

the attack upon an American oil boat.¹ House warned him that the German threat of using submarines recklessly might have to be taken at its face value.

Colonel House to the President

[Telegram]

LONDON, May 5, 1915

I believe that a sharp note indicating your determination to demand full reparation, would be sufficient in this instance.

I am afraid a more serious breach may at any time occur, for they seem to have no regard for consequences.

EDWARD HOUSE

On the morning of May 7, House and Grey drove out to Kew. 'We spoke of the probability of an ocean liner being sunk,' recorded House, 'and I told him if this were done, a flame of indignation would sweep across America, which would in itself probably carry us into the war.' An hour later, House was with King George in Buckingham Palace. 'We fell to talking, strangely enough,' the Colonel wrote that night, 'of the probability of Germany sinking a trans-Atlantic liner. . . . He said, "Suppose they should sink the *Lusitania* with American passengers on board. . . ."'

That evening House dined at the American Embassy. A despatch came in, stating that at two in the afternoon a German submarine had torpedoed and sunk the *Lusitania* off the southern coast of Ireland. Many lives had been lost.

Thus did Germany interpret the Freedom of the Seas.

¹ The *Gulflight*, torpedoed by a German submarine on May 1, but not sunk. The master died of heart failure the next morning, and two sailors were drowned.