

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 107

### “Too Proud to Fight”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

On May 10, 1915, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, gave a speech in Philadelphia before an audience of newly naturalized American citizens. He said in part:

“Other countries depend upon the multiplication of their own native people. This country is constantly drinking strength out of new sources by the voluntary association with it of great bodies of strong men and forward-looking women out of other lands....

“[Y]ou were drawn across the ocean by some beckoning finger of hope, by some belief, by some vision of a new kind of justice, by some expectation of a better kind of life. No doubt you have been disappointed in some of us. Some of us are very disappointing....No doubt what you found here did not seem touched for you after all with the complete beauty of the ideal which you had conceived beforehand. But remember this: If we had grown at all poor in the ideal, you brought some of it with you....That is the reason that I, for one, make you welcome. If I have in any degree forgotten what America was intended for, I will thank God if you will remind me. I was born in America. You dreamed dreams of what America was to be, and I hope you brought the dreams with you....

“The example of America must be a special example. The example of America must be the example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but of peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world and strife is not. There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 107. Too Proud to Fight.

By the end of 1914, it was becoming clear to Woodrow Wilson, as it was to everyone else, that the Great War was huge and terrible and there was no obvious way it was going to end anytime soon.

Under the Wilson Administration, the US strove to navigate its policy of strict neutrality. But there were complications. Some of the German merchant ships trapped in US waters were being bought up by US owners and sent out to sea again, now as US-registered ships. The British objected to this. They didn't recognize the right of Americans to buy enemy-flagged ships and threatened to seize them, despite their US flags. Relations with Britain's ally Japan continued to deteriorate after the US pressed Japan to back down on its Twenty-One Demands note to China, episode 93.

Wilson sent his friend and informal representative, Colonel House, to Europe at the end of January 1915 to meet with the leaders of the belligerent nations and sound out the prospects of a US-brokered peace. House sailed to Europe aboard *Lusitania*, which, as you know, is now the largest and fastest and most luxurious passenger ship still working the transatlantic run.

Nothing came of House's trip, but by this time, Wilson was already beginning to formulate a set of principles that in his mind would define a just and lasting peace. For there to be such a peace, Wilson decided early on, there could be no decision by force of arms, no imposed peace, especially not one under which the defeated nations were forced to make territorial or other major concessions to the victors. That would only sow the seeds of yet another war.

The shorthand for this principle, "Peace without victory," would become Wilson's slogan. No nation must ever again be permitted to acquire new territory by force of arms. All nations must treat other nations with equal deference and courtesy, be they large or small. The manufacture of arms and munitions must be taken out of private hands, as that creates a financial incentive for war. And finally, there needed to be some international association of nations, bound by mutual agreement to enforce these principles, by making war collectively on any individual nation that failed to uphold them.

On February 4, while Colonel House was still aboard *Lusitania* on his way to Europe, the German Admiralty announced its war zone around the British Isles. This sparked a testy diplomatic exchange between the United States and Germany, and some American-flagged freighters were attacked during this period of unrestricted submarine warfare, despite the fact that German U-boat commanders were ordered not to fire on American ships. Still, the fact was that there were not many American merchant ships on the transatlantic routes, so those orders didn't affect the U-boat campaign much.

More serious, as we have seen, was the potential problem of U-Boat attacks on British ships carrying American civilian passengers. And then there was the British tightening of their blockade on Germany. In response to unrestricted submarine warfare, the British announced a total blockade of all goods to Germany, including even foodstuffs. This provoked an exchange between the US and British governments, with the US government objecting most strenuously to the British claiming the right to limit shipments of food even to nearby neutrals, like the

Netherlands or Denmark. What right did the British have to regulate trade between two neutral nations?

Then came the sinking of *Falaba* and the death of Leon Thrasher. Wilson and most of his Cabinet agreed that Germany was guilty of a war crime in this incident, with the notable dissent of the Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan. Bryan expressed the view that the US government shouldn't be expected to lend its power and influence to the protection of private US citizens, like Leon Thrasher, who make the private decision to travel into a war zone for their own personal reasons. Was it right to risk the US getting sucked into the Great War on account of one man?

At least Woodrow Wilson was getting over the death of his wife Ellen. It had been quite a blow to him, but Wilson was getting back into the swing of things. In more ways than one, as it turned out. In March 1915, the 58-year old Wilson met Edith Galt, a 42-year old widow, descended from some of the oldest families in the Virginia Tidewater, including Pocahontas and John Rolfe. He fell in love at once, as he had with Ellen, and proposed to Edith two months later.

Now in those days, the old taboos against widows and widowers remarrying were breaking down, but it was still expected that there would be at least a lengthy period of mourning before you got involved in a new relationship. For Wilson to propose marriage to Edith a mere nine months after the death of his first wife bordered on scandalous. The engagement was kept secret for some time, finally being made public in October. Woodrow and Edith married in December 1915, making him the third President in American history to get married while in office. John Tyler, like Wilson, had been widowed in office and then remarried; Grover Cleveland married for his first and only time during his first term as President. For the record, there have been no further Presidential wedding ceremonies since Wilson's, at least not as of the recording date of this episode.

And just in case you're wondering, Grover Cleveland was the only one of these three Presidents to actually hold his wedding ceremony in the White House itself.

Anyway, in the wake of the German submarine warfare declaration and the sinking of *Falaba*, Wilson and his administration expected more of the same as the war went on, by which I mean the occasional minor infringement of American sovereignty: an American freighter torpedoed, an American shipment blockaded, the occasional death of an American citizen. Wilson worried what the cumulative effect of this steady drip of insults might do to American public opinion and spoke publicly of the necessity of America standing firm on its principles. "America First," he said, coining a slogan that, ironically, would later be used against him by the Republicans. And not only against him.

Then came May 7, 1915, and a challenge to his arm's-length neutrality Wilson could not have foreseen the sinking of *Lusitania*. We covered this event last time, but let me reiterate how shocking and how sad the losses were and how they brought up unhappy memories of the *Titanic*

disaster. But while *Titanic* had been a terrible accident, or at worst, the result of carelessness and overconfidence, *Lusitania* was the consequence of a deliberate policy of one of the world's Great Powers.

And if you will allow me to indulge in a moment of personal reminiscence, May 7, 1915, also happens to be the day my paternal grandfather died. Not that he was aboard *Lusitania* or anything. It was just a coincidence. But there it is.

Anyway, there was shock and outrage expressed in every quarter in the United States. Now you may be wondering at this point, "Didn't Mark tell us that this was an era far more tolerant of violence than our society is today? Didn't King Leopold's soldiers kill Congolese by the thousands and yet it took a concerted campaign to make the world take notice? Weren't factory workers and miners dying on the job, or being shot and killed by soldiers for going on strike? And yet the deaths aboard *Lusitania* sparked so much fury. What's the deal here?"

Well, this is a good question. The answer is that although it's true that this society condoned forms of violence we would find intolerable and that human life was in many ways less regarded then than it is now, this case was different, for a couple of reasons. One obvious reason was that 128 of the *Lusitania* victims were middle and upper class Americans, people that other middle and upper class Americans could easily identify with, and think, along with the English theologian John Bradford, "There but for the Grace of God, go I."

The other reason has to do with the nature of the Great War. I've already talked about how the scale of the armies raised and the number of the casualties inflicted in this war are dramatically higher than what would have been seen even in wars as recent as the Crimean War or the Franco-Prussian War just fifty years ago. In those wars, civilian casualties were quite light, by our standards today. Civilians always died during wars, but mostly they died due to the disruption and havoc of war. They died of disease or of starvation, but they seldom died as a direct result of combat, and when they did, it was because they were at or near the scene of a battle. Civilians who had the means to avoid the sites of battles and keep away from enemy soldiers were likely to remain safe and might even be able to go about their business more or less as usual.

This is going to change in the twentieth century, and the sinking of *Lusitania* should be seen as an ominous sign of what's ahead. It's going to get harder and harder for civilians to keep away from war because, civilians, the war is coming for you. This was still a shocker in 1915, but we're going to come to accept it as the century moves forward. Even the Great War, as bloody as it is, is not going to see all that many civilians killed directly by enemy military personnel.

[music: *In a Haunted Forest*]

When I was young and they taught me this history, they linked the sinking of *Lusitania* directly to the US entry into the Great War. They were wrong, or at least, they grossly oversimplified the story. Because it will be two more years before the US gets into the war, and when it does, the

sinking of *Lusitania* will not be the reason. But the sinking of *Lusitania* was the first step down the road, the first chapter in the story, that leads to American involvement in the war.

It was a Friday in Washington DC, when the news came to Wilson in the White House. He was preparing to go out on a round of golf when the first cables came. He canceled his golf game and stayed in the White House to await more news. That evening he was seen strolling the streets of the capital alone, lost in thought, seemingly oblivious to the fact that it was raining.

American public opinion was critical of the Germans, but only a handful of America's thousands of newspapers called for war. Even Theodore Roosevelt wouldn't go quite that far, although he was outspoken in his criticism of Wilson's policy toward Germany, going so far as to say that if Wilson had dealt with the Germans more firmly the first time they had torpedoed an American freighter, the *Lusitania* victims would still be alive. He wanted the US to take a much harsher, more confrontational line toward Germany, over the U-boat issue and over German war crimes in Belgium. Privately, he professed himself "pretty well disgusted with our government and with the way our people acquiesce in and support it."

On Monday the 10<sup>th</sup>, Wilson went to Philadelphia to speak to a group of newly naturalized American citizens. The speech had already been scheduled, and Wilson had already intended to use it as an opportunity to lay out his argument for why America should not get involved in the war. The sinking of *Lusitania* made the speech more relevant than ever, but Wilson saw no reason to change his plans. This was the speech I read excerpts from at the top of the episode.

The line from that speech that jumped out at the press and the public at the time probably had the same effect on you when you heard it; I'm referring to the business about a man being "too proud to fight." It was an off-the-cuff addition to the speech. Wilson didn't think he had said anything controversial and he didn't mean that *America* was too proud to fight, exactly, but that's how his words were taken. Those words would be much quoted, and much mocked, over the rest of his presidency, and he would come to regret them.

Colonel House, still in London, telegraphed the President to say, "[W]e can no longer remain neutral spectators...we are being weighed in the balance, and our position amongst the nations is being assessed by mankind." House was meeting regularly with the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and was himself becoming increasingly sympathetic to the Allied cause, promising a lot to Grey while being cagey with Wilson.

The Cabinet met on the 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss the situation. Several wanted to take a hard line against Germany, notably the Secretary of War, Lindley Garrison. But Secretary of State Bryan remained stubbornly opposed to any sort of US interference in the war. Bryan wanted the US government to issue a statement warning US citizens against traveling on ships of belligerent nations. Wilson thought that such a statement, coming right after the *Lusitania* sinking, would look weak. Bryan countered that if the US was to begin making demands on one side in the war,

evenhandedness required demands be made on both sides. If the Germans were to be asked to limit their U-boat war, then Britain should be asked at the same time to loosen its blockade.

In the end, Bryan was not able to convince Wilson or his Cabinet to soften their message, and a stronger diplomatic note was sent to the German government on May 13. The United States asserted the right of its citizens to travel on civilian ships under any flag and called for a halt to submarine attacks on civilian ships.

The German reply was disappointing. Although the German Admiralty secretly issued orders to its U-boat commanders to avoid attacking passenger liners, Germany's public position was that attacking civilian ships was not as bad as blockading shipments of food and starving civilians. At least civilians had the option not to travel on ships; they did not have the option of not eating. The Germans also raised the point that *Lusitania* was carrying small-arms ammunition and shells bound for Britain. This was true, although it was kept secret at the time, and many doubted the German claim.

The US sent a second diplomatic note on June 9, rejecting linkage between the submarine war and the blockade and arguing that the loss of so many American lives raised the issue of submarine warfare above the normal give and take of diplomacy. William Jennings Bryan objected to this note as well. He insisted on a simultaneous US protest of the British blockade. He also suggested the US bar passenger liners using its ports from also carrying munitions. Wilson liked that second idea, but felt bringing it up now would seem like weakness.

This second note was too much for Bryan. He resigned from his position as Secretary of State rather than sign it. In a testy final meeting with Wilson, Bryan told him, "Colonel House has been Secretary of State, not I, and I have never had your full confidence."

Bryan consoled himself with the thought that he could do more to prevent America getting into the war from the outside, as a private citizen free to speak his mind, rather than in the Cabinet, where he would have to show loyalty to Wilson. He told his daughter, "The President does not seem to realize that a great part of America lies on the other side of the Allegheny Mountains."

In saying that, Bryan had put his finger on the geographical component of the division in American society between those who wanted the United States to join the Great War and those who didn't. For it was in the northeastern United States that support for Britain was highest. This was the part of the country with many citizens whose ancestors were English, or at least British, and had many commercial connections to the United Kingdom. And these were the very people, the monied interests of Wall Street, that William Jennings Bryan had dedicated his career to opposing.

But it more than just English ancestry. The northeastern elites of this day were irrepressible Anglophiles. They traveled to England frequently—these were the very people who bought those luxurious first-class accommodations aboard the great transatlantic liners. They took their social

and cultural cues from the English aristocracy. What the lords and ladies of England wore when they went to Covent Garden was imitated by the New York financiers and their wives when they went to the Metropolitan Opera.

These wealthy families were descended from the earliest settlers in the northeastern United States and they had been at the top of the social order from the beginning. They were mostly of English ancestry, except in New York, where some of them were Dutch. They were an American aristocracy in all but name. And they were a tightly knit group. They all knew each other. They had all gone to Ivy League schools together. They did business with one another. They socialized with each other. And they married their children to each other's children.

But as America's cities grew, and particularly New York City, it became difficult for the elite to keep track of who was in the club. The solution to this problem was the *Social Register*, an annual publication that listed the members of New York's most important families, and helped them keep abreast of each other's doings. Who had married whom and who had had children, what businesses they were engaged in, what clubs they attended, and so on. If you had enough money and knew the right people, you could work your way into the *Social Register*; conversely, if you did something scandalous, like marry an actress, you could get bumped out of it.

The *New York Social Register* was introduced in 1886, ironically by a German-American named Louis Keller, who was the son of an immigrant. By the time of the Great War, there were annual *Social Registers* published in many cities across the US Northeast and Midwest, places like Boston, Newport, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Chicago.

These people I'm describing were once known as WASPs, although that usage won't be coined until the 1950s. WASP is an acronym that supposedly stands for white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, although "white" is redundant in this context and not all Americans of English ancestry qualify for this label, only the wealthy elites. The term is a bit of sly humor as well, since it suggests that these elites are "waspy," that is, they are easily provoked and spiteful.

Throughout the twentieth century, these WASP elites also represented the leadership of the Republican Party, and at this moment, they are also the Americans most enthusiastically supporting Britain in the Great War. They are also the Republican leaders who were never more than lukewarm about supporting Theodore Roosevelt—even though he's one of them. These are the people who prevented Roosevelt from winning the 1912 Republican nomination for President, despite his impressive showing in the primaries.

But the outbreak of the Great War is changing the dynamics of the Republican Party. The war is bringing out Roosevelt's old jingoism. He wants America to take a far harder line with Germany, while at the same time his progressive zeal of a few years ago is waning. The way is clearing for a reconciliation between Roosevelt and his party. Roosevelt is well aware of this, and is already mulling over a 1916 run for President against Wilson. He is at this stage still only 56 years old—two years younger than the incumbent.

But what about those people on the other side of the Alleghenies that William Jennings Bryan was talking about? Southern Democrats are the portion of the Democratic coalition most likely to be pro-British, since a lot of them are also descended from British immigrants. At least, that was the case until the British government alienated their strongest Democratic supporters by declaring cotton exports to Germany contraband. Fortunately for the British, Sir Edward Grey's understanding of American politics was sufficiently acute that he saw the problem and pushed for his Government to compensate Southerners for the lost business by buying up much of the US cotton crop itself.

As for the rest of the Democratic coalition, well, when you look farther west, into the Midwest and beyond, in the wide open spaces of America's farming communities, what you find there are a lot of German-Americans and Scandinavian-Americans. They are poorer than the WASPs and they lack the political clout of the WASPs, but they also lean more toward Germany.

You may be surprised to learn that there are more Americans of German ancestry than of any other ethnic background, including English. This is not obvious, partly because German-Americans have historically been quick to assimilate and sensitive to accusations that they aren't "real" Americans. In 1915, many German- and Scandinavian-Americans were sympathetic to the German cause in the Great War, though only a small number of hotheads went so far as to advocate US entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers. But many German-Americans quietly supported Wilsonian neutrality, yet even for this they would come under suspicion and have their loyalty to the United States questioned.

And then there were the Irish-Americans. Many Irish-Americans are descended from people who fled their homeland because of famine and poverty, at least some of which could be blamed on British misrule. These Irish-Americans remembered. There was probably more opposition to British rule over Ireland among Irish-Americans than among the Irish of Ireland. Like the German-Americans, though, only a relatively small number would go so far as to push for the US to ally with Germany and punish Britain, but much larger numbers were unenthusiastic about America going to war to rescue Britain from what some might see as the consequences of her imperial arrogance.

Both of these communities, German-Americans and Irish-Americans, would come under a lot of criticism for their lukewarm attitude toward intervention in the war, and much of this criticism would come from the Eastern bluebloods. The American writer H.P. Lovecraft, as blue a blueblood as they come, wrote harsh essays condemning Irish-Americans and German-Americans during this period, and on October 12, 1915, Theodore Roosevelt gave a famous speech in New York in which he condemned what he called "hyphenated Americans," saying in part:

"For an American citizen to vote as a German-American, an Irish-American, or an English-American, is to be a traitor to American institutions; and those hyphenated Americans who

terrorize American politicians by threats of the foreign vote are engaged in treason to the American Republic.”

He also named English-American in there, in a bid to sound reasonable, but everyone knew who he was *really* talking about. It’s telling, I think, that in these debates, German-Americans and Irish-Americans are assumed to support neutrality out of base motives of blood loyalty set above honorable patriotism. Can’t someone support neutrality out of an honorable patriotism? Conversely, WASP support for intervention is framed as an act of patriotism, when it could just as easily be interpreted as putting ties of blood above love of country. Funny how all this works.

And all of this put Woodrow Wilson in a difficult position, squeezed in between the interventionism of the bombastic, pugnacious Theodore Roosevelt and the militant neutralism of the homespun, Bible-thumping William Jennings Bryan. And the fact that both these men were veteran campaigners who likely still harbored Presidential ambitions added an awkward political dimension as the 1916 Presidential election approached.

[music: *In a Haunted Forest*]

When the German reply to the second diplomatic note came, it was also unsatisfactory. It was now time for Congress to pass the fiscal year 1916 budget. As part of his effort to strike a balance between peace and firmness, and probably also to send a message to the German government, the White House announced that the President was consulting with his Secretary of War and his Secretary of the Navy on increasing the size of the US Army and Navy in the name of military preparedness. Wilson insisted this had nothing to do with the diplomatic tiff with Germany, but it was unquestionably an about-face from a President who had previously rejected all calls for increasing American military spending.

The War Secretary, Lindley Garrison, one of the loudest jingoes in the Cabinet, had previously been a key advocate for the unfortunate US intervention in Mexico and had been pushing to expand the Army since before the *Lusitania* sinking. He was not personally loyal to Wilson, and had been quietly threatening to resign if his expansion plan were not approved. This won him praise from Republicans like Theodore Roosevelt, but irked Wilson, who called him a “conceited ass.” But now Wilson chose to back Garrison’s plan, which was to expand the standing US Army to 140,000, as well as creating a reserve force of 400,000 that would be in addition to and distinct from the National Guard, America’s conglomeration of state militias.

This move was controversial with Bryan and the pro-peace Democrats. Standing armies have traditionally been regarded with suspicion in the United States, ever since Revolutionary times, when they were seen as undemocratic and an instrument of tyranny.

The Navy plan was an ambitious five-year plan to expand the US Navy by six battleships, ten cruisers, fifty destroyers and one hundred submarines, which would make it the largest navy in the world. At this time, the US Navy was a distinct third behind Britain and Germany, and only

slightly larger than the Imperial Japanese Navy. But the outbreak of the Great War had slowed naval construction among the combatant nations, making it feasible for the US to jump into the lead.

But the Navy Secretary, 53-year old Josephus Daniels, unlike his War Department colleague, was not highly thought of by Roosevelt and the Republicans. Born in North Carolina, Daniels was the longtime publisher and editor of the Raleigh *News and Observer*. In that position, he had been an ardent racist and advocate for white supremacy—that's his description of his views, not mine—and also a key supporter in the effort of white Democrats to regain control of North Carolina's state government in the 1890s. Daniels had mellowed a bit since then, embracing Progressive causes, including the temperance movement, and in the early twentieth century, becoming that peculiar political creature of the age, the Southern Democrat who wants to outlaw both child labor and African-American suffrage.

We already saw back in the McKinley Administration how the position of Secretary of the Navy was often seen more as a political plum to give to a loyal supporter rather than, you know, a linchpin of American defense. And so it was with Daniels, who had won the position as a reward for supporting Wilson in the 1912 Presidential election. Republicans like Roosevelt viewed Daniels as a Southern bumpkin, wholly in over his head at the Navy Department.

Daniels is probably best remembered today for issuing General Order 99 on June 1, 1914. This is the order banning alcoholic beverages from US Navy ships and installations.

It's hard to appreciate from the perspective of a hundred years how radical a change this was. The United States Navy inherited its traditions from the Royal Navy, and the Royal Navy has been issuing alcohol to its sailors for centuries.

Sea-going vessels have to take fresh water for drinking along with them when they leave port. Standing casks of water get nasty after a while, and sailors who won't drink water get dehydrated and sick, and so the Royal Navy began mixing in beer and wine to make the water more potable and more attractive. After the conquest of Jamaica in 1655, the British began issuing the now-cheaper rum to their sailors, in a daily ration of two gills. That's one cup or eight ounces in modern terms, four to six cocktails' worth of booze, which I think you will agree is quite a lot to be drinking every day.

If you gave the sailors their rum ration straight, they have a disturbing tendency to chug it straight, or even worse, to hoard it for a few days and then chug it all at once. That's just not healthy, so the Royal Navy would pre-mix the rum with water and issue it in two servings, one at lunch and one at supper. If sailors had the means, they might try adding a little something of their own—sugar or nutmeg or allspice or fruit juice or whatever they had on hand—into the mix to make the drink tastier, and these early naval cocktails came to be known as “grog.” “Grog” is still used as a name for rum cocktails today, though there's no generally accepted recipe for grog, reflecting its history of improvisation. In Australia and New Zealand, “grog” is used pretty much

the way Americans use “booze,” as a catchall term for any alcoholic drink. This is also the origin of our modern term “groggy,” meaning dazed or sluggish. It originally meant simply “drunk.”

You can find other examples in English of nautical terms working their way into our drinking language, including words like “bingeing,” “down the hatch,” and the wonderfully obscure “three sheets to the wind.”

Anyway, when the US Navy was created, it inherited the Royal Navy’s groggy traditions. In 1806, the Navy began pushing whisky rather than rum, because whisky was cheaper in the United States. Sailors who were too young to drink or turned down their ration could get a little extra pay instead. In 1842, the US Navy reduced the ration to one gill, and during the Civil War eliminated it entirely, although sailors could still bring personal supplies of alcoholic beverages aboard their ships.

All that changed after Daniels’ order. Ever since, US Navy ships can keep only a small quantity of alcoholic beverages under lock and key in sick bay for medicinal purposes—yeah, medicinal purposes, that’s the ticket—it can only be used on the orders of the ship’s doctor or captain. I suppose this is also the origin of the tradition in Starfleet of Chief Medical Officers bringing a bottle of booze along to the Captain’s quarters when it’s time for them to have a heart-to-heart talk.

General Order 99 is still in effect to this day, although a couple of exceptions have been written into the rules over the years. Issuing this order instantly made Daniels despised by the sailors and did nothing to help his reputation in Washington as a man who didn’t really understand the Navy he was in charge of. To be fair, though, in hindsight we can view Daniels’ order as the final step in a process of de-alcoholization of the Navy that had been happening gradually over the past century.

Now, I’ve already compared Josephus Daniels to John Long, President McKinley’s Secretary of the Navy, whom we met all the way back in episode 3. You may recall, if you have listened to episode 3, and if you haven’t, you really should, that McKinley’s Assistant Secretary of the Navy was Theodore Roosevelt. That might leave you wondering, if Josephus Daniels is the John Long of the Wilson Administration, who is Wilson’s Theodore Roosevelt?

Ha, ha. Well, funny you should ask, because it’s another guy named Roosevelt. The 33-year old Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to be exact. And no, the similarity in names is not a coincidence, though they were only distantly related. They were fifth cousins, to be exact. Franklin came from a less reputable branch of the family, and when I say less reputable, I mean that they were Democrats. Still, young Franklin admired his famous cousin, despite their partisan differences, and was rooting for Theodore when he became Vice President, and then President. And then Franklin suddenly became a much closer relative of Theodore’s when he married the President’s niece Eleanor in 1905.

Roosevelt ran for a New York Senate seat in 1910, and he won, thanks to the Democratic wave of that year and also thanks to his famous name. He supported Wilson in the Democratic nomination process in 1912 and continued to support Wilson in the general election, despite Uncle Theodore's third-party campaign. The job of Assistant Secretary of the Navy was his reward.

A lot of people in Washington saw Franklin Roosevelt as a dilettante and a fop, no more qualified to be running the Navy than Daniels. But that was selling him short. Although Franklin Roosevelt never served in the armed forces, he had a keen interest in naval warfare and had read widely on the subject. Inspired by the example of his uncle-in-law, he tried to assert himself in the Navy Office, but Daniels wasn't as easy to snooker as Long had been. Perhaps Daniels listened to episode 3. Maybe you should, too, if you haven't yet.

Franklin Roosevelt also acted as a back channel, keeping Uncle Theodore informed about the goings on in the Navy Department. Daniels and Wilson had an inkling that this was going on, but they let it slide. No doubt they reasoned that letting the elder Roosevelt know what was actually going on in the Navy Department was better than keeping him in the dark and leaving him to his own imagination.

On July 21, the US sent its *third* diplomatic note to Germany, rejecting the German reply to the second and informing the Germans that America would regard any further surprise submarine attack on a civilian vessel as an unfriendly act. This was just short of an ultimatum.

The wheels of diplomacy ground on, and the State Department awaited a German reply. They were still waiting almost a month later, on August 19, when a German submarine sank the White Star liner *Arabic*, killing 44, including two Americans.

That incident reminded everyone in America of *Lusitania* and reopened the unsettled debate on how to respond. There were calls for Wilson to call a special session of Congress, which might have led to a declaration of war. Wilson refused, and wracked his brains for a couple days until he hit upon the expedient of leaking to the press that his Administration was seriously considering breaking diplomatic relations with Germany. That would be just one step short of declaring war. He then had his new Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, meet with the German ambassador to discuss with him how serious the situation had become.

It worked. The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, quite sensibly judged that Germany's U-boats were too few to take a real bite out of British merchant shipping, certainly not enough to outweigh the serious consequences of pushing the United States into the arms of the Allies. On August 27, he persuaded Kaiser Wilhelm to order a halt to submarine attacks on neutral-flagged merchant vessels. That effectively meant all merchant vessels, since the British could always fly a false neutral flag and it would be too difficult for a U-boat commander to tell the difference.

The Germans announced their new policy and offered an indemnity, although they stopped short of apologizing for the sinkings of *Arabic* and *Lusitania*. Still, the change of policy was greeted with relief in the United States, and Woodrow Wilson got a much-needed foreign policy victory. For the time being at least, his policy of strict neutrality and firm but patient diplomacy had gotten real results. He had changed German policy, without a war and without a threat of war.

Okay, maybe a little bit of a threat.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening. I'd also like to thank Michael for making a donation and thank you to Charles for becoming a patron of the podcast. You can find links for donations and for the Patreon page at the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com). You can also leave a comment and let me know what you thought of today's episode.

I'm back from my week off, only I came down with the flu during my week off, which kind of put the kibosh on the whole doing extra work and catching up thing. Oh, well, so it goes. My voice is still a little ragged; I don't know if you can hear it or not, but it is. As always, I will keep plugging along as best I can. We'll be on for the next three weeks, and then I'll take off Easter weekend and we'll see how it goes from there.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look back to Europe, where women's groups are making their bid to end the war, and Germany is about to unleash yet another terrible weapon. This isn't war, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Woodrow Wilson and Edith Galt married in a private ceremony at the bride's home in Washington on Saturday, December 18, 1915. After the reception, they took an overnight train to Hot Springs, Virginia for their honeymoon. The following morning, at the honeymoon destination, a Secret Service agent caught the President in the act of dancing a jig by himself while singing, "Oh, you beautiful gal. You great, big, beautiful gal."

The honeymoon lasted three weeks. The newlyweds played golf, they went on automobile rides, and they took long walks. On January 2, 1916, though, came the news that a German U-boat had sunk the British passenger liner *Persia*, killing two Americans. The honeymoon was cut short, and the couple returned to Washington.

[music: "Oh, You Beautiful Doll"]