victories in both World Wars."

– Stéphane Ouellette, President and CEO, MNCTP

Quick Facts

SS William P. Frye	<i>Home Port: Portland, ME</i>
Company: Mystic Steamship Co. Boston, MA	
Master: Meinhard Scherf (Lost)	Built: February 1943 @ Portland, ME
Gross Tons: 7176	Dimensions: 441' x 57' x 37'
<i>The Liberty Ship, SS WILLIAM P. FRYE, was torpedoed by the German submarine U-610 (von Freyburg) at 2240 GCT on March 29, 1943 in the North Atlantic (56-57 North/24-15 West) while en route in Convoy HX-230 from New York to Liverpool, England. She carried a full load of general cargo, including 750 tons of explosives and wheat in #1 hold, with 5 LCT Landing craft on deck. Her complement was 40 merchant crew and 24 Naval Armed Guard. Of this number, 35 crew members and 22 Navy men were lost. Five crew members and 2 Navy men were the only survivors.</i>	
<i>At 1123 GCT, on March 28, the ship became a straggler due to engine trouble. The repairs were completed at 1430 GCT on March 28, but because of the heavy sea the ship did not respond to right rudder. The Master decided to remain hove to for a few hours, but when two torpedoes were seen near the ship at 1840, the vessel got underway in an attempt to evade the sub and rejoin the convoy. A speed of 12½ knots was maintained until 2240 on March 29, when a torpedo struck on the starboard side at #1 hold. About 4 minutes later, another struck on the starboard side of the engine room. The wheat in #1 hold cushioned the shock of the first torpedo, but the second torpedo was fatal. The ship went under, bow first, at 2246 GCT March 29, 1943.</i>	
	

Associated Links

- [Daily Press: German sea raiders launch charm offensive on Hampton Roads, January 14, 2017](#)
- [The Dawlish Chronicles: A liner turned hunter: Prinz Eitel Friedrich 1914 –15](#)
- [Germans sink American merchant ship](#)
- [President Woodrow Wilson asks U.S. Congress for declaration of war, April 2, 1917](#)

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