

# Causes of World War I

## "Conquer It" — The United States' Entry into World War I

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President Woodrow Wilson hoped to keep the United States out of the war. In a speech on August 19, 1914, to Congress and the American people he stated, "The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another." However, actions by Germany would make United States entry into the war inevitable.

On May 7, 1915, a German submarine torpedoed the Lusitania, a passenger ocean liner killing 1,198 people, of which 138 were Americans. Because of this action, the United States almost declared war on Germany. In order to avoid American entry into the war, Germany promised to abandon its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.

In January 1917, Germany announced its renewed policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. The following month, the British intercepted a German telegram to Mexico proposing an alliance with Mexico if they would declare war against the United States. In the telegram, Germany promised to finance Mexico's fight against the United States and help them regain Mexico's former territories of Arizona, Texas and New Mexico.

Consequently, President Wilson knew that war with Germany was inevitable. Frank Cobb, a friend of President Wilson, visited him the night before Wilson appeared before Congress asking for a Declaration of War against Germany. Cobb stated, "I'd never seen him so worn down. He looked as if he hadn't slept, and he said he hadn't. He said he was probably going before Congress the next day to ask a declaration of war, and he'd never been so uncertain about anything in his life as about that decision. For nights, he said, he'd been lying awake going over the whole situation - over the provocation given by Germany, over the probable feeling in the United States, over the consequences to the settlement and to the world at large if we entered the melee."

On April 2, 1917, President Wilson appeared before Congress and asked for a declaration of war against Germany, stating it would "make the world safe for democracy." As a result, on April 4, 1917, Congress declared war on Germany.

That same year, the Russian Revolution occurred and Russia withdrew from the war. Consequently, Germany redirected all of its forces to the Western Front. Because of the entry of the United States into the war, an additional four million troops joined the allies against Germany, turning the tide of the war. In October, Germany's military alliances began to collapse. The effect of this collapse was the surrender of Germany on November 11, 1918. Thus, after four years of fighting, World War I ended.