Lusitania:

On May 7, 1915, less than a year after World War I (1914-18) erupted across Europe, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the RMS Lusitania, a British ocean liner in route from New York to Liverpool, England. Of the more than 1,900 passengers and crew members on board, more than 1,100 perished, including more than 120 Americans. Nearly two years would pass before the United States formally entered World War I, but the sinking of the Lusitania played a significant role in turning public opinion against Germany, both in the United States and abroad.

The captain of the Lusitania ignored the British Admiralty’s recommendations, and at 2:12 p.m. on May 7 the 32,000-ton ship was hit by an exploding torpedo on its starboard side. The torpedo blast was followed by a larger explosion, probably of the ship’s boilers, and the ship sank off the south coast of Ireland in less than 20 minutes.

It was revealed that the Lusitania was carrying about 173 tons of war munitions for Britain, which the Germans cited as further justification for the attack. The United States eventually protested the action, and Germany apologized and pledged to end unrestricted submarine warfare. However, in November of that same year a U-boat sunk an Italian liner without warning, killing more than 270 people, including more than 25 Americans. Public opinion in the United States began to turn irrevocably against Germany.

America Enters WWI:

On January 31, 1917, Germany, determined to win its war of attrition against the Allies, announced it would resume unrestricted warfare in war-zone waters. Three days later, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany, and just hours after that the American ship Housatonic was sunk by a German U-boat.

On February 22, Congress passed a $250 million arms appropriations bill intended to make the United States ready for war. In late March, Germany sunk four more U.S. merchant ships, and on April 2 President Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war against Germany. On April 4, the Senate voted to declare war against Germany, and two days later the [House of Representatives](https://www.history.com/topics/history-of-the-house-of-representatives) endorsed the declaration. With that, America entered World War I.