In speaking about Armistice Day of 1941, under the auspices of The American Legion which knows something about the true meaning of Armistice Day, I hope I can speak in frank and plain words which no American can misunderstand. At its national convention at Milwaukee in September, The American Legion solemnly resolved that:

"Our present national objective is the defeat of Hitler and what he stands for, and all diverting controversies should be subordinated to the main objective. We appeal for unity on this national objective."

That declaration seems quite clear to me. It may be less than a declaration of war, but it is certainly a declaration of a determination to defeat an enemy. If we can do that with some other people handling the actual fighting, we may do it that way. If not, it may be assumed we will do it the way we did before. When the President of the United States has ordered the Navy of the United States to "shoot first," I see very little occasion for further palaver about when the "shooting war" will begin. Palpably it will begin when the first American war vessel sees the first German submarine, surface raider, or airplane; or when the first armed German raider sees an American war vessel. Perhaps it has begun already.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the conflict at this exact date, it now seems trivial and wasteful of time and energy to continue the debate about the details of American conduct. America has decided upon her line of conduct. We decided it before any resolution such as I have read had been passed by The American Legion. The decision was made in the constitutional American way, by the President and the Congress. Congress made its decision when it passed the lend-lease bill. That meant a complete end to any pretense of neutrality. We joined one side of the war then and there, by solemn act of Congress, and that was that. Already we had performed hostile acts, including the sale of fifty destroyers to England. We since have declared hostile intentions, including the order to "shoot first." You say that is only the President's order. I say it is the order also of Congress and of the whole people of this country. Had it been otherwise, Congress would have declared for its rescission immediately it was promulgated.
On this Armistice Day I take the liberty of thus speaking—plainly—about where we now stand—definitely a party to the greatest war in history—because Armistice Day is a day of celebration of our victory in what was previously the greatest war in history. We won that war, we the people of the United States. We sent two million men to fight Germany at a place thousands of miles from our own soil. We sent them across an ocean infested with enemy submarines. While our allies fought longer than we did, and sacrificed vastly more, it fell to our lot to throw into the contest the balance of power. The splendid American Army commanded by John J. Pershing won and ended the World War. Make no mistake about it. The victory came through our participation and the final and deciding blows were ours. That is the victory we celebrate today.

There is of course more to Armistice Day than a celebration of victory. By our commemorations at Arlington National Cemetery, where the Unknown Soldier rests in silent glory on the hillside above the Nation's capital, we give to the day something of a Memorial Day, and keep alive the memory of those who gave their blood in service to a cause. Annually we commemorate on this day the whole purpose of our effort in the last war. It is well that we do so, because the memory of that purpose is a help to us in clear thinking about the present war.

Why did the United States go to war in 1917? Why did we enter upon a war in which our manpower proved the deciding factor on land after our Navy had proved the deciding power on the sea? We have been told that we entered that war "to make the world safe for democracy." Permit me to remind you that the phrase about making the world safe for democracy was not coined until we were long advanced on our course into that conflict. Let me remind you that when the Lusitania was sunk without warning and with the loss of hundreds of American lives, we were half way into the war. And that when Germany declared for unrestricted submarine warfare we went all the way in. I think those facts are very much worth remembering today—namely that we went into the World War because Germany sank our ships. We went into it because we believe in the freedom of the seas, and because we believe the American Flag shall be allowed to fly unmolested on any ocean in the world. We believed that when we fought England in 1812. We believed it even earlier when we sent Stephen Decatur to clean the pirates out of the Mediterranean Sea. We believed it in 1917 when we decided to put an end to German piracy by submarine, and we believe it in 1941, although it has taken us a little time to realize the fact.

I think we should be honest with ourselves and admit that most of us in the United States got softened up during the good times following the last war and decided that we would all just be rich and prosperous and not fight any
more. I am very proud to be a member of The American Legion, but I am willing to
admit that even that bunch of first-rate Americans had begun to forget the plain
truths, and had begun to get the neutrality fever which was prevalent in the
United States at that time. Yes indeed, we of the Legion met in a national con-
vention at Chicago a couple of weeks after the present war started in Poland, and
passed a resolution indorsing strict neutrality.

Well, neutrality sounded good then and sounds good yet - if you can get
everybody to respect your neutrality. The only trouble with neutrality for a big
Nation as rich as ours is that the only way you can maintain your neutrality is
to fight for it. We had a neutrality law in 1939 - and we still have part of it -
and it was a fine looking law but it had one weakness. It only worked one way.
It made us neutral but it did not make the other fellow neutral. That is where
law falls down. You can pass laws to limit what your own people do, but you can
not pass a law which any other nation has any obligation to respect.

It was that way with the neutrality which President Wilson declared in
1914 when the last war began. It kept us from sinking other peoples' ships, but
it did not keep the Germans from sinking the Lusitania and other ships loaded with
American citizens.

So it was in 1939. Our neutrality law kept us from sending ships into
the war zone, but it did not keep the Germans from sending submarines outside the
war zone and into the South Atlantic to sink an American steamer. It did not
keep the Germans from declaring half the North Atlantic Ocean a "war zone" and
thereby telling us to keep our ships in port, or close to our own coasts.

Step by step we see the history of 1915 and 1916 repeated, American
ships sunk and threats of sinking more, rules for the conduct of the Atlantic
Ocean being issued by Germany as if she owned the ocean, and submarines being
turned loose to try to enforce those German rules by promiscuous murder on the
high seas. There is no use trying to fool ourselves. There is no use in wishfully
thinking that we can keep out of it all by just closing our eyes to what is going
on. The plain fact is that we are forced to a flat choice. We can choose to
maintain our rights and keep our ships afloat and our commerce operating and our
flag flying on the seven seas. Or we can surrender our rights to the aggressor,
turn the ocean over to the pirates, give up our trade and come home with our tail
curled between our legs, ready to live off our own fat so long as the big boys
will stay away and let us alone.

I think that is a fair statement of our situation today, expressed in
simple words. It is almost exactly the situation we faced in the months before
our entry into the last world war. The decision that we made at that time was to
assert and maintain the position of the United States of America on sea as well as on land. We asserted it, in the words of President Wilson, in his war message. We maintained it by the courage and power of the United States Navy and the courage and power of the American Expeditionary Force. The Navy joined with the allied navies to put an end to the submarine piracy. The North Sea mine barrage was the result of American naval participation. The convoying of our troops and supplies was a Navy job. When we entered the war, Great Britain was threatened with defeat by starvation because of the sinking of her food ships. Within a few months that threat was eliminated by the aid of the United States Navy.

Today we are celebrating the victory of the forces of the United States in that war, and we have need to remember that while the bulk of the fighting was done by the Army, and the majority of dead and wounded were from the A.E.F., it was a Navy job to bring the seas under control so that our A.E.F. could get to France and be sustained there, and the Navy was just as ready, just as brave, and just as capable as any force which ever flew the Stars and Stripes.

That is worth remembering on this Armistice Day, because there are ships of the United States Navy patrolling the sea lanes today, protecting American lives and property, facing the submarine peril and added peril from the air, with orders from the President of the United States to shoot, and to shoot first. That is something to remember, and that Navy and every member of it is something to hold close to the heart of every American and close in the prayers of every American as those boys go about their duty of forming the first line of protection for your home and mine.

Referring again to the resolutions of the recent rational convention of The American Legion, I would like to quote from another of them, which says:

"We want America strong enough to meet any possible attack before it arrives and to turn the enemy back so that our homes remain intact and our families secure. If fighting is necessary to defend the United States, we insist upon being prepared to do the fighting outside of the United States."

We are celebrating today a victory in a war which was fought in Europe, but won by the United States. It is just possible that the time has come for us to re-examine some of the discussions of the past twenty years in which we talked about being always neutral and never sending a soldier away from American soil again. The members of the Legion, with perhaps a little closer memory about 1917 and 1918 than anybody else, are still in favor of having America defended before the shells or the bombs can begin to fall upon any American home anywhere.

It seems to me that each day of the present world confusion lends strength to all that Americans fought for in the war of 1917-18, which ended with the Armistice we celebrate today. I think we are all coming to realize that what
we fought for was right and just and fair and American. Also we may be obliged
to state with due regrets that the peace which came out of that war did not suc­
cede in keeping the gains which we had won at arms. A great many words have been
said and written about the failure of the world to achieve the peace which we
thought would come with that victory. I am afraid that no words which can be
said today will alter the fact; no matter how we arrived where we are today, the
facts of our present situation must be faced clearly, honestly, without self-pity,
self-delusion, self-confusion.

We are faced today once more with the decision whether we shall keep
our flag afloat. We are today again obliged to remember that the deck of a ship
flying the American Flag is the soil of the United States, exactly as much so
as a wheat field in Kansas or a pavement in Chicago. Once more we must put
straight before us the fact that the life of an American on such a ship is going
to be as safe as the life of an American in Kansas or Chicago, or else the United
States is not going to be a first rate nation. The decisions which we must make
are therefore primarily our own. It does not matter so much what we think about
naziism and communism and fascism in one country or another. The first question
is what about our Americanism in the United States. Shall we abandon it before
each threat which makes it difficult to sustain? Or shall we sustain it as we
did before the Armistice of 1918?

President Wilson, who led us, reluctantly, to war in 1917, was far
from satisfied with the peace which was made in 1919 but never ratified by the
United States. In a letter written in 1921 to the late Sid Houston, one of the
organizers of The American Legion, President Wilson said:--

"It is our privilege not only to indulge in high and solemn pride and
grief for the heroes of that great struggle but also to re-dedicate ourselves to
the achievement of the great objects for which the war was fought. We shall not
be happy; we shall not be able to enjoy the full pride of the day's recollections
until we have made sure that the duties that grew out of the war have been ful­
filled to the utmost. Are we sure? If we are not shall we not soon take steps to
do whatever has been omitted?"

Those words of twenty years ago sound strangely like a prophecy.

Has not the decision of America been made? Are we not now committed
to an end of neutrality, and a beginning of Americanism? Without bloodshed if we
can, but by another victory if we must, are we not determined that we shall "take
steps to do whatever has been omitted?"

The Stars and Stripes flies high today because there were men and women
in the last war determined to keep it so. I believe there is no American, honestly
facing the plain issues, who wants to lower it. November 11, 1918, no banner
flew or had ever flown higher before the eyes of all mankind. Let it be our
heritage to keep it so.