

2Pager: World War 1: The Spark to US Entrance

1914

June 28 The crown prince of Austria, **Archduke Francis Ferdinand**, is murdered in the city of Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip. Using the assassination as a pretext, the Austro-Hungarian government declares war on Serbia, its tiny southern neighbor, five days later. Russia begins to mobilize its troops in defense of Serbia.

August 1 Allied to Austria, Germany declares war on Russia. Two days later, Germany declares war on France.

August 4 Bound by mutual defense treaties, Great Britain declares war on Germany as German troops invade Belgium on the way to France.

August 5 The United States formally declares its **neutrality** and offers to mediate the growing conflict.

August 6 Germany's Central Powers ally, Austria-Hungary, declares war on Russia.

August 23 Japan declares war on Germany.

September 5 The **Battle of the Marne**. In the first horrific battle of the war, with each side taking casualties of 500,000, a French- English repulse of the German invasion stalls Germany's plan to quickly subdue continental Europe before Allied forces can fully mobilize. Instead, German forces fall back, beginning three years of devastating, stalemated trench warfare. The defeat also forces Germany to step up its U-boat (Unterseeboot) warfare to counter British naval superiority, which threatens to cut Germany off from essential war supplies. Although the German U-boats initially concentrate their attacks on warships, the submarines eventually turn to commercial and passenger shipping, a strategy that will ultimately give the United States its justification to join the Allied side.

1915

January 28 The William P. Frye, an American merchant ship carrying wheat to England, is torpedoed by a U-boat, the first such attack against American commercial shipping.

February 4 Germany declares the waters around the British Isles a war zone, threatening all shipping that approaches England.

May 1 The American tanker Gulflight is sunk by a German U-boat. Germany apologizes, but the ocean war is escalating as the British call for a blockade of all German ports, despite President Wilson's protest.

May 7 The British ocean liner **Lusitania** is sunk by a U-boat. Germany claims—reliably, it turns out—that the liner carried munitions; the British deny this. Nearly 1,200 of the 1,959 passengers aboard die; 128 of them are Americans who had disregarded the warnings published by Germany in American newspapers to avoid passage on vessels carrying wartime cargoes.

A diplomatic crisis follows, as Germany refuses to pay reparations or disavow the attack. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, a pacifist, resigns in protest over what he deems a tilt toward England in Wilson's reaction to the Lusitania's sinking. In a series of notes to Germany, Wilson warns against infringement of American rights.

Although the sinking of the Lusitania has come down in history as one of the reasons the U.S. joined the war, the actual impact of the sinking was slight, and it would be almost two full years before America committed itself to war.

July 2 A German professor at Cornell University explodes a bomb in the U.S. Senate and shoots J. P. Morgan the next day. The captured professor commits suicide. A few days later, the head of German propaganda in the United States leaves on a New York subway train a suitcase filled with information about the existence of a German spy ring. It is found by the Secret Service and released to the press, further arousing anti-German sentiment.

July 25 The American merchant ship Leelanaw, carrying flax, is sunk off the coast of Scotland by a German U-boat.

November 7 Twenty-seven Americans die in an Austrian submarine attack on the Italian liner Ancona.

December 7 President Wilson requests a standing army of 142,000 and reserves of 400,000.

1916

January 7 Responding to American pressure, Germany pledges to abide by international rules of naval warfare.

February 2 A congressional resolution warns Americans to avoid travel on ships owned by the warring nations. In response, President Wilson declared that American rights must be protected.

March 15 The **Army Reorganization Act** is passed by Congress. Under this measure, the army will be brought to a strength of 175,000 and the National Guard to 450,000 by the end of June.

March 24 Three more Americans die when a French ship is torpedoed in the English Channel, and public sympathies turn increasingly in favor of the Allied cause and against Germany.

June 16 Wilson is renominated by the Democrats under the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War," all the while preparing the nation for entrance into the war on the Allied side. Running on a platform of "Peace and Preparedness,"

1917

January 22 In a speech to Congress, Wilson calls for a league of peace, an organization to promote the resolution of conflicts. But neither side is willing to agree to negotiations while holding on to the prospect of victory.

January 31 Having rapidly built its submarine fleet to over one hundred boats, Germany resumes **unrestricted submarine warfare**, believing it can starve the Allies into submission in six months.

February 3 Citing the German decision, Wilson breaks diplomatic relations with Germany.

February 24 In what will become known as the **Zimmermann Telegram** incident, the British Secret Service intercepted a telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German ambassador in Mexico, attempting to incite Mexico to join Germany's side in the event of war with the United States. In return, Germany promises to help Mexico recover Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The British have held the note until an appropriate moment when its revelations will presumably push Wilson over the brink of his wavering neutrality and into war. After the telegram is released, there is an angry public outcry over what is considered German treachery.

February 26 After asking Congress for permission to arm merchant ships, Wilson is told by his attorney general that

he has that power. He issues the directive on March 9.

March 15 The Czar of Russia is forced to abdicate after the Russian Revolution. The U.S. government recognizes the new government formed by Aleksandr Kerensky, and the USSR.

March 12–21 Five more American ships are sunk, all without warning.

April 2 Wilson asks Congress to declare war on Germany.