

World War I

The First World War

One hundred years ago, a conflict erupted in Europe that over the next four years seeped around the world, pitting countries against each other in the first global war.

On June 28, 1914, the leader of Austria was killed and its country declared war on Serbia, the country responsible for the murder. Countries were linked together with treaties, swearing to protect each other, so one by one, they stepped on either side of the battle line.

The **Central Powers** which included Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey),

began fighting against the **Allied Powers**, France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and finally, the United States, among others, along with their colonial holdings.

World War I reshaped the world in fundamental ways. A century later, this Newspaper In Education series

offers a historical look back on the conflict that was intended to be “the War to end all Wars.”



Americans Volunteer

More than 2,000 Americans volunteered for the war effort with the American Ambulance Field Service, later known as American Field Service (AFS). World War I was one of the first major conflicts in which modern medicine, like X-rays and advanced surgery, was used to save lives.

Over Here

By 1916, most Americans believed the war “over there” was not theirs to fight and in November, Woodrow Wilson was re-elected under the slogan

“He kept us out of war.” In December and January, while negotiating peace with Mexico, Wilson also attempted to negotiate a peace between Germany and the Allied Powers without success.



His speech received enthusiastic applause from Congress. On

Proclamation of War

On the evening of April 2, at a joint session of Congress, President Wilson shared one of the most important speeches in American history.

the morning of April 6, both houses of Congress approved and the United States declared war against Germany.

Unifying Effort

Earlier doubts among Americans about entering the conflict gave way to an outpouring of enthusiastic support. A national mobilization effort called on every man, woman and child to “Be Loyal,” “Do Your Bit,” and help the country in its hour of need. Within

months, the war effort transformed the nation. Industries switched to producing munitions, uniforms and weapons. Millions of men joined the armed forces over the next two years.



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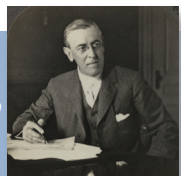
**THE NATIONAL
WWI MUSEUM
AND MEMORIAL**

American Neutrality

The United States did not enter the war until 1917, however, it hardly remained “neutral” despite its official stance. Americans raised funds for both Allied and Central Powers, volunteered to fly, fight and heal — and shipped millions of tons of both relief and war goods to Europe.

“The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men’s souls.”

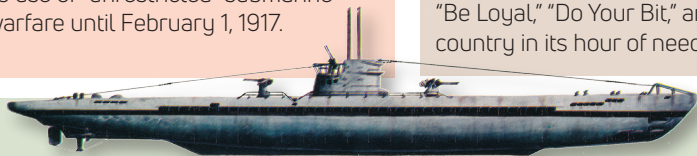
— WOODROW WILSON, 1914



U-Boats & the Lusitania

Winning a war depends upon supplies and in 1914, Great Britain’s blockade across the North Sea and the English Channel cut the flow of war supplies, food and fuel to Germany. In February 1915, Germany responded with new technology, submarine U-boats (unterseeboots), to destroy neutral ships supplying the Allies.

On May 7, 1915, German submarine U-20 torpedoed the *Lusitania*. Nearly 1,200 men, women and children, including 128 Americans, lost their lives. The Allies and Americans considered the sinking an act of war. The Germans asserted the *Lusitania* was carrying war material, but stopped its use of “unrestricted” submarine warfare until February 1, 1917.



Supply Shortages & Unrestricted Warfare

By January 1917, the Russian military was weakening from shortages in food and military supplies. More

than a million German combatants had died, and hundreds of thousands of German civilians perished from starvation. German military leaders

reinstated unrestricted submarine warfare, hoping it would end the European stalemate, but knew it might draw the U.S. into war.

| TIMELINE | |
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| 1914 | Aug. 4 The United States declares neutrality in the world’s war. |
| | Oct. 22 The Commission for Belgium Relief (CRB) is founded by Herbert Hoover. The CRB distributes millions of tons of food to civilians in Belgium and northern France. |
| 1915 | Feb. 4 Germany begins unrestricted submarine warfare. |
| | May 7 The <i>Lusitania</i> is sunk. |
| 1916 | Aug. 8 Under the leadership of Army Officer Leonard Wood, the first preparedness training camp is held at Plattsburgh, New York, with nearly 1,200 trainees. |
| | March 15 General John J. Pershing leads the Punitive Expedition into Mexico. |
| 1917 | June 3 The National Defense Act of 1916 is enacted. |
| | Nov. 7 President Woodrow Wilson is re-elected. |
| 1917 | Jan. 31 Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare. |
| | Feb. 3 The U.S. severs diplomatic relations with Germany. |
| | Feb. 25 U-boats sink the ship <i>Laconia</i> and eight American lives are lost. |
| | March 1 News of the Zimmermann Telegram makes the press in the United States. |
| | April 1 German U-boats sink the American steamer <i>S.S. Aztec</i> . |
| | April 2 President Wilson delivers his war message in a historic joint session of the House and Senate, stating that the world must be made “safe for democracy” and asks for a declaration of war. |
| 1917 | April 6 Congress passes the resolution and declares war against Germany. |
| | May 13 Congress passes the Selective Service Act. |
| 1917 | June 25 First American troops land in France. |

