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WAR DECLARATION CREATES TUMULT THROUGHOUT WORLD

Germany and Austria-Hungary Refuse to Participate in Mediation Conference Over Austro-Serbian Trouble and Battle Squadrons of All Countries on Continent Are Being Mobilized in Readiness for General War Eventualities.

AUSTRIA TO HAVE FREE HAND IN CONFLICT

Imperial Foreign Office at Vienna Determined Declares Serbia's Compliance Would Have No Influence on Empire's Course of Action. Army Moving to Frontier. No Traffic Except Troop Trains on Bohemian Railroads. Telegraphic Service Demoralized.

Official notification of the declaration of war was sent to Serbia today by the Austria-Hungarian government. The declaration of war was gazetted here late this afternoon. The text is as follows:

"The Royal government of Serbia, not having replied in a satisfactory manner to the note remitted to it by the Austro-Hungarian minister in Belgrade on July 13, 1914, the imperial and royal government finds itself compelled to proceed to safe guard its rights and interests and to have recourse for this purpose to force of arms. Austria Hungary considers itself therefore from this moment in a state of war with Serbia."

An extract from the Declaration of Neutrality by President Wilson to Congress, 19 August 1914 (found at www.firstworldwar.com/source/usneutrality.htm).

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict.

Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to allay it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility, responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honor and affection to think first of her and her interests, may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion if not in action.

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend.

On October 31, 1914 at the First Battle of Ypres in Belgium, both the Allies and the Germans failed to achieve significant breakthroughs, and both sides settled into the trench warfare that would characterize the remainder of the war on the Western Front. To break the stalemate on the Western front, British initiated a blockade of German ports.

Since the early 18th century, trade blockades had been a vital coercive element in the maintenance of British naval supremacy. This supremacy was still very much intact when war broke out in August 1914. The British government moved immediately to strangle the supply of raw materials and foodstuffs to Germany and its allies. This marked the beginning of the 'hunger blockade', a war of attrition that lasted until Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919.

Armed with contraband lists, British naval ships spent the war patrolling the North Sea, intercepting and detaining thousands of merchant ships thought to be harbouring cargo bound for enemy shores. This aggressive display of maritime power aroused considerable anger in neutral countries, many of whom enjoyed strong trading links with Germany.

Tension was heightened after the North Sea was declared a British 'military area' on 3 November 1914. Despite complaints about breaches of international law, however, most neutral merchant ships agreed to put into British ports for inspection and were subsequently escorted - minus any 'illegal' cargo bound for Germany - through the British-laid minefields to their final destinations.

The final shift to establishing the full blockade came on **November 11, 1914**, after several German light cruisers were observed attempting to lay mines off the coast of southern England. This act of aggression gave British leaders the impetus they needed to declare the full blockade.

The blockade strategy worked effectively. As a memorandum to the War Cabinet on 1 January 1917 stated, very few supplies were reaching Germany or its allies - either through the North Sea or through other areas such as Austria's Adriatic ports, subject to a French blockade since the first month of the war.

An extract from a letter from Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to the Ambassador to Britain Walter Hines, 26 December 1914 (found at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/U.S._Protests_Against_Maritime_Warfare).

The Government of the United States has viewed with growing concern the large numbers of vessels laden with American goods destined to neutral ports in Europe, which have been seized on the high seas, taken into British ports and detained sometimes for weeks by the British authorities. During the early days of the war this Government assumed that the policy adopted by the British Government was due to the unexpected outbreak of hostilities and the necessity of immediate action to prevent contraband from reaching the enemy. For this reason it was not disposed to judge this policy harshly or protest it vigorously, although it was manifestly very injurious to American trade with the neutral countries of Europe. This Government, relying confidently upon the high regard which Great Britain has so often exhibited in the past for the rights of other nations, confidently awaited amendment of a course of action which denied to neutral commerce the freedom to which it was entitled by the law of nations.

February 4, 1915 (From history.com's This Day in History)

A full two years before Germany's aggressive naval policy would draw the United States into the war against them, Kaiser Wilhelm announces an important step in the development of that policy, proclaiming the North Sea a war zone, in which all merchant ships, including those from neutral countries, were liable to be sunk without warning.

In widening the boundaries of naval warfare, Germany was retaliating against the Allies for the British-imposed blockade of Germany in the North Sea, an important part of Britain's war strategy aimed at strangling its enemy economically. By war's end—according to official British counts—the so-called hunger blockade would take some 770,000 German lives.

This was the American response:

The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Germany (Gerard)

[Telegram]

WASHINGTON, *February 10, 1915, 1 p. m.*

1163. Please address a note immediately to the Imperial German Government to the following effect:

The Government of the United States, having had its attention directed to the proclamation of the German Admiralty issued on the 4th of February, that the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland, including the whole of the English Channel, are to be considered as comprised within the seat of war; that all enemy merchant vessels found in those waters after the eighteenth instant will be destroyed, although it may not always be possible to save crews and passengers; and that neutral vessels expose themselves to danger within this zone of war because, in view of the misuse of neutral flags said to have been ordered by the British Government on the thirty-first of January and of the contingencies of maritime warfare, it may not be possible always to exempt neutral vessels from attacks intended to strike enemy ships, feels it to be its duty to call the attention of the Imperial German Government, with sincere respect and the most friendly sentiments but very candidly and earnestly, to the very serious possibilities of the course of action apparently contemplated under that proclamation.

The Government of the United States views those possibilities with such grave concern that it feels it to be its privilege, and indeed its duty in the circumstances, to request the Imperial German Government to consider before action is taken the critical situation in respect of the relations between this country and Germany which might arise were the German naval forces, in carrying out the policy foreshadowed in the Admiralty's proclamation, to destroy any merchant vessel of the United States or cause the death of American citizens.

Text from a notice issued by the German Embassy and published in Washington newspapers, 22 April 1915, from *The American Nation*, Vol. 2, by J.A. Garraty, published by HarperCollins, New York, 1991 (7th edition), page 684.

The image below it appeared in the New York Times on May 1, 1915.

NOTICE!

Travellers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY WASHINGTON, D.C., APRIL 22, 1915.

**GERMAN EMBASSY
ISSUES WARNING**

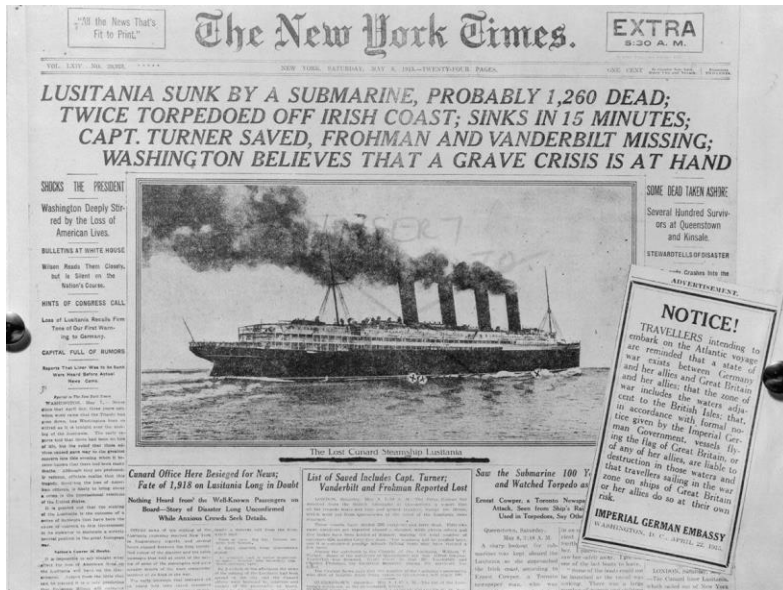
Advertises Notice of Danger
to Travelers in the
War Zone.

BUILDING UP A DEFENSE?

Suggestion That Notice May Be
Cited Against Possible Claims
for Damages—Cunard Agent
Says Travel Is Safe.

The following advertisement was received last night by THE TIMES and other newspapers throughout the country. It came from an advertising agent in Washington, who said it had been brought to him by the Counselor of the German Embassy:

NOTICE!
Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travelers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.
IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY.
Washington, D. C., April 22, 1915.



WAR BY ASSASSINATION.

From our Department of State there must go to the Imperial Government at Berlin a demand that the Germans shall no longer make war like savages drunk with blood, that they shall cease to seek the attainment of their ends by the assassination of non-combatants and neutrals. In the history of wars there is no single deed comparable in its inhumanity and its horror to the destruction, without warning, by German torpedoes of the great steamship Lusitania, with more than 1,800 souls on board, and among them more than 100 Americans. Our demand must be made, and it will be heeded, unless Germany in her madness would have it understood that she is at war with the whole civilized world. For many hours yesterday the hope was cherished that the passengers and crew of the ship had been saved, but later it was made certain that there had been an appalling loss of life, and then there was here full realization of the extreme seriousness of this latest act of barbarity and of its effect upon our relations to the war. It will stir the American people as they have not been stirred since the destruction of the Maine in the harbor of Havana, and Government and people will be united in the resolve that Germany must be called upon to bring her practices into conformity with the usages of civilized warfare.

On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the British-owned luxury steamship Lusitania, killing 1,195 people including 123 Americans, according to the Library of Congress. The disaster immediately strained relations between Germany and the neutral United States, fueled anti-German sentiment and set off a chain of events that eventually led to the United States entering World War I.

Wilson issued a strong protest, demanding that Germany abandon the policy. William Jennings Bryan resigned as Secretary of State over the uneven handling of the issue. He argued that Wilson did not protest British violations in seizing neutral ships as described above – although many historians have noted that these did not result in American deaths. Germany was surprised by Wilson’s vehemence, particularly after their well-publicized warnings.

Note how the newspaper clippings (both from the New York Times) depict the event and the language used to describe Germany and her actions.

These newspaper excerpts describe the sinking of the SS *Arabic*, a British ship carrying American passengers, on August 19, 1915. At the time, details on survivors was unclear. It would later emerge that 2 Americans on board the ship perished. Germany responded by agreeing to abandon unrestricted submarine warfare. From now on submarines would only attack the ships after giving due warnings and ensuring their crew and passengers had been placed in lifeboats.

From the Stevens Point Daily Journal, Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Aug. 20, 1915:

BIG BRITISH LINER SUNK BY SUBMARINE;

26 AMERICANS SAFE

Arabic Reported Torpedoed Without Warning.

48 LIVES ARE BELIEVED LOST

London, Aug. 20 - The big White Star line steamer *Arabic*, formerly a favorite ship of the Liverpool-Boston service, but which on its present trip was on the way to New York, was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine at 9:15 o'clock yesterday morning about forty miles south of the spot where the *Lusitania* lies, which is 65 miles southeast of Fastnet rock and 55 miles south of Old Head of Kinsale. The steamer, according to a statement of the White Star line, was attacked without warning and went down in 11 minutes. [...]

Whether any of those not accounted for are Americans has not yet been determined, but there were only 26 citizens of the United States on board [...]

Raises Question for Wilson.

This fact is considered significant, but whether it brings the disaster within the category of President Wilson's announcement to Germany that a repetition of the *Lusitania* incident would be regarded as "an unfriendly act" is a question British officials and the American embassy attaches do not care to discuss. Chief attention is being devoted to the question of the maximum loss of life.

There is a rumor that the *Arabic* carried a large amount of British gold to pay for war supplies bought in America, but this is unverified. [...]

(From history.com's This Day in History)

May 4, 1916 – Germany issues the Sussex Pledge

On this day in 1916, Germany responds to a demand by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson by agreeing to limit its submarine warfare in order to avert a diplomatic break with the United States.

Unrestricted submarine warfare was first introduced in World War I in early 1915, when Germany declared the area around the British Isles a war zone, in which all merchant ships, including those from neutral countries, would be attacked by the German navy. A string of German attacks on merchant ships—culminating in the sinking of the British passenger ship *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915—led President Wilson to put pressure on the Germans to curb their navy. Fearful of antagonizing the Americans, the German government agreed to put restrictions on the submarine policy going forward, incurring the anger and frustration of many naval leaders, including the naval commander in chief, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, who resigned in March 1916.

On March 24, 1916, soon after Tirpitz's resignation, a German U-boat submarine attacked the French passenger steamer *Sussex*, in the English Channel, thinking it was a British ship equipped to lay explosive mines. Although the ship did not sink, 50 people were killed, and many more injured, including several Americans. On April 19, in an address to the U.S. Congress, President Wilson took a firm stance, stating that unless the Imperial German Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of warfare against passenger and freight carrying vessels this Government can have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the Government of the German Empire altogether.

On June 3, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson guided these three mobilization acts through Congress:

1. National Defense Act, 1916

- a. Increased army from 80,000 to 223,000
- b. Brought state militias under federal control
- c. Gave president power to mobilize the National Guard
- d. Expanded National Guard to over 400,000
- e. Established JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps)

2. Naval Expansion Act, 1916

- a. Multi-year building plan
- b. 10 dreadnoughts
- c. 16 cruisers
- d. 50 destroyers

3. Merchant Marine Act, 1916

- a. Federal government could own ships
- b. Increased federal power to regulate shipping

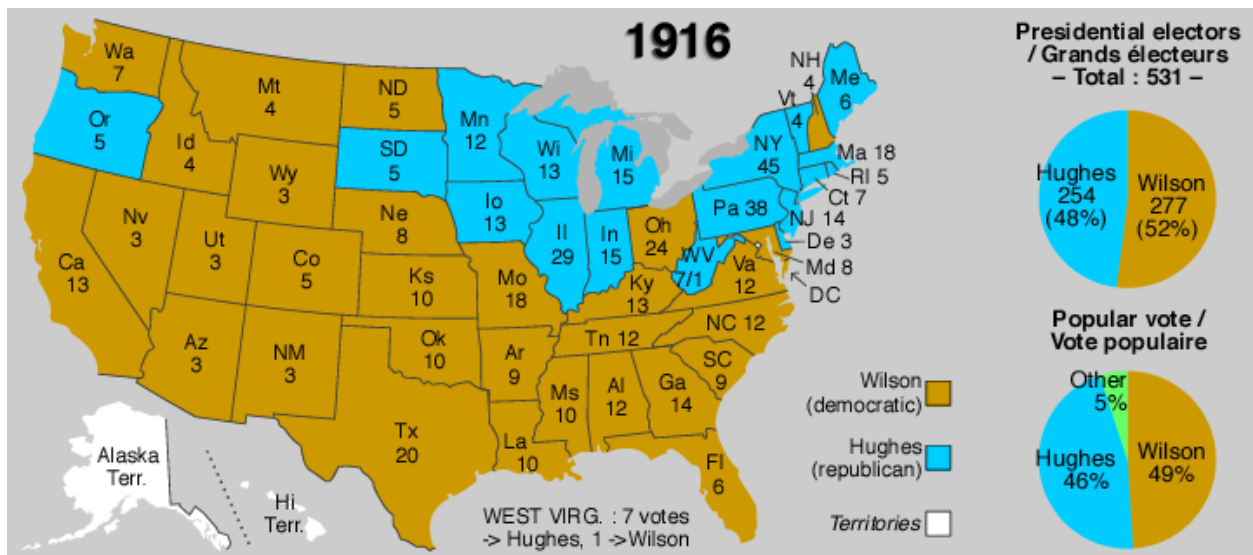
(From Access to IB History)

The US 1916 presidential election

As might be expected, the issue of the war dominated the campaigns. Wilson was in a difficult situation; the Democratic Party was campaigning on his neutrality and during the Convention in which he was renominated, supporter after supporter applauded the fact that 'He kept us out of the War'. This indeed became one of the campaign slogans. Wilson, however, was not so sanguine. As he told his Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, 'They talk of me as though I were a god. Any little German lieutenant can put us into the war at any time by some calculated outrage.'

Wilson won the election by 9.1 million to 8.5 million votes against a respected but uncharismatic opponent, Charles Evan Hughes, who had much the same policies towards the war. The election was close, and had as much to do with Hughes' political failings as with popular enthusiasm for Wilson. For example, Hughes was indecisive on various domestic issues and upset the popular Governor of California, Hiram Johnson, by not meeting him when he campaigned there, thereby losing his support.

Here are the November 7, 1916 results:



The German Ambassador (Bernstorff) to the Secretary of State

[Translation]²

WASHINGTON, *January 31, 1917.*

[Received 4.10 p.m.]

[...]

A new situation has thus been created which forces Germany to new decisions. Since two years and a half England is using her naval power for a criminal attempt to force Germany into submission by starvation. In brutal contempt of international law the group of powers led by England does not only curtail the legitimate trade of their opponents but they also by ruthless pressure compel neutral countries either to altogether forego every trade not agreeable to the Entente powers or to limit it according to their arbitrary decrees. The American Government knows the steps which have been taken to cause England and her allies to return to the rules of international law and to respect the freedom of the seas. The English Government, however, insists upon continuing its war of starvation, which does not at all affect the military power of its opponents, but compels women and children, the sick and the aged to suffer, for their country, pains and privations which endanger the vitality of the nation. Thus British tyranny mercilessly increases the sufferings of the world indifferent to the laws of humanity, indifferent to the protests of the neutrals whom they severely harm, indifferent even to the silent longing for peace among England's own allies. Each day of the terrible struggle causes new destruction, new sufferings. Each day shortening the war will, on both sides, preserve the life of thousands of brave soldiers and be a benefit to mankind.

The Imperial Government could not justify before its own conscience, before the German people, and before history the neglect of any means destined to bring about the end of the war. Like the President of the United States the Imperial Government had hoped to reach this goal by negotiations. After the attempts to come to an understanding with the Entente powers have been answered by the latter with, the announcement of an intensified continuation of the war, the Imperial Government—in order to serve the welfare of mankind in a higher sense and not to wrong its own people—is now compelled to continue the fight for existence, again forced upon it, with the full employment of all the weapons which are at its disposal. [...]

Enclosing two memoranda regarding the details of the contemplated military measures at sea, I remain [etc.]¹

J. Bernstorff

MEMORANDUM

Under these circumstances Germany will meet the illegal measures of her enemies by forcibly preventing after February 1, 1917, in a zone around Great Britain, France, Italy, and in the eastern Mediterranean all navigation, that of neutrals included, from and to England and from and to France, etc., etc. All ships met within that zone will be sunk.

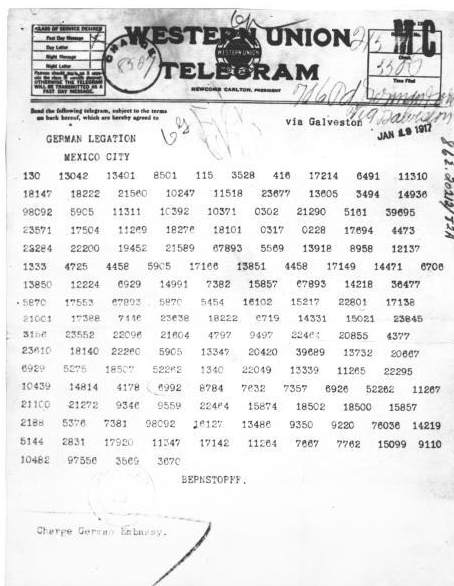
Zimmermann Telegram; January 16, 1917

The Zimmermann telegram was a coded telegram from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to the German Ambassador to Mexico Heinrich von Eckhart, sent on 16 January 1917. It told von Eckhart to propose a secret alliance with Germany to the Mexican Government in which, if they went to war with the USA, the latter would receive back Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. British intelligence intercepted the telegram and passed it on to the US Ambassador in Britain, Walter Page. In February 1917, he sent a copy of the telegram to the State Department. The Ambassador had not in fact acted on the instruction, and Mexico knew nothing of it. With a civil war raging there Mexico was hardly in a position to make full-scale war on the USA. Nevertheless, Wilson was affronted by this telegram and it afforded him a further pretext for war.

“We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President’s attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace.”

Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration



Access to IB History has this to say about Wilson's response to Germany's January 31, 1917 announcement:

While Wilson privately considered the Kaiser insane, and on 3 February broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, he still hoped to avoid entry into the war. However, on the same day, the US ship *Housatonic* was sunk, on 12 February the *Lyman M Law*, and on 27 February the Italian armed liner *Laconia*, with the deaths of a further two Americans. On 12 March, the US steamer *Algonquin* was sunk without warning; in the following few days, three further US vessels were sunk. Wilson ordered the arming of US merchant vessels that same month.

President Woodrow Wilson Asks Congress to Declare War; April 2, 1917 (excerpts)

On the third of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the first day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and Ireland or the western coasts of Europe...

The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium...have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle....

I am now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children, engaged in pursuits which have always, even in the darkest periods of modern history, been deemed innocent and legitimate. Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be. The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken...The ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way.

Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances...

The world must be made safe for democracy. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration