



The ASC History Newsletter

100th Anniversary of World War I: Declaration of War

This
MONTH in
military
history ...

1770: Boston Mas-
sacre

1778: Rhode Is-
land authorizes
enlistment of
Black troops

1836: Texas de-
clares Independ-
ence

1847: Battle of
Sacramento

1861: St. Augus-
tine, Florida sur-
rendered to Un-
ion Forces

1916: Pancho Villa
attacks Columbus,
New Mexico

1917: US govt re-
leased the Zim-
mermann Tele-
gram

1918: Second Bat-
tle of the Somme
began

1936: Nazi Ger-
many reoccupied
the Rhineland

1941: FDR signs
Lend-Lease

1943: Battle of the
Bismarck Sea be-
gan

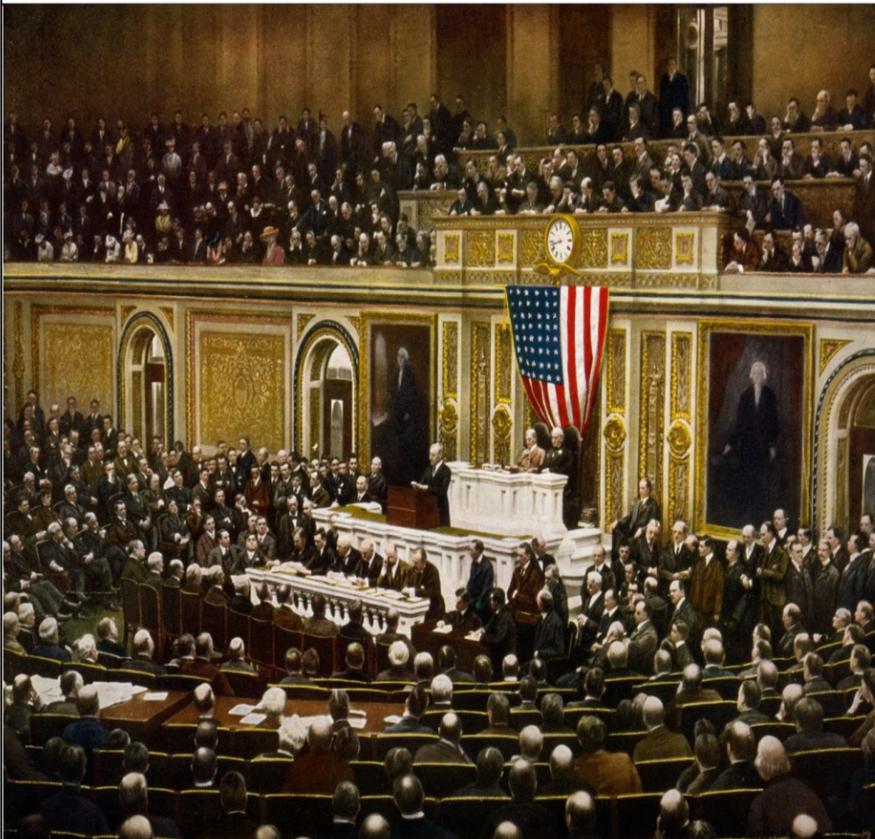
1947: Truman
Doctrine an-
nounced

1967: Operation
Junction City

1968: My Lai mas-
sacre

1973: Last combat
troops leave Vi-
etnam

2003: OIF began



“WHEREAS, The Imperial Ger-
man Government has committed re-
peated acts of war against the people
of the United States of America;
therefore, be it resolved by the Senate
and House of Representatives of the
United States of America in Congress
assembled, That the state of war be-
tween the United States and the Im-
perial German Government, which
has thus been thrust upon the United
States, is hereby formally declared;
and that the President be, and he is
hereby, authorized and directed to
employ the entire naval and military
forces of the United States and the
resources of the Government to carry
on war against the Imperial German
Government; and to bring the conflict
to a successful termination all the
resources of the country are hereby
pledged by the Congress of the Unit-
ed States”. –U.S. Declaration of War
6 April 1917

Of the 96 Senators (Alaska and Ha-
waii did not become states until
1959), 82 voted for, 6 voted against
and 8 Senators abstained from Amer-
ica’s declaration of war. The vote
came on the heels of President Wil-
son’s speech before both houses of
Congress on 2 April 1917. Here is an
excerpt from that address:

“Gentlemen of the Congress:

I have called the Congress into ex-
traordinary session because there are
serious, very serious, choices of poli-
cy to be made, and made immedi-
ately, which it was neither right nor
constitutionally permissible that I should

assume the responsibility of making.

On the 3d of February last I offi-
cially laid before you the extraordi-
nary announcement of the Imperial
German Government that on and af-
ter the 1st day of February it was its
purpose to put aside all restraints of
law or of humanity and use its sub-
marines to sink every vessel that
sought to approach either the ports of
Great Britain and Ireland or the west-
ern coasts of Europe or any of the
ports controlled by the enemies of
Germany within the Mediterranean.
That had seemed to be the object of
the German submarine warfare earli-
er in the war, but since April of last
year the Imperial Government had
somewhat restrained the commanders
of its undersea craft in conformity
with its promise then given to us that
passenger boats should not be sunk
and that due warning would be given
to all other vessels which its subma-
rines might seek to destroy, when no
resistance was offered or escape at-
tempted, and care taken that their
crews were given at least a fair
chance to save their lives in their
open boats. The precautions taken
were meagre and haphazard enough,
as was proved in distressing instance
after instance in the progress of the
cruel and unmanly business, but a
certain degree of restraint was ob-
served the new policy has swept ev-
ery restriction aside. Vessels of every
kind, whatever their flag, their char-
acter, 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 friend-
ly neutrals along with those of bellig-
erents. Even hospital ships and ships
carrying relief to the sorely bereaved
and stricken people of Belgium,
though the latter were provided with
safe-conduct through the proscribed
areas by the German Government
itself and were distinguished by un-
mistakable marks of identity, have
been sunk with the same reckless
lack of compassion or of principle...”

Over the space of twenty minutes,
President Woodrow Wilson outlined
the reasons the United States should
enter the war. Finally and as elo-
quently as ever, he ended his address
with one of the greatest conclusions
of any speech in U.S. history.

“It is a distressing and oppressive
duty, gentlemen of the Congress,
which I have performed in thus ad-
dressing you. There are, it may be,
many months of fiery trial and sacri-
fice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing
to lead this great peaceful people into
war, into the most terrible and disas-
trous 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
right of those who submit to authority
to have a voice in their own govern-
ments, for the rights and liberties of
small nations, for a universal domi-
nion of right by such a concert of free
peoples as shall bring peace and safe-
ty to all nations and make the world
itself at last free. To such a task we
can dedicate our lives and our for-
tunes, everything that we are and
everything that we have, with the
pride of those who know that the day
has come when America is privileged
to spend her blood and her might for
the principles that gave her birth and
happiness and the peace which she
has treasured. God helping her, she
can do no other.”

