

Declaration of Neutrality

(1)

*After Britain's entry into the war on August 4, 1914, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson addressed Congress and made public the U.S. policy of neutrality. During his address, he made an appeal to American **nationalism** and warned U.S. citizens against taking sides in the war.*

(2)

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned.

(3)

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to ease it. Americans may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion, if not in action.

(4)

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation.

What's going on?

(5)

I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that breach of neutrality, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle over another.

(6)

My thought is of America. This great country of ours should show herself to be a nation fit beyond others to exhibit the poise of undisturbed judgment and the dignity of self-control; a nation that neither sits in judgment upon others nor is disturbed in her own counsels and which keeps herself fit and free to do what is honest and truly serviceable for the peace of the world.

Adapted from Wilson, W. (1914). President Wilson’s message to Congress (63rd Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. No. 566). Washington, DC.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?

Armistice – The End of World War I, 1918

(1)

The terms of the agreement called for the cessation of fighting along the entire Western Front to begin at precisely 11 a.m. that morning. After more than 4 years of bloody conflict, the Great War was at an end. Colonel Thomas Gowenlock served as an intelligence officer in the American 1st Division. He was on the front line that November morning and wrote of his experience a few years later.

(2)

On the morning of November 11, I sat in my dugout, which was our division headquarters, talking to our Chief of Staff, Colonel John Greely, and Lieutenant Colonel Paul Peabody. A signal corps officer entered and handed us the following message:

Official Radio from Paris - 6:01 A.M., Nov. 11, 1918. Marshal Foch to the Commander-in-Chief.

- 1. Hostilities will be stopped on the entire front beginning at 11 o'clock, November 11th (French hour).*
- 2. The Allied troops will not go beyond the line reached at that hour on that date until further orders.*

*[signed]
MARSHAL FOCH
5:45 A.M.*

(3)

My watch said nine o'clock. With only two hours to go, I drove over to the bank of the Meuse River to see the finish. The shelling was heavy and as I walked down the road, it grew steadily worse. It seemed to me that every battery in the world was trying to burn up its guns. At last eleven o'clock came—but the firing continued. The men on both sides had decided to give each other all they had—their farewell to arms. It was a very natural impulse after their years of war, but unfortunately many fell after eleven o'clock that day.

What's going on?

(4)

All over the world on November 11, 1918, people were celebrating, dancing in the streets, drinking champagne, hailing the armistice that meant the end of the war. But at the front there was no celebration. Many soldiers believed the Armistice was only a temporary measure and that the war would soon go on. As night came, the quietness, unearthly in its penetration, began to eat into their souls. The men sat around log fires, the first they had ever had at the front. They were trying to reassure themselves that there were no enemies spying on them from the next hill and no German bombing planes approaching to blast them out of existence. They talked in low tones. They were nervous.

(5)

After the long months of intense strain, of keying themselves up to the daily mortal danger, of thinking always in terms of war and the enemy, the abrupt release from it all was physical and psychological agony. Some suffered a total nervous collapse. Some, of a steadier temperament, began to hope they would someday return to home and the embrace of loved ones. Some could think only of the crude little crosses that marked the graves of their comrades. Some fell into an exhausted sleep. All were bewildered by the sudden meaninglessness of their existence as soldiers. What was to come next? They did not know—and hardly cared. Their minds were numbed by the shock of peace. The past consumed their whole consciousness. The present did not exist—and the future was inconceivable.

Adapted from Gowenlock, T. R. (1937). *Soldiers of darkness*. New York, NY: Doubleday, Doran. Retrieved from <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/armistice.htm>

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