

## Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

President Wilson wanted to keep out of the war, yet some Americans wanted to take sides. Early in the war, the English navy set up a blockade around the Central Powers. This cut off American trade with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The Germans decided to use submarines called U-boats to break the blockade. The plan was to eventually starve England by cutting off their supplies. The U-boats would sink unarmed merchant ships without warning and without seeing to the safety of the crew and passengers to do this.

From 1914 to 1917 more than 250 Americans lost their lives on Allied ships that were sunk. The British ship, *Lusitania*, was sunk in 1915. The *Lusitania* could cross the Atlantic Ocean in less than 5 days. It was the fastest passenger ship of its time. The *Lusitania* left New York on May 1, 1915 with 1200 people including 128 Americans. Later it was discovered that guns and ammunition for the English army were on board.

<http://www.mce.k12tn.net/ww1/lusitania.htm>

## The Sussex Pledge

Other ships were sunk as well. President Wilson sent notes to Germany ...

*"...I have deemed it my duty, therefore, to say to the Imperial German Government, that if it is still its purpose to prosecute relentless and indiscriminate warfare against vessels of commerce by the use of submarines, notwithstanding the now demonstrated impossibility of conducting that warfare in accordance with what the Government of the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity, the Government of the United States is at last forced to the conclusion that there is but one course it can pursue; and 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."*

Germany promised to alter their naval and submarine policy of unrestricted submarine warfare and stop the indiscriminate sinking of non-military ships. Instead, merchant ships would be searched and sunk only if they contained contraband and then only after safe passage had been provided for the crew and passengers.

In 1917, Germany violated the pledge testing Wilson's patience.

# **The end of German-American Relations**

**Once Germany violated the Sussex Pledge, the United States was thrown closer to entering the war as the world watched. Wilson's hopes of staying neutral dimmed. America broke diplomatic ties with Germany and Wilson asked Congress for permission to arm American merchant ships. The United States was pushed further to the Allies.**

## The Zimmerman Note

Great Britain intercepts a telegram from Germany to Mexico. In January of 1917, British cryptographers deciphered a telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German Minister to Mexico, offering United States territory to Mexico in return for joining the German cause. This message helped draw the United States into the war and thus changed the course of history. The telegram states the following:

“... we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement...”

<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=687>

# **WILSON GOES TO CONGRESS**

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**"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 IN WAYS WHICH IT HAS STIRRED US VERY DEEPLY TO LEARN OF; BUT THE SHIPS AND PEOPLE OF OTHER NEUTRAL AND FRIENDLY NATIONS HAVE BEEN SUNK AND OVERWHELMED IN THE WATERS IN THE SAME WAY. THERE HAS BEEN NO DISCRIMINATION. THE CHALLENGE IS TO ALL MANKIND.**

**WITH A PROFOUND SENSE OF THE SOLEMN ... I ADVISE THAT THE CONGRESS DECLARE THE RECENT COURSE OF THE IMPERIAL GERMAN GOVERNMENT TO BE IN FACT NOTHING LESS THAN WAR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES; THAT IT FORMALLY ACCEPT THE STATUS OF BELLIGERENT WHICH HAS THUS BEEN THRUST UPON IT; AND THAT IT TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS, NOT ONLY TO PUT THE COUNTRY IN A MORE THOROUGH STATE OF DEFENSE BUT ALSO TO EXERT ALL ITS POWER AND EMPLOY ALL ITS RESOURCES TO BRING THE GOVERNMENT OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE TO TERMS AND END THE WAR.**

**THE WORLD MUST BE MADE SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY."**

[HTTP://HISTORYMATTERS.GMU.EDU/D/4943/](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/)