

The Guns of August Study Guide

The Guns of August by Barbara W. Tuchman

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Summary

The Guns of August by Barbara W. Tuchman is the story of the prelude to World War I and the very early days of the conflict. The British, the Belgian King, and President Woodrow Wilson were sensible minded. As such, they wanted no part of war. However, there was another faction that was anxious to conquer. The Germans were emboldened by the war of 1870 in which they trounced the French at Sedan. They wanted more.

Some skirmishes leading toward the major conflict seemed insignificant at the time. The Russians beat the Austrians in a short-lived conflict. The Japanese were victorious over the humiliated Russian Army. There were weak brothers and strong sisters who were foes and friends on the European continent. Those nations who did not have a powerful army or naval force sought pacts with stronger nations who would protect them if war became a reality.

The big bullies in the schoolyard were the Germans who were thirsty for war. There was something inherent in the German mind and soul that was part of their psyche before, during, and after World War I. The Germans felt that they were special, very special in fact. They considered themselves to be more intelligent, better educated, and harder workers than other people in the world. The Germans also thought they were the epitome of a peace-loving nation. Their arrogance was the basis of their belief that they should dominate the European continent and ultimately the entire world. Even though Germany lost World War I, that sentiment of superiority lingered and reared its ugly head again in the 1930s.

The war which everyone expected and feared began with the invasion of Belgium. The first act of war by the Germans was also one of the most cruel. It exposed the Germans as duplicitous liars, cruel marauders, and barbaric murderers. The Germans promised that if they could use Belgium land to pass through to France, they'd clean up any messes they left behind. The Belgians wouldn't allow them to access their land. As a result the Germans invaded the country. They pillaged and burned villages and tortured and executed innocent men, women, and children. They apparently forgot their promise to clean up after themselves.

The Guns of August tells the story of the first month of World War I, the most violent and cruel war that the world had ever seen. It changed the world forever. World War I left its scars. Its far-reaching impact is still felt to this day.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

Chapter 1: A Funeral

On the May morning of 1910, nine kings rode in the funeral of Edward VII of England. It was a spectacle that made the crowds that had gathered gasp. The kings were followed by five heirs apparent, four dowager queens, and three reigning queens among other royals and state officials from the seventy nations that were represented. Riding next to the new king, George V, was William II, the German Emperor. William II was related to the British royal family. His mother had been an English princess, sister of the dead king. William despised Edward who he felt had stood in the way of Germany emerging as a European power. To Kaiser Wilhelm, Edward was Satan himself.

During a European tour in 1907, Wilhelm had resented Edward's visits to the kings of Italy and Spain. William considered George, the new king, to be a "nice boy." King Albert of the Belgians disliked the pomp and circumstance. He was thirty-five at the time. In later years he would be known to all as a symbol of heroism and tragedy. The King of Holland, the Emperor of Japan, a Prince of Siam, the Crown Princes of Serbia, Rumania, and Montenegro among many others were in attendance.

Edward was known as the Uncle of Europe, and he was literally the uncle of many of the European royals. He was a popular king who reigned only nine years. His unexpected death brought a flood of condolences. The public knew that he was sick one day and learned he was dead the next. Through his personal diplomacy, Edward had formed an alliance of sorts with two old enemies, France and Russia, and a new power, Japan.

When Germany gained power with its naval program of 1900, Edward decided to patch things up with France. In a visit to France in 1903, he was greeted with sullen and angry crowds. He ignored the effrontery and smiled and waved to the people. Edward praised the French profusely during his visit and charmed the people. By the time he left, the people were cheering and praising him. The Germans were suspicious of the new alliance and took it as an aversion to Germany. The Kaiser wanted an agreement with England. At Queen Victoria's funeral he expressed his wishes to Edward. But, when Edward showed signs of agreeing, the Kaiser became suspicious and an agreement was never attained. Germany would depend on its powerful navy to frighten English into submission.

Bismarck had warned Germany to be content with land power. But the Kaiser failed to listen. No one had believed that England and France would patch things up. When an agreement was reached, William was enraged. William longed to have the adoration of the Parisians – Paris was all that was beautiful and desirable. But the Kaiser was never invited to Paris and died without ever seeing it. Although he admired Paris, he was



envious. Everyone was anxious to visit Paris but not Berlin. He thought the huge navy he was amassing would buy him respect. The people of Germany shared the Kaiser's need for recognition. They felt entitled to high esteem from the rest of the world. The Kaiser sought recognition through threats and show of power. When he dispatched troops to China and the Boxer Rebellion he compared them to the Huns of Attila.

The premier of France discussed with Edward the German lust for power and its policy to exterminate France. Under the urging of France, an Anglo-Russian agreement was signed in 1907. The two countries were old adversaries, and the old resentment gave way to new pressure. The Kaiser viewed the Russian Czar, Nicholas II, as "only fit to live in a country house and grow turnips." The Kaiser tried to lure the Czar out of his alliance with France. He wrote him letters and offered his advice. He offered to send German soldiers to protect him from his enemies. The Kaiser was not successful in breaking Russia's alliance with France. As a result, the Kaiser drew up an agreement proclaiming that Russian and Germany would aid each other in case of attack. Nicholas signed the agreement which Kaiser took as a diplomatic and strategic victory. The agreement repudiated his treaty with France.

The Kaiser was sure that Edward wanted to go to war but was too cowardly to do so. He wanted the Kaiser to strike first. He expressed his ideas of a war in a newspaper interview. It was so ill-received that he went into retreat for a time and backed off his talk of war. Besides, scholars had declared war unprofitable for both the defeated and the victor. "The Great Illusion," a book by Norman Angell that held this theory became the rage. A war in the twentieth century would cause financial ruin and widespread suffering.

Copies of the book were given to the Germans at the same time German General von Bernhardi was penning a book, "Germany and the Next War." To Bernhardi war was a biological necessity and Germany had to choose between becoming a world power or suffering a downfall. Bernhardi discussed the need for starting a war at the most opportune time to the aggressor. France had to be annihilated once and for all.

King Edward did not live to read Bernhardi's book. Although the Kaiser showed great respect and reverence publicly for the dead king, he was scheming behind the scenes. He proposed to M. Pichon of France that France should side with Germany should Germany and England become engaged in a conflict. Kaiser even tried to escort the Queen Mother who detested him. The funeral process to Paddington Station where the body was to go by train to Windsor for burial was long and featured Edward's riderless horse with boots reversed in the stirrups.

Chapter 2: Plans

"Let the Last Man on the Right Brush the Channel with His Sleeve"

The heart of France lay between Brussels and Paris. Belgium, which had been assured neutrality, lay in the path between Germany and the heart of France. A neutral Belgium was the creation of England. Belgium's coast was England's frontier. Based on the



terms of several treaties, Germany would have to fight on two fronts against both Russia and France if war broke out. England's role was vague and uncertain. Fighting over Belgium could be a cause for English involvement. England had vowed to defend Belgium. Germany decided that in the event of war, that Germany could attack France by way of Belgium. In a two-front war, Germany would have to focus on its most powerful enemy – France. Russia, because of its great distance away, would take longer to mobilize. And once it did, France would already be defeated. The German Army numbered a million and a half. It was too large to stay within the boundaries of France and there were two neutral countries at either end of the French lines – Switzerland and Belgium. The Germans needed to use Belgium to maneuver its great numbers.

German strategist Alfred Schlieffen's first plan to violate Belgium was formulated in 1899 suggesting that Germany would use just the east corner of the country in a conflict with France. Over the years the plan expanded its potential use of Belgium land. Schlieffen dreamed of a double victory against France on two fronts. The Kaiser accepted the plan. What the world thought was irrelevant. The triumph of Germany was all that mattered.

The German character had been stoked for centuries by the likes of Fichte who saw the Germans as the chosen people who should occupy the supreme place in history; of Hegel who saw the Germans leading the world, of Nietzsche who told them they were Supermen and of Treitschke who saw a power grab as the highest moral duty of a state. They lived in the past glories of victories over Austria and France. The Germans knew that the war would be a protracted one. And as such difficult to plan for compared to short decisive battles. Many European economists felt the war couldn't last long because of its cost. Schlieffen's advice was to strike first. If France got wind of any aggression, they would break their agreement and involve Belgium.

Clausewitz, another strategist, advocated the importance of public opinion. A few early victories would capture the support of the people. He also stressed that indemnity would allow them to conduct a war at the enemy's expense. Whoever started the war would use Belgium territory and Belgium would offer no resistance. Kaiser had hoped to bribe greedy Leopold II, King of the Belgians. He was unsuccessful. Schlieffen favored threatening Belgium with assault before the war began demanding that they cede railways and troops. British troops would ultimately be involved, and he wanted a quick victory over both.

In order not to spread younger troops too thin, Schlieffen recommended that reserve officers – veterans who had served their time in the army – be used on the front line. Expanding his forces thusly, Schlieffen felt that envelopment was possible. Schlieffen died in 1913 just before the war. He worked on his military plans until his death. General von Moltke, his successor, was more conservative and practical about the capabilities of the German Army and changed Schlieffen's plan accordingly allowing for the unexpected. Moltke at first feared the Russians but his concern lessened when he was assured that the Russians would not be ready for war until 1916.



In 1914, two events sharpened Germany's readiness for war. First, England had begun naval talks with the Russians. Next, Germany completed the widening of the Kiel Canal allowing direct access from the North Sea to the Baltic.

Chapter 3: The Shadow of Sedan

General de Castelnau, Deputy Chief of the French General Staff, was paid a visit in 1913 by the Military Governor of Lille who protested the abandonment of Lille as a fortified city. It was a short distance from the Belgian border and would be used by an invading army. Castelnau was sure that the Germans would cut themselves too thin to use that route. The French could cut the Germans in half! The French did not ignore the possibility of envelopment by a German right wing. The stronger the Germans made their right wing, the weaker the left and center would be. The French had been soundly defeated by the Germans decades before and wanted to recover from the humiliation of Sedan. The defeat had remained a stain on the French consciousness. The thought of it happening again was a nightmare.

France revived its faith in herself in the generation after 1870. It was this spirit that would lead them to victory should the threat of "again" present itself. France would not go down in defeat again. Attention was focused away from the Belgian frontier in favor of a strategy that gravitated toward a French offensive that could break through the Rhine. Only a small force would be left behind to defend the Belgian frontier. General Foch of the War College advocated a strategy that blended spirit, strategy and common sense. Foch believed that victory was dependent not upon a pre-planned battle schedule like the Germans advocated but rather by being adaptable and ready to improvise to fit circumstances. But Foch was not averse to the placement of advance guards and recognized the elements of firepower and the need for an obedient army.

Unfortunately, Colonel Grandmaison who was the Director of the Bureau of Military Operations only grasped the spiritual or metaphysical aspect of Foch's philosophy and not the security and disciplinary elements. To Grandmaison, "all command decisions must be inspired by the will to seize and retain the initiative." Victory meant imposing one's will upon the enemy. In 1913, Field Regulations for the conduct of war included the declaration that the French Army would "march straight against the enemy without hesitation." There was no law other than the offensive. Success came to the army that has suffered the least and whose will and morale were the strongest. References to Foch's practical concerns about security and discipline were nowhere to be seen in the Field Regulations.

In 1911, a final effort to commit France to a defensive strategy was attempted by General Michel, Vice President of the Supreme War Council. He was the ranking officer in the army. Michel felt certain that the Germans would take advantage of Belgium in their advancement. Michel's plans were considered merely defensive and were unpopular with his fellow officers. Michel proposed augmenting the French front-line with reserves. His fellow officers looked down on the reserves and felt that merging them with active duty divisions would be a drag on the army's strength. Those who opposed Michel demanded reform to match the increase in the German Army.



Increased numbers in training and longer (three years) tours of duty would mean less reliance on reserves. They felt that reserves would create an army that was incapable of the will to conquer. They were certain that the Kaiser would not mix reserves into the active German army and therefore would not have enough men to cut through Belgium and at the same time defend their left and center flanks.

Messimy, the French Minister of War, suppressed Michel's plans and recommended that Michel removed from his command. He believed that Michel represented a national danger with his insane proposal. But, Michel persisted and presented his plan the War Council where he got absolutely no support. Michel was removed from his post and reassigned as Military Governor of Paris. Messimy advocated replacing the current French army uniform consisting of a blue jacket and red pants with a duller, less visible gray-green or gray-blue uniform. Opponents found such a change unimaginable. The colorful uniform was what gave the soldier his vivid aspect. The dull colors would be contrary to French taste and to military function. Messimy's proposal was voted down.

General Joseph Joffre was named as Michel's replacement. Joffre had a vast and storied military career. Foch had left behind his strategic plan which became the framework of Plan 17 which was completed in April 1913 without further discussion. Joffre spent the next eight months reorganizing the army according to the plan and to the new Field Regulations developed by the Supreme War Council. By February 1914, the reorganized army was ready for distribution to the generals of the five French armies. Plan 17 contained no over-all objective and no schedule of operations.

The five generals were not permitted to discuss with each other the classified secrets they were shown. It was only necessary that they carry out the orders. The Commander in Chief's intention was to "advance with all forces united to the attack of the German armies." The French offensive would consist of two major actions – one to the right of the German fortified area of Metz-Thionville and the other eastward across the border of Lorraine. The plan of attack would deal with any German violation of neutral territory through Belgium.

Plan 17 called for the five French armies along the frontier in Alsace to the Franco-Belgian border. Two-thirds of the Belgian frontier that General Michel had wanted to use in defense of France was left undefended. Joffre had found Michel's plan pure "foolishness." Even though the French General Staff had intelligence that the German right-wing was powerful they disregarded it. A German officer who had defected had even confirmed the intelligence with official documents outlining the German invasion plan through Belgium. While General Pendezac, Chief of the French General Staff, was concerned most of his colleagues doubted that the Germans could pull it off. It would be impossible to mobilize that many soldiers. They thought the intelligence was a ruse to draw them away from the real attack. If the Germans violated Belgian territory, it would bring the English into the conflict. Would the Germans really do that to themselves?

Jean Jaures, the great socialist leader, recommended that France use its reservists because he was certain that Germany would be doing the same. If so, France would be far outnumbered without the extra forces. Other scholars argued for fixing France's



attention on a German offensive through Belgium as the intelligence suggested. In 1913, indisputable evidence that the Germans were recruiting large numbers of reservists fell into French hands. The Germans were recruiting a reserve unit for every corps. But still French officials were unconvinced. They wanted to focus their efforts on the offensive, not the defensive. They were able to ignore solid intelligence in favor of the belief that the reserve officers would be used for ordinary services and not for active duty. They convinced the others that a strong German right-wing would make their left and center vulnerable to French assault.

Analysis

Chapter 1

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany attended the funeral of King Edward VII of England. The Kaiser detested Edward and always felt that he was slighted by the English King. Perhaps, his thinking was correct. The King visited rulers of other European countries, but he did not request to see the Kaiser. He must have realized for a very long time that Edward wanted to go to war with Germany but was too cowardly to do so. He wanted the Kaiser to strike first. He was rebuffed when he sought an alliance agreement with Edward who basically ignored his request.

The resentment Kaiser Wilhelm had for King Edward undoubtedly spilled over on to his general feelings about England. There was talk of war before the years that lead up to World War I. Kaiser Wilhelm looked at England as an enemy before the conflict started. The Germans wanted to have dominance over Europe, and England was one of the Kaiser's prime targets.

Chapter 2

Belgium was an important country at the onset of World War I. It was geographically located between Germany and France. It was the most direct route between the German border and Paris. Belgium wanted to maintain its neutrality. Germany pressured Belgium to allow it to cross its territory to France, but Belgium refused. Both France and England had signed alliances with Belgium that they would defend its neutrality should it be attacked.

For centuries, the Germans had considered themselves superior to other nationalities and felt that they should ascend to a position of dominance in Europe and in fact in the entire world.

The shadow of the French defeat to the Germans in 1870 at Sedan, France, loomed over the French military and politicians. It was a humiliating defeat that they had never gotten over. The word "again" would creep into their minds when the thought of the Germans invading them occurred. They would not be defeated again.

Chapter 3



French General Foch of the War College was an advocate of a strategy that blended spirit, strategy, and common sense. He believed that winning a war was not dependent on planned battles or exotic weaponry. It was the spirit – the elan – that would lead France to victory. Colonel Grandmaison, the Director of the Bureau of Military Operations, did not agree with the metaphysical approach of Foch. He believed that success came to the army that was on the offensive. Defense was not as important. There was much debate over these two theories over the years. Both of these strategies had a lasting impact on the French military and found their way into WWI.

The French Minister of War Messimy selected General Joseph Joffre as his Vice President of the Supreme War Council. Both of these men would play huge roles in August of 1914, the early days of WWI.

Vocabulary

dowager, regnant, cortege, nostalgia, bane, potentates, diabolical, provocative, implicit, erudite, perfidious, axiom, perpetuity, signatories, inviolability, mesmerized, amorphous, indemnity, avarice, chagrin sardonic, inherent, clandestine, imponderable, aphorism, ardent, abstruse, metaphysics, dogmatic, anathema, intransigent, riposte



Chapters 4 - 6

Summary

Chapter 4: A Single British Soldier

Europe was shaken by the Japanese defeat of Russia in 1905. It led to the development of joint military plans between Britain and France. Three weeks after the Russian defeat, the German Kaiser flung a challenge at France with his appearance at Tangier. Was it the “again” moment that France so feared? England reacted to the Kaiser’s Tangier appearance. The British army was in the process of reorganization. They engaged in a theoretical war game in which the Germans attacked through Belgium. They concluded that if such an attack took place, all would be lost without British intervention.

Nerves were frazzled in the fear that Germany would take advantage of the Russian defeat and start a conflict. The French approached the English to begin negotiations for joint military operations. The British warned the French not to violate Belgium territory unless forced. England was committed to the defense of Belgium. French negotiators asserted their belief that England and France had to show a “unity of command” in Belgium. The English determined that it would take two months to dispatch four divisions on the Continent. The English continued talks with the French with the caveat that the negotiations did not commit the British.

British military officers toured the frontier with French officials, selecting landing bases and staging areas along the front. The “Esher triumvirate” had been established to govern policy pertaining to war. It did not approve of using the British Army as an additional French force. After nerves settled down following the Kaiser’s threat, the joint planning that had begun in 1905 did not move forward. Lord Esher supported action in Belgium independent of France. Many on the British side doubted the military capacity of the French army. If the Germans soundly defeated the French on land, Britain wanted no part of that. The British favored an attack on the Germans closer to their home along the Baltic coast of East Prussia a mere 90 miles from Berlin. The French plan was thought to be “suicidal idiocy.”

While talks stalled for the next several years, a strong relationship developed between General Henry Wilson, Commander of Britain’s Staff College and the aforementioned French General Foch. In January of 1909, a student brought an article written by Schlieffen protesting changes made to his plan for the envelopment of the French and British by his successor, Moltke. The article sparked the first meeting between Wilson and Foch. The two men got on well and continued their talks both in London and in Paris on a regular basis. The two men formed a close professional as well as personal relationship.



Foch stressed that a small force of British soldiers would be useless. In turn, Wilson tried to convince his colleagues about the urgency of the matter. War with Germany was inevitable. In August, 1910, when Wilson was named as Director of Military operations, Anglo-French military cooperation became a priority. Wilson and Foch agreed that Germany would move through Belgium. Wilson would tour the old battlefields of 1870 by bicycle to familiarize himself with the territory and perhaps refresh his mind with the potential of “again.” Wilson had a large map of Belgium in his office with every possible path that the Germans could take marked. He was informed by the generals that the British army was trained and ready. But, plans of transporting and feeding the army were non-existent. This lack of planning angered and frustrated Wilson.

By March 1911, Wilson was able to bring about a schedule of mobilization of six infantry divisions. The timing was good. Serious talk of war ran through Europe in July of 1911. Wilson rushed to Paris at the same time General Michel was removed and there would be no more discussion of his defensive plan. Wilson drew up a memorandum with General Dubail committing a force of 150,000 men and 67,000 horses should the British have to intervene. The agreement provided for the unity of command that had been desired for so long.

When Wilson returned to London he emphatically told English officials that Britain must join the French, must mobilize on the same day, and must send all six divisions. His words were not well-received; but, he was given another opportunity at a secret meeting of the Imperial Defense Committee. Wilson presented the marked map of Belgium and lectured on how Germany would attack through the neutral country. British intervention could stop the Germans in their tracks. It was shocking when that afternoon the British Navy Admiral explained his plan to land on the shores of Prussia. The army and navy plans had no connection at all! The Admiral's plans was argued against and the army plan carried the day. Lord Fisher lamented the Admiral's defeat noting that the British Navy was what was needed to keep the Germans out of Paris.

The Cabinet members were upset that they hadn't been included in the secret meeting and blamed Wilson for the slight. While some in the government maintained that the talks between Wilson and Foch were just that, Lord Esher pointed out to Prime Minister Asquith that the talks committed England's involvement. In 1912, a naval agreement was reached between France and England. Richard Haldane, Secretary of War, had made a last ditch effort by appealing to the Kaiser to not increase his naval fleet. However, it failed. The Kaiser would only maintain his current fleet if Britain would maintain neutrality in the event of war between Germany and France. Of course, there was already a military agreement between France and England. Britain could not agree to the Kaiser's demand. Haldane returned to London certain that Germany wanted to not only conquer France but to achieve domination over the entire world.

The agreement was laid out in a letter from Britain to France. It was made intentionally vague, indicating that if there were a threat of war both parties would take into consideration the plans of the other. The document managed to please the anti-war groups because no firm commitment was included in the letter and the British Cabinet felt informed. The real plans were saved while its opponents were quieted. Wilson



continued to make his due-diligence trips to the front. By 1913, he was visiting Paris every other month. The Belgians warned that if British troops entered their territory before a German invasion that they would open fire. By the spring of 1914, the joint work of the British and French was completed.

Chapter 5: The Russian Steam Roller

Russia's size and numbers represented the largest piece of the military planning chessboard. Russia was ready to leave its defeat to Japan behind.. Although Russia had been soundly defeated on many occasions, the iconic image of the charging Cossacks was burned into everyone's mind. The Cossacks who were willing to die for their country were the stereotype of the Russian Army. At a time of war, the Russians could amass a staggering 6.5 million soldiers. Since the Japanese debacle, the Russian army had undergone change and showed signs of improvement.

The French depended on the Russians to draw off a portion of the German forces opposing them. The hope was for Russia to launch an offensive on Germany's rear forces at the same time France engaged the Germans on the Western Front. France recognized that Russia would not be able to mobilize in less than fifteen days. But it was crucial that Germany was engaged on two fronts at once. The Russians were anxious to repair their reputation and return to glory. They agreed to a simultaneous assault on the Germans. General Jilinsky undertook the task of having 800,000 men heading for the German front by May 15.

British observers noticed many defects in the Russian military including poor intelligence operations and a lack of swiftness, dash, and initiative among other flaws. But, it was a consensus that having the Russian giant in motion was a plus. Mobilization of the Russian army was a huge task given the distance the soldiers had to travel and the lack of adequate railroads. However, it was agreed that the Russian invasion of German territory would have a monumental impact. Many of the Russian generals were old and politically appointed. Many soldiers were considered lazy and disinterested. The Russian military system was not designed to allow the best officers to rise to the top. Czar Nicholas was considered shallow and uneducated in statecraft. After receiving word about the annihilation of a Russian fleet, he stuffed the telegram in his pocket and continued his game of tennis.

At the bottom of the regime were the secret police who penetrated all levels of government. In between the Czar and the secret police were bureaucrats and officials who performed the actual business of the government. These men served at the pleasure of the Czar. Most didn't last long thanks to the interference of the Czar's wife who didn't trust anyone. The reign of Nicholas II was plagued by disasters, massacres, defeats and uprisings culminating in the revolution of 1905. He was forced to either grant the constitution that the people demanded or restore order militarily. He opted for the first action because Nicolas, the Grand Duke, refused to accept the second.

The move was not popular and neither was the Grand Duke. Many Russians felt that an alliance with Germany was a natural fit given their common interest in autocracies as



opposed to the democracies of the West. The growing threat and aggression of Germany made Russia an ally with England for the first time in a century. Russia was a blend of agonized souls, socialists, and anarchists. One British diplomat proclaimed that everyone in Russia was a little mad. The Minister of War, General Sukhomlinov, was old, pleasure-loving, and lazy. It was difficult to get him to work and even more difficult to get him to tell the truth. He was leading the Russian war effort. He hated the term “modern war” and preferred sabers and lances over firepower. He lasted because he was charming, entertaining, and told funny stories. His fourth wife was 32 years younger than he. Her beauty and charm more often than not kept him away from his duties. He stole money from the government to cover personal expenses. Ultimately, his young wife divorced him. In 1917, he was tried for various crimes and was sentenced to hard labor for life. The Bolsheviks freed him a few months later. He spent the rest of his life in Berlin.

Sukhomlinov was the Minister of War from 1908 to 1914. In preparation for the war, he halted the movement for military reform. While he allowed others to do his work, he did not allow them to have freedom of ideas. He believed in the bayonet over the bullet and failed to build up factories for increased production of ammunition and rifles. He began the war with 850 shells per gun compared to 2,000 to 3,000 shells per gun used by Western armies. The Russian Army had 60 batteries of heavy artillery, while the German Army had 381. Sukhomlinov avoided Grand Duke Nicholas like the plague. The Grand Duke was younger than Sukhomlinov and a reformer.

The Grand Duke had been named to reorganize the army after the Japanese war. The Grand Duke was the most admired man in the army. He commanded the respect and admiration of others. The Czarina was not a fan of the Grand Duke – another person she didn’t trust. She feared he was trying to get the Czar to abdicate. The Duke decided in prewar plans to command the front against the Germans. The Duke detested the Germans and often said that only if Germany were crushed and divided up into little states could the world live in peace.

The Russian General Staff had worked out two alternate campaign plans. If Germany attacked France, Russia would strike Austria. The second plan for the German front was the invasion of East Prussia in a two-pronged attack. Once Germany was defeated, a march to Berlin would follow. The Germans would not willingly give up East Prussia with its rich farmlands and beautiful lakes and forests. The Kaiser came there every year to hunt. The region had been under German rule for 700 years. The many railroads in East Prussia would give an edge to the army defending it. The Germans' strategy was based on the idea that Russia have to keep large forces in the Far East to guard against Japan. But, that didn’t turn out to be the case. If Russia did try to attack Prussia, it would have to do so with a two-pronged approach. The plan was to attack with all available strength at the Russian army when it came within reach.

Outbreak

Bismarck had predicted that a foolish act would start the next war. The assassination of Austrian heir apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Serbian nationalists on June 28,



1914, was that foolish act. Russia had been humiliated and weakened after the Japanese defeat and had been forced to kowtow to the German Kaiser. Russia was ready for revenge. On July 5, Germany assured Austria that Germany would be its faithful supporter of whatever punishment was levied against Serbia. Germany's assurance was in direct conflict with Russia. Austria declared war on Serbia on July 28 and began a bombardment the next day. Russia began to mobilize, bringing an ultimatum from Germany to demobilize within 12 hours. Chaos ruled. State leaders tried to back away from the war, but they were pulled back into it.

Chapter 6: August 1: Berlin

The Russians ignored the German ultimatum. The German ambassador in St. Petersburg was instructed to declare war by 5 o'clock in the afternoon on August 1st. In Berlin in front of the palace on August 1st, tense crowds milled in the streets by the thousands. They had been told the night before by the Kaiser that Germany was being forced into war. After the time had passed for the Russians to respond to the ultimatum, mobilization was announced. The people struck up the national anthem. There was wild cheering among the crowd. Several suspected Russian spies were killed over the next few days.

The trigger had been pulled. The process of preparing and mobilizing 2 million men for war had begun. There was a fixed schedule and everything was to move as planned. The Kaiser was in a somber mood. He had not really wanted a general war. He wanted greater power and prestige; but, he preferred that his victories be won through intimidation and threats. Had he taken on too much in fighting France and Russia not to mention England?

At the last minute there was a chance to avoid war. For years a possible solution had been discussed over Alsace. If the territory were to be made a Federal State within the German Empire, France would have no reason to try to liberate the lost province. Officials urged that the offer for Alsace's autonomy be made immediately and publicly. France would be forced to hold off on any attack and Germany would have time to deal with Russia while keeping England at bay. But Germany bungled the deal and sent it to France in the form of an ultimatum at the same time it had sent the ultimatum to Russia. France responded that it would act only in accordance with its own interests. The English weighed in guaranteeing their neutrality if Germany did not attack France. The agreement would be a pledge to keep France neutral as well.

The officials on both sides were duplicitous and vague in their language and misunderstandings arose. Germans took the offer as a pledge to keep both England and France neutral in a Russo-German war.

But, mobilization was taking place and German troops were already rolling toward the French frontier. The Kaiser said in triumph that Germany would go to war against only Russia. The entire army would be focused on Russia and the East. But Moltke, Chief of the German Staff, refused to take on the impossible challenge of reversing the on-going mobilization. Moltke had planned for ten years. It was the march to final dominance for



Germany. Moltke was not willing to put up with the Kaiser's meddling in his military plans – especially in terms of turning around a million men from west to east. Moltke told the Kaiser that it could not be done. There were accommodations and supplies and arms to consider. Later, others provided evidence that the reverse mobilization could have been accomplished.

A telegram was sent to England stating that the mobilization against France was underway and could not be altered. The Kaiser sent a telegram to King George stating the same thing, adding that if neutrality were offered, the Kaiser would not allow his army to attack. The troops were being stopped by telephone and telegraph from crossing into France territory to take Luxembourg. Moltke was crushed. When he returned to the General Staff, he burst into tears of despair. He refused to sign the order canceling the Luxembourg action. After all this wrangling, it was discovered that the original English offer had been misinterpreted. The Kaiser no longer stood in the way of Moltke's mobilization. At seven o'clock that evening the first frontier of the war was crossed. The Germans seized a railroad station in Ulflingen at the Luxembourg border. By August 2, the entire Grand Duchy was occupied.

The German ambassador presented Germany's declaration of war to the Russian Foreign Minister in St. Petersburg. Since Germany's aim was to saddle Russia with causing the war, Admiral von Tirpitz, German naval Minister, asked why Germany had to declare war. The Germans wanted their people to think that they were fighting in self-defense which would also keep Italy out of the fray. Italy would only join the allied forces if they were fighting in self-defense. If Austria refused to accept any Serbian concessions, it would also present a problem in blaming Russia for the war. But, it was German protocol that demanded that a declaration of war be presented.

Analysis

Chapter 4

The Japanese defeat of the Russians led to an alliance between Britain and France. Germany's somewhat aggressive behavior toward France made them worry about another war with them. The Russian defeat made England and France wonder if Germany would take advantage of the situation and start a conflict. British military staked out staging areas for a possible future conflict. Fear and apprehension were in the air and it all pointed to the possibility of Germany starting a war. Germany was seen as an aggressor. Even though it was years before the war actually started, there was talk of war and planning for it for many years. It was the first that the French heard of Germany's plan of envelopment – completely circling an enemy with several armies and capturing them. It gave France something else to worry about. The years leading up to the war (1911 and 1912), saw more planning and military agreements between the nations.

Chapter 5



Although Russia had recently been defeated by the Japanese, they were still afraid of their massive size. The image of the charging Cossacks remained an image in everyone's mind. The French depended on the Russians to draw off some of the German force from them. If the French and Russians engaged Germany on two fronts, they would be able to defeat them.

In reality, the Russians did not have a great military force. Also, it was difficult for the Russians to mobilize because of their vast country and lack of sufficient railroads. They did not have a modern army. Many commanders preferred bayonets over bullets. If they were to be depended on there were these and other considerations to remember.

Russia became an ally of England due to Germany's aggression and the growing threat they represented. The Grand Duke of Russia was charged with reorganizing the Russian army after the defeat to Japan. The Russians worked out battle plans with different scenarios about a possible war on the European continent. The Germans worried about the Russians invading East Prussia and then easily moving on to Berlin.

Chapter 6

Germany declared war on Russia. As was their modus operandi, the Germans tried to portray their act of aggression as their enemy's fault. The Kaiser didn't really want to go to war. He wanted his way, but he preferred to get it through threats and intimidation. Germany threatened France who responded that it would act in its own interest. England guaranteed its neutrality if Germany did not attack France.

Many of the documents that were sent back and forth in an effort to avoid war had language that was confusing and conflicting. Germany began mobilizing its troops. The Kaiser wanted to go to war only against Russia. But, the Germans were mobilizing against France which would break the neutrality proclamation by England. France and England were being drawn into the war.

Vocabulary

impotence, equilibrium, triumvirate, vehement, audacious, ebullient, impetus, vexation, lethargy, shoddy, envisaged, inexorably, manifestly, regime, bureaucrats, autocracies, cohorts, ardent, fecklessness, indolent, obsequious, bellicose pummeled, enviable, foreboding, autonomy, garrisoned, apocryphal, introspective, conflagration



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

Chapter 7: August 1: Paris and London

France's main objective was to enter the war with England as an ally. In order to accomplish this, France had to convince England that Germany was the aggressor. To underscore this point, French troops were ordered to withdraw by ten kilometers along the entire frontier. Joffre told the government that if he was not given the order to mobilize the troops of the five army corps and cavalry to the frontier, the Germans would enter France without one shot of resistance. He did accept the ten kilometer withdrawal. The government was still reluctant to move forward while there was the possibility of a diplomatic solution. The government agreed to give Joffre the go ahead on a limited basis – that is without calling in the extra reservists.

On July 31st, Messimy received intelligence that Germany was ready for war and that England was "tepid." Joffre offered evidence of German movements and insisted upon immediate mobilization. But word had come that the Czar was appealing to the Kaiser so nothing moved much to Messimy's dismay. France feared public protests and prepared for them. Some foreigners suspected of espionage were arrested. The Russian ambassador woke the French President Poincare at two in the morning asking what France was going to do. The Russians feared an action by the French Parliament which were never made fully aware of the agreement between France and Russia. Poincare assured the ambassador that he would call the Cabinet together in a few hours and would have an answer for him.

The French government was faced with a delicate balancing act. They were pressed by the Russians to declare themselves and by Joffre to mobilize yet they had to prove to the English that they were not the aggressors. Joffre attended the cabinet meeting with Messimy where he declared that he would refuse to responsibility for the command if mobilization did not occur. After much discussion, the Cabinet agreed to mobilization. Messimy was given the signed order but the Prime Minister Viviani asked him to keep it in his pocket until that afternoon – Viviani still hoping for a diplomatic solution. At the same time the ten-kilometer withdrawal was publicly reaffirmed. The mobilization declaration was presented at 3:30 that afternoon to the War Office. Word traveled around Paris that they were at war.

The French suggested to the English that if they waited until Russia invaded France that it might be too late. British statesman Sir Edward Grey was in favor of Britain's intervention but was mindful that Belgium neutrality was a big factor in their involvement. The British Cabinet was split on their views on the war – some were isolationists and others were convinced that it was in England's interest that France was preserved. England was the only European country that did not have conscription and



would have to depend on volunteers. There was fear that an antiwar party would be established that would have a negative impact on potential volunteers.

In order to enter the war as an ally of France, the government had to speak as one. After hours of discussion by Cabinet members where their diverse opinions were aired, by August 1st, the crack was even widening. Twelve of the eighteen Cabinet members were opposed to giving France an assurance of Britain's support. The House of Commons voted 19 to 4 for England to remain neutral regardless of what happened in Belgium or anywhere else.

England was dealing with its own internal conflict with Ireland resulting in the resignation of the Secretary of War. The duties of the Secretary of War fell to Asquith who had the help of an active First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. He had a clear view of what England should do and advocated acting immediately. On July 26, Churchill decided that the British naval fleet be on war footing even before a final decision was made. It had to protect its island nation and protect the Channel and the French coasts to fulfill England's pledge to France. Churchill was most concerned about a new weapon the German's had developed called the torpedo.

By July 29th, the fleet, eighteen miles of warships, had passed through the Straits of Dover headed for the coast of France. Churchill convinced Asquith to authorize the Warning Telegram which was in essence a declaration of martial law which would allow the Secretary of War to act without the Cabinet. Asquith had no intention of leading the country into war with a divided government. He was waiting for an event to occur that would convince the peace groups that war was unavoidable. Sir Grey threatened to resign should England fail to support France. The threat of war was beginning to take its toll on the economies of the world.

The official British position remained "no commitment." But, the military agreement between the two countries had been developed over years and was the actual policy. A French minister, M. Cambon, visited the Capital and reminded them that all their plans had been made in common. If England did not help, France would never forgive them. Grey sent telegrams to both France and Germany asking them to restate their commitment to maintain Belgium's neutrality. France answered immediately in the affirmative. There was no answer from Germany. Grey told Cambon that France would have to make its own decision. England was not in a position to give assistance at the time. Cambon suggested that the word "honor" should be erased from the English dictionary.

While Moltke was refusing to go east, the Germans were seizing Luxembourg. Messimy was reconfirming the ten-kilometer withdrawal and Churchill was playing bridge with his dinner guests, keeping his mind off the talk of war. A courier delivered an urgent message to Churchill in the middle of a game. Germany had declared war on Russia. Churchill mobilized the fleet and Grey promised Cambon that England would not allow the German fleet to enter the Channel. Most of the Cabinet was against dispatching the fleet but it was underway. Grey was certain that Germany would give England the motivation it needed by invading Belgium.



Chapter 8: Ultimatum in Brussels

The German Minister in Brussels had a sealed envelope in his safe. He was told not to open it until he received permission. On August 2, he received a telegram to open the envelope and to deliver the note inside to the Belgian government by eight o'clock that evening. The Belgians would have twelve hours to respond. Since receiving the envelope he had assured more than one Belgian official that they had nothing to worry about. Belgium had been free for seventy-five years the longest time period in its history. It had been a territory that warriors had used for centuries even dating back to Caesar.

Belgium had long ago adopted a policy of neutrality. Learning of German's aggression, the mobilization of the Belgium Army was ordered. King Albert penned a letter to the Kaiser asking for his assurance that Belgium's neutrality would be respected. Kaiser failed to respond. Instead the ultimatum was received. The ultimatum was making its rounds in the Belgium government. The note indicated that Germany had received word that France would be advancing through Belgian territory in order to attack Germany. Germany warned the Belgians not to consider their entrance into their country as a hostile attack. Germany was acting out of self-preservation. Germany would leave the territory as soon as peace was achieved and would pay for any damages incurred during combat. If Belgium opposed German's passage through its territory, Germany would consider them an enemy.

Belgian government and military officials discussed their options and imagined the ramifications of an attack by Germany. Was the Belgium Army ready to defend the country? They were ready but they had not received the heavy artillery that they had sent for. King Albert was notified. He would be made Commander in Chief only after Belgium had been attacked. The Belgian Army consisted of six divisions of infantry plus a cavalry division. This meager force of untrained soldiers would have to face thirty-four German divisions.

On August 2, King Albert presided at the Council of State at a nine o'clock meeting at night. He declared that their answer must be "no" no matter what the circumstances. Belgium had to defend its territory. One official warned not to trust Germany to restore Belgium integrity after the war. If Germany was victorious, they were certain that Belgium would become an annexation. One official suggested that Belgium attack Germany in a preemptive move. At 1:30 that next morning, a committee had been formed to draft a reply was at work when the German Minister showed up. The Germans weren't as concerned about Belgium's decision as they were about it delaying their timetable. The German Minister was dispatched to tell the Belgians that French dirigibles were dropping bombs and that the French had crossed the border in Germany. Since the French was violating international law by attacking them surely they would do the same to Belgium. At 2:30 in the morning, the document was approved. King Albert signed it.

In Berlin late-night meetings were also taking place. Tirpitz was still in a dither about why declarations of war were necessary. It was explained to him that the declaration of war on France was necessary because they needed to march through Belgium. The



report of bombings by the French reached the German public. People were watching the skies but there were no bombs to report. Tirpitz was concerned that Germany would appear to be too aggressive. According to German logic, a declaration had to be declared due to the imaginary bombings. Tirpitz asserted that the French were “intellectually” the aggressors but German politicians had mishandled the matter. The invasion of Belgium, which was purely an emergency action that the Germans were forced to take in self-preservation, would be made to appear a “brutal act of violence.”

At seven o'clock on the morning of August 3rd, during the final minutes the German had given the Belgians to reply, their response was delivered to the German Minister. The newspapers carried the “No” response from the Belgians. The Germans would have to go around their territory. Everyone was sure that the Germans would not take the bold step of defying their response. A belated response from the Kaiser to King Albert's letter arrived on the 3rd. In his response, the Kaiser made the not-so-veiled threat of a broken relationship should the Belgians refuse Germany's request to advance on their territory.

The Kaiser's response angered King Albert, propelling him to order the blowing up of the Meuse bridges at Liege and the railroad tunnel and bridges at the Luxembourg frontier. He put off asking for help from the English and French.

Analysis

Chapter 7

In order for France to secure England as an ally, it had to convince the British that Germany was the aggressor. However, England was balking. It was obvious that it was not eager to enter into a war. Russia was urging France to get in the war. There were many conversations, a lot of maneuvering, and negotiations that took place during the first stages of the war. Many politicians and military men were hoping for a diplomatic solution.

Most of the debate took place in England. Geographically, they didn't feel threatened because they were across the Channel from the rest of the nations. There were diverse factions in the Parliament. Some politicians and ministers were for some involvement; some were for robust involvement; and, some were for none at all. The idea of war wasn't popular with the English people. Asquith, the Prime Minister, had no appetite for leading the country into a war with a divided government.

Chapter 8

The Germans sent an ultimatum to Belgium which was a neutral country. Germany lied to Belgium by telling them that France planned to invade their country in order to attack Germany. If Germany were not allowed to use Belgium territory to have access to France, Germany would consider Belgium an enemy. The Belgium army would be no match for the Germans. However, King Albert of Belgium responded to the Germans with an emphatic “no” they would not allow them access. The Belgians prepared for war



and invasion by blowing up some key bridges. They asked for help from France and England.

Vocabulary

inertia, flamboyancy, impeccable, conscription, dissidents, schism, prophesying, euphemism, immutable, ambiguous, superfluous, perfidy, amenities, dirigibles, acquiesce



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

Chapter 9: Home Before the Leaves Fall

On August 2, just a short time before the German ultimatum was delivered to Brussels, Sir Grey asked the British Cabinet for permission to dispatch the fleet to defend the French Channel Coast. The Cabinet was still undecided about moving forward with a firm commitment. France accepted war inspiring nationalism among the populace. Belgium was being uplifted by its brave king. The British military was prepared and ready, but the will was lacking. They had done their homework. All the necessary documents to declare war and engage in combat had been prepared years before. Still there was a reluctance. Finally, the Cabinet acquiesced and agreed to Grey's request. Grey handed the document to Cambon with an assurance of Britain's intervention if the German naval fleet should violate treaties. England was not prepared to send troops outside the country. Britain would deal with that challenge should it arise.

The action made several ministers resign and pushed several others to the verge of doing so. Churchill made an effort to bring his former party, the Tories, into a coalition government. The Tories believed that Britain must fulfill its treaty obligations. The key development that would require Britain's support of France was already underway behind closed doors. To many Englishmen the war was the old fight between Germany and France. It was not England's fight. To go to war most believed that Belgium territory had to be violated first. That very night Sir Grey received a telegram warning that Germany was on the verge of invading Belgium. The response of Grey and his colleagues was to immediately mobilize. Asquith agreed. Haldane was temporarily assigned to the War Office. The next day, crowds were gathering around the ministry where Haldane was hard at calling up reservists.

On August 3, Grey would be making the first public statement about the crisis in Parliament. His task was to bring a united country into the war. As he was preparing notes for his statement, Lichnowsky, a German Minister, called on him asking for the decision. It would not be a declaration of war, Grey told him, but a "statement of conditions." Lichnowsky implored Grey not to name the neutrality of Belgium as one of those conditions. Germany would only traverse a small corner of Belgium – something that could not be stopped at this late hour.

Parliament was packed. The only empty seats were those of the German and Austrian ambassadors. There wasn't a sound in the room when Grey rose to present the cases for British involvement in the on-going crisis. He asked the House to view the matter from the perspective of "British interests, British honor, and British obligations." Grey provided the details of the naval agreement with France. He said that England could not look on dispassionately at the undefended coasts of France and do nothing. Cheers were heard from the opposition. There were somber responses and silence from the



Liberals. He quoted Gladstone who spoke before the Parliament in 1870 and declared that England had to take a stand against the “unmeasured aggrandizement of any power whatsoever.” Grey hinted at the downfall of all of Europe should England not intervene.

After Grey finished speaking, there was thunderous applause which gave Grey his answer. But there was still dissension among the Liberals and Laborites. The two ministers who had resigned returned to their positions after Grey’s speech. Grey had done his job and brought the country together. Grey told Churchill that the next step would be to send an ultimatum to the Germans demanding they stop the invasion of Belgium with 24 hours. If they refused, there would be war.

The German General Staff found little significance in England’s pronouncement. They were sure the war would be over in four months. Economics wouldn’t allow for a protracted conflict. There were estimates among German officials of the war lasting between four weeks and eight weeks. The Russians weren’t sure if the war would take them two months or three months to resolve. The Germans had only a six month supply of nitrates for making gunpowder. The English and French also envisioned a short conflict.

There were a few who saw it differently. Moltke saw a long struggle. Joffre saw the possibility of a war of “indefinite duration.” Despite their concerns, they made no allowance in their operational plans. Lord Kitchener was recalled to become War Minister on August 4. He thought the war would last three years at a minimum. Germany would not give in until it was beaten into the ground. In his position as War Minister, Kitchener prepared an army for millions for a war that would last for years. Despite England’s public statement about engagement in the war, the Kaiser still didn’t believe that they’d intervene. Moltke however was well aware that England had to support France should Belgium territory be violated.

Several hours after Grey’s speech, Germany declared war on France. The German people were joyous and convinced that France had forced their hand. The German Ambassador met with Viviani and handed him the declaration of war. The declaration cited France’s hostility and its bombing of German territory – both of which were lies. The German Minister in Brussels delivered a message to the Foreign Office that Germany would carry out whatever measures were necessary for self-preservation – including use of force.

That evening the Germans breached the Belgian frontier at Liege. Belgian gendarmes opened fire. Grey had still not sent England’s ultimatum to Germany. King Albert had still not asked for assistance from France and England. He was afraid a battle on Belgium soil would bring his country into war. On August 4th after Liege had been marched upon, King Albert asked for the help of his allies. One hour after the invasion began, King Albert met with his Parliament. On his ride there, he was met with an emotional crowd that cheered him on. His emotional and patriotic appeal in Parliament was just as well received. Outside the people shouted, “Down with the Germans!”



In Paris, the French soldiers marched in formation in their dress uniforms. Following the soldiers and officers were huge crates containing airplanes and artillery. The procession lasted the entire day. Down the boulevards, regiments of volunteers marched proclaiming that Luxembourg would never fall into German hands. The volunteers consisted of people of many different nationalities. Italy, Spain, Greece, and Latin America were among others in Paris to show their support. Italy announced its neutrality. It would not be supporting the German campaign.

Rain was pouring down in Berlin when the Kaiser gave his speech from the throne before the deputies. Prior to the meeting, German officials met with the deputies and stressed the importance for unity. They urged the deputies to be unanimous in their decisions. There was assurance that the Serbs would be beaten in a week. The deputies then marched to the palace to hear the Kaiser's speech. He declared that the Germans were drawing "the sword with a clear conscience and with clean hands." He contended that the war had been provoked by Serbia with the support of the Russians. He called for all upon all party leaders to step forward if they agreed with him that only Germans would be recognized. The leaders stepped forward to shake the Kaiser's hand. There was excitement in the room with shouts of joy and celebration. The vote in Parliament to support the Kaiser was unanimous.

Word had reached Berlin that Luxembourg was occupied and that Belgium have been invaded. The Germans made their case to the people that they had been forced into taking the actions they'd taken. Chancellor Bethmann created a sensation when he stated that the invasion of Belgium was against international law but it would ultimately be seen as good once the military goal had been attained. Bethmann added that the Germans were badly threatened and their actions were justified. The Reichstag voted itself out of session for four months – the time during which the war would be fought and won by the Germans. Bethmann proclaimed August 4, 1914, to be one of Germany's greatest days.

The ultimatum from the British to the Germans arrived in two parts. The ultimatum asked for an assurance from the Germans that they would not proceed with demands against Belgium. But, there was no time limit or punishment for non-compliance was included so it was a weak ultimatum at best. The second part of the English message was sent after the German Army invaded Belgium. It stated that Britain was bound to uphold the neutrality of Belgium based on a treaty that German was as much a party to as was England. There was a midnight time limit on this part of the ultimatum.

In Berlin, the British ambassador, Sir Edward Goschen, presented the ultimatum in a personal interview with a very agitated Chancellor Bethmann. The Chancellor felt that England was just using the Belgium invasion as an excuse to enter the war. England would be responsible for all the "dreadful events that might follow" all for Belgium's neutrality. Word got around Berlin, resulting in protests in the street against the British and the stoning of the British Embassy. The Germans felt betrayed by the English which fed into their sense of isolation. Germany was a hated country. While people in the street were jubilant, German ministers privately bemoaned German's standing in a



world that was rising up against them. Austria was Germany's only ally. But, they were sure their woes would be short-lived. The war would be over and won in four months.

A new debate rose up in the British Parliament. Should an Expeditionary Force be sent to France? Once approved, how far should this force penetrate the ground? Britain was terrified of an invasion. They felt a large home army would deter an invasion. There was an on-going debate about the Expeditionary Force with no decisions forthcoming. Cambon appealed to Grey showing him on a map how essential it was for Britain to shore up France's left wing. The mobilization order read only "mobilize" not "mobilize and embark." Balfour spoke up and reminded the government that should France fall so could the rest of Europe.

The British were waiting for the midnight deadline to learn their own fate. Unofficial word got to the government that Germany had declared war on the English. They decided to wait for the deadline before they responded. When the time ran out, the War Telegram was dispatched.

Chapter 10: Goeben... an Enemy Then Flying

Prior to the start of the land battle, a message from the Germany Admiralty to the German Commander Souchon in the Mediterranean stated that the alliance with Turkey had concluded. The Commander was ordered to proceed to Constantinople. His command consisted of two fast new ships, the Goeben and the Breslau. Turkey was considered the "sick man" of Europe and not worthy of an alliance. The vultures circled Turkey waiting to prey upon its carcass. However, Turkey survived. In fact, it began to be rejuvenated after the old Sultan was overthrown in 1908 and the Committee of Union and Progress was created. The Committee was known as the Young Turks and was led by Enver Bev. They were determined to remake the country and renew its strength so it could fend off its enemies. They wanted to return to the glory days of the Ottoman Empire. The Germans had decided to become the Young Turks' patron. That move enraged the Russians.

As the war gained momentum, the Turks had to figure out what path to take. They feared the Russians, resented the English, and didn't trust the Germans. Bev thought that the Germans represented the wave of the future. Many felt that Turkey could not survive the war by staying neutral. The Russians had longed to possess Constantinople for centuries. The Russians called the City, which was lying at the exit of the Black Sea, Czargrad. It was Russia's only egress to the rest of the world. Turkey's biggest asset was its geographical location. For that reason, Britain had been its protector, although it no longer took the country seriously. England's disenchantment with Turkey was largely due to its distaste for the old Sultan and the corruption that ran rampant under his rule.

A request by Turkey to Britain for a permanent alliance was turned down in 1911. Churchill encouraged the Turks to remain friendly to the British due to their dominance of the sea. In July of 1914, the Germans wanted to secure a relationship with the country that could close the Black Sea exit and cut Russia off from its allies. The Kaiser pushed for an alliance. On July 28, Turkey asked Germany for a secret alliance to



become effective in the event that either party went to war against Russia. Although Germany signed the pact immediately, it was the Turks who dragged their feet. What if Germany didn't win?

England helped them decide by seizing to Turkish battleships that were being built in British shipyards. The ships had cost Turkey \$30 million. With the war approaching, England might need the extra ships. No word about compensation for the ships was forthcoming. Turkey signed the alliance on August 3rd, the same day it had received word about the seizure of its ships. Turkey did not declare war on Russia or close off the Black Sea. It remained neutral. Russia pressured Turkey for a declaration of war against Russia. The Turks wanted to see how the war was going, which way the wind was blowing, before it took any action. Enver Bev was the only exception. He was for acting immediately.

Ships were maneuvering in the Mediterranean for combat positions. The British and French were keeping an eye on the Goeben and Breslau which were considered the biggest threat to French troop transports. The French and British fleets were the largest and most powerful in the Mediterranean. Germany was represented by only two warships. One was the Goeben battle cruiser and the other was the Breslau. Because of its lightness and speed, the Goeben would be able to evade the French battle squadrons and sink their transports crammed with soldiers. The British naval thinking gave more credit to Germany sea power than it deserved.

Admiral Souchon was ordered to Constantinople on August 3rd to put pressure on the Turks for the war declaration. The Goeben had been undergoing repairs for leaks and other maintenance issues over the last month. All repairs including leaking boilers that impacted its speed had not been completed when he was dispatched to Constantinople. Italy refused to supply coal when the ship docked there. The ship headed to Messina where it could receive fuel from German merchant ships. The Goeben met up with the Breslau at Taranto. Churchill sent an order for the Admiral Milne of the Mediterranean naval fleet al to focus on the swift Goeben. They were also instructed not to take on a ship that was superior in capabilities.

On August 1st, Milne assembled at Malta his own squadron of three battle cruisers and a second squadron of other battle cruisers and destroyers. Receiving word that the Goeben had been sighted off Taranto, Milne sent a light cruiser to search the Strait of Messina for it. The cruiser did not locate the Goeben. Souchon was heading west toward the Algerian coast where he planned to bombard French embarkation ports. Milne received orders to shadow the Goeben. However, there was one problem. Milne didn't know the location of the Goeben. He sailed westward to look for it. The French Naval Minister, Dr. Gauthier, failed to send torpedo boats into the Channel. It was an egregious oversight which he tried to make up for by proposed that the Goeben and the Breslau be attacked immediately before the war declaration. Gauthier was pressured to step down.

The French Commander in Chief, Admiral de Lapevrere was ordered to stop the Goeben and Breslau as soon as he received word of the opening of hostilities. He



immediately dispatched three squadrons of the French fleet southward toward Algiers to intercept the Goeben and Breslau. On August 3, Souchon received word that war had been declared on France. As he sped toward Algiers, he received the order to proceed to Constantinople. He proceeded on to Algiers on August 4th, raised the Russian flag and bombarded the French ports. According to the German's Conduct of War, using enemy uniforms or insignia was permissible. Souchon turned back toward Messina where he would refuel and continue on to Constantinople.

On the morning of August 4th, two British steamers caught sight of the Goeben and Breslau as they were heading to Messina. Since there was no declaration of war, the British ships could not react. They merely passed the German ships in silence. The British ships turned around to follow the German ships so they would be in range to fire on them as soon as the war declaration was made. The British cabinet refused to grant authority for the ships to be fired on before the declaration was issued. The Goeben was racing across the sea out in front of its pursuers who were trying to keep it in range until midnight. The space between the two slowly widened. The Dublin commanded by Captain John Kelly joined the hunt. The two British ships dropped out of sight with the Dublin in lone pursuit. A fog set in and by nine the Goeben and Breslau had disappeared.

The German ships reached Messina and a refueling in safety. The next day, the British were free to fire on the Goeben and Breslau, but they were nowhere in sight. Thinking the German ships would head west again, Milne guarded the exit to the western Mediterranean while a single light cruiser, the Gloucester, patrolled the exit to the east. This patrol lasted through August 5th and 6th. Souchon's departure from Messina was delayed due to an unusually prolonged fueling process. The August heat was taking a toll on his men who were shoveling the coal. The crew was exhausted and Souchon decided that he must depart even though the ship did not take on a full load of coal.

Souchon received word to cancel his trip to Constantinople. Enver Bev had decided that the passage of the two German ships would violate their neutrality. Another message from Tirpitz informed Souchon that the Austrians would provide no naval help to Germany in the Mediterranean. It was up to Souchon where he headed. He decided to head for Constantinople despite the order against it. He wanted the Turks to spread the war to the Black Sea against their enemy the Russians. He had arranged to refuel off Cape Malea in Greece. When the Goeben and Breslau exited the east exit of the Strait of Messina they were followed by the Gloucester.

Upon learning that the Goeben had left Messina by the eastern exit, Milne maintained his course. When the Goeben changed course to head for the Aegean, the course change was received by Milne who then set out for Malta for refueling. It would be up to Admiral Troubridge's squadron which was watching the Adriatic to intercept the Goeben. Troubridge decided to head south to try to intercept the German ships. He was unsure of his ability to be victorious in an exchange with the Germans. When he didn't find the Goeben by four o'clock in the morning, he decided against engaging it. He feared that the Goeben could sink his four cruisers. He was following orders by not engaging in a fight with a superior force. He called off the hunt and informed Milne who



ordered the Gloucester to stay back to avoid capture. The failure was less military than it was political. Churchill later admitted that the British was completely misinformed about the Turks.

On August 7th, the Goeben was rejoined by the Breslau and the Gloucester, against Milne's orders, was still following them. The Breslau dropped back to intimidate the Gloucester. Captain Kelly decided to fire on the Breslau in hopes of luring the Goeben back to protect its sister ship. After firing on the Breslau, the Goeben did turn around and fired. No fires landed on any of the three ships. The Gloucester resumed tailing the Goeben but Milne ordered Kelly not to go beyond Cape Matapan at the tip of Greece. The Gloucester stopped its pursuit, and the Goeben entered the Aegean free of surveillance.

Milne left Malta and pursued the Goeben. He had to speculate as to where the Goeben was heading. He did not think it would be heading to Turkey because it would be a violation of neutrality. Souchon could not proceed into the Straits without Turkish permission because the entrance was mined. His fueler was waiting for him in Cape Malea. He was unaware that the British chase had been called off. The Goeben and the Breslau took on fuel all day on the 9th. Souchon dared not use his wireless to communicate with Constantinople because it would give away his location. He ordered another ship to transmit a message to the German naval attaché in Constantinople asking for access the Straits.

Early on the morning of August 10th, Souchon got permission to enter the Straits. Enver allowed the German ships to enter the Straits. Not knowing if the English were right behind them, he authorized the British to be fired on if they were present and tried to enter behind the German ships. On August 10th, the German ships entered the Straits and as Churchill recounted later brought "More slaughter, more misery and more run than has ever before been borne within the compass of a ship."

The Turks, still hoping to maintain the semblance of neutrality, suggested that the German ships be required to disarm. That was rejected. Actually, the Turks were buying the two German ships and that the Germans were merely delivering their boats was roundly accepted. The ships were renamed the Jawus and Midilli and flew the Turkish flag with their crews wearing Turkish uniforms. Still the Turks refused to declare war which the Germans were pressuring them to do. Turkey decided to get paid for their neutrality. Russia was more than willing to pay after learning that the two German ships had arrived at their back door in the Black Sea. Russia proposed to France to offer Turkey a guarantee of territorial integrity and the promise of great financial reward. France agreed. Britain could not be persuaded to join them in the agreement.

Churchill's recommendation that the British send in a torpedo flotilla through the Straits and sink the Goeben and Breslau was voted down. Lord Kitchener said England could not afford to alienate the Moslems. Turkey would have to strike the first blow. Over the next few months while the Allies bargained and blustered, the German military influence in Turkey was growing by the day. On October 28th, the former Goeben and Breslau under Souchon's command along with several Turkish torpedo ships, entered the Black



Sea and fired on Odessa, Sevastopol and Feodosia. There was loss of civilian life and the sinking of one Russian gunboat.

The Germans were basically in control of Turkey. Dismissal of the German military by the Turks which the Allies wanted as proof of neutrality was impossible for the Turks to accomplish. The Allies all declared war on Turkey on November 4th and 5th. The world war was growing. Soon Turkey's neighbors – Bulgaria, Rumania, Italy and Greece – were eventually all drawn into the war. Russia suffered the most with the exit to the Mediterranean closed off. Their exports and imports both dropped in value. The English had been totally blind to the importance of Constantinople.

Analysis

Chapter 9

The British cabinet was still undecided about what role if any England would play in the war. They were prepared and well-trained but the problem was a lack of will. Sending troops outside the country was something that they were not prepared to do. The Cabinet approved the British Fleet being sent to the French Coast in defense of France. Some ministers resigned over the move. Still the debate raged on in Parliament and in the Prime Ministers offices. The game changer was when word arrived that Germany was invading Belgium. England took an oath to defend Belgium if it was attacked. Even so, some ministers were still against intervention. After Sir Henry Grey explained what was happening in Europe and that Belgium was being invaded, he ginned up a good deal of support although there was still dissension. Next, Germany declared war on France. Again the Germans lied and told its people that France had bombed German territory and was the aggressor. The Germans supported its army in the war. There was still maneuvering among the world leaders. England sent an ultimatum to Germany warning them not to invade Belgium but it was meaningless to the Germans. That very evening, Germany breached Belgium territory and was met with gun fire from Belgian gendarmes. Britain was still uncertain about how involved they would be.

Chapter 10

The Goeben and the Breslau were two swift boats in the German fleet. They were in the Mediterranean when they were ordered to Constantinople because the German alliance with Turkey had ended. The Turks were unsure about whom they wanted to align themselves with in the war. They were considered the "sick child" of Europe. Relations with England had been strained. They were ready to form an alliance with Germany but was reluctant in case Germany lost.

The English and French were keeping an eye on the Goeben and Breslau because they were a threat to French troop transports. The English and French chased the two German boats across the Mediterranean not knowing where they were heading. Two British ships spotted them but they couldn't fire on them because there was no declaration of war between Britain and Germany. The German ships eventually wound

up in Turkey. The Germans got control of Turkey and its neighbors including Bulgaria, Rumania, Italy, and Greece were all drawn into the war.

Vocabulary

belligerency, emissary, hegemony, mettlesome, orthodoxy, attrition, fathomless, gendarmes, contemned, hypocritical, homage, moribund, amenable, malleable, assuage, embarkation, corsair, imperative, flotilla, vacillating, bellicose, fait accompli



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

Chapter 11: Liege and Alsace

Advance groups of the Germans entered the fray from the east and the French entered from the west. Regardless of what France did, the Germans proceeded to assault Liege in order to open up pathways across Belgium. The French charged into Alsace hoping to gin up nationalism at home. Over 1.5 million German soldiers in seven armies were being assembled along the Belgian and French fronts. Germany did not take the threat of resistance by the Belgians seriously. The Germans targeted the multiple forts at Liege. The Belgians had not kept the forts up to date and were manned by the oldest reservists. Extra defensive measures were ordered only days before the invasion and were not complete.

The Germans had a surprise weapon – a gigantic siege cannon that was so large and powerful that no one imagined it could be mobilized. Moltke expected the forts to be taken quickly – by the 39th day of the war allowing German troops to cross Belgium to help Austria on the 40th day. The Germans were having Krupp build some of these siege cannons for them but they wouldn't be ready until late October. The Austrian Skoda 305 version of the weapon had the advantage of mobility. Instead of tires, their wheels were continuous belts that some described as “iron feet.”

When war broke out in Austria, several of the Austrian 305s were in Germany. Urgent requests were sent to Krupp on August 2nd to complete the construction of the cannons. Krupp worked the staff day and night to complete them. On August 3, King Albert became Commander in Chief of the Belgian Army. He had wanted to bring up all six Belgian divisions to take a stand along the neutral barrier so they could reinforce the fortified positions of Liege and Namur. But the new Chief of the General Staff Selliers instead stationed the officers to face all possible comers in all directions eventually bringing them all together in the center of the front. The King insisted that one division remain at Namur to reinforce the frontier garrisons. Selliers took a third of that division and countermanded the King's order to demolish the bridges above Liege which would allow the movement of the Belgian Army.

The Belgians had less than half the weaponry of the Germans. Plans to increase the size of the Army had just been implemented. By August 1914, the Belgian Army consisted of 117,000 men and was largely untrained. Transport and supplies were limited and insufficient. The soldiers received the support and admiration of the people. It was an illusion that the Belgian Army could stand up against the Germans. Early on August 4th the first Germans breached the Belgium border with a goal of seizing the crossings before bridges were destroyed. They were also to capture farms and villages for food. The soldiers passed out propaganda sheets apologizing to the people for being compelled to invade their country. The German soldiers were each weighted down with



65 pounds of supplies and weapons. They had new leather boots that squeaked as they walked. They were upbeat and proud as they sang songs in praise of their homeland.

When the first division reached the Liege, they saw that the bridges were already destroyed. When they attempted to cross the river on pontoons, the Belgian soldiers fired on them. The erstwhile happy soldiers were being wounded and killed. The Germans far outnumbered the Belgians. By that evening the Germans had succeeded in crossing the river. The Germans had more of a battle than they had imagined. The Germans were shaky and on edge and the cry of “snipers” sent them reeling.

The Belgian government warned the people not to fight or put up resistance. If the Germans caught them with guns, they’d be executed. The people were told to stay inside in order to avoid contact. On the very first day, Germans were shooting citizens and even priests. They took hostages and killed them and burned down a village also on the first day. On August 5th, the Germans attacked the four eastern most forts of Liege with the Belgians returning fire. Soldiers on the front line were slaughtered. When German soldiers broke through and made it up the hill toward the forts, they were taken out by machine gun fire. The dead German soldiers were stacked up by their fellow soldiers to serve as barricades.

That night the German brigades reassembled for a renewed attack. The German soldiers were skittish. Two brigades taking the same hill ran literally ran into each other in the dark. But the Germans eventually emerged victorious and by the afternoon of August 6th, they had broken through the ring of forts and reached the hill on the right bank of the Meuse. The Germans were angry that they had to waste time and manpower on a conflict with a nation that should have just allowed them to pass through. On August 6th, the Zeppelin L-Z was sent from Cologne to bomb the city. The Germans repeatedly sent emissary across enemy lines in an effort to effect a surrender. They even tried to kidnap the commander but failed.

The people of Brussels and the newspapers cheered the Belgian Army’s successes. The invaders were “decisively checked” and the “German rout [was] complete.” However, the Belgian 3rd Division was being withdrawn, the Belgian’s recognition that they would soon be overwhelmed. The King recognized the size of the force that was attacking Liege. There was a chance if the French and English helped him that the advance of the Germans could be halted. Although Poincare and Messimy were all for sending help, Joffre would not change his plans of deployment. England finally responded that it would send an expeditionary force. Joffre sent a dispatch to King Albert telling him to retreat until the French reached Namur on August 15th.

On August 7th, as a morale booster, the French government conferred the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor upon Liege and the Military Medal upon King Albert. However, Liege continued to be pounded by bombs and field artillery. The Germans marched across two bridges that hadn’t been destroyed yet and entered the city of Liege. The few remaining Belgium soldiers in the Citadel immediately surrendered. By eight that night the Liege was seized by the Germans. Upon hearing the news, the Kaiser was ecstatic. But he was worried about British intervention.



Two of the gigantic cannons were ready and loaded onto trains to be transported as far as possible to save their treads. The trains left Essen on August 10th and reached Belgium by that night. While the weapons were on their way, the Germans made a last ditch effort to persuade Belgium to allow them passage. Germany was persistent and willing to make any concession that would allow them to pass through Belgium territory. King Albert still refused to cooperate. The Germans had been temporarily defeated and paused their advance after August 9th. They were waiting for reinforcements – not more soldiers but siege guns.

Joffre was focused as always on the Rhine and not on Belgium and accordingly had his troops staged along the front. A special assault force was strategically stationed to make the opening move into Alsace. There was a gap that was to be filled with a British division but it was learned that they weren't being dispatched. Joffre wasn't concerned about the missing Brits but General Lanrezac who would have to bear the impact of the German right wing was concerned. He had early objections to Plan 17, but his complaints were ignored. He felt much of the plan was built on assumptions one of which was that the Germans would come through Sedan. He thought they'd come through Namur and several other Belgium locations.

Another Commander, General Ruffey, Commander of the Third Army, feared that the Germans would have a parade through Belgium. But Joffre told him he was wrong. At a final meeting before the start of the war, General Dubail voiced his concern that the plan required reinforcements but they had not been allowed for. Again Joffre ignored the concern. He believed that it wasn't the best plan for winning a war. Determination and confidence would decide the victor.

Joffre had a "hands on" approach to running the war. He was driven out to the front and was in daily contact with his commanders. As August wore on, Joffre showed that he was not timid about firing generals. Every day Joffre presided at a meeting of his section chiefs. No one would dare to be late to one of his meetings. He was stubborn. He became enraged by anyone who tried to change his mind.

As the soldiers waited to advance, the time had come when the French flag would once again be raised over Alsace. A proclamation by the War Ministry had been disseminated to the populace. In the early morning on August 7th a few hours before Liege would be attacked, French soldiers crossed the frontier and waged a bayonet charge upon Altkirch, a town of 4,000. They took the town in six hours with 100 casualties. General Bonneau was ordered to push on to the next target, Mulhouse, take it and burn the Rhine bridges. The French took Mulhouse on August 8th without firing a shot. The German troops defending the town had left to join another front. There was quite a celebration in the streets of Mulhouse. However, there were German citizens in the town who were not pleased at all.

While the French were occupying the city, German troops were dispatched to circle the town. A long battle ensued. The reinforcements that Dubail worried about were sorely needed. The French withdrew on August 10th. German citizens reported those who had celebrated with the French. Those citizens faced unpleasant consequences. Joffre



responded by relieving Bonneau of his duty. "Faulty execution" was to blame for the defeat. Joffre dispatched more reservists and created a special Army of Alsace that would strike a second siege on Mulhouse. Joffre kept the operation secret from the French people and the press.

With a delay in action while the Germans waited for their siege weapons, the French and the rest of the world wondered what they were up to. A French cavalry unit had been sent to find out. They combed the Belgium terrain and saw evidence of the Germans; but, to their dismay, the Germans refused to engage in one-on-one saber battles. The French were held off instead by machine guns and cyclist battalions. Other intelligence sources told the French that the Germans were on the move and were intending to cross the Meuse to the defenseless Maubeuge and that the Belgian Army would not be able to stop them. No matter what was reported back to the Chief Staff, excuses were made and French losses were downplayed. It was still believed by many that the Germans would not wage a principal maneuver in Belgium. The same day that the Belgians enjoyed a stunning victory at the Battle of Haelen, the siege guns that the Germans had been waiting for arrived.

By the afternoon of August 12th, one of the great guns had been set up and aimed at Fort Pontisse. Several Skoda 305s had also been brought up and joined in the bombardment of the other forts. The screaming shells pummeled the area. The shelling was relentless. Men were blown to bits and buildings were obliterated. By August 14th, all forts east and west of Liege had fallen. The German advance began. Thirty-six horses pulled the monster cannon into Liege to take aim on Fort Loncin. By the 16th, all forts had fallen and General Leman who would not surrender was gravely injured and taken captive. The Germans were walking across Belgium just as some had feared.

Chapter 12: BEF to the Continent

Field Marshall Lord Kitchener was not happy to be the new Secretary of State and his colleagues were not happy to have him in that position. It was feared that he would interfere with the dispatch of an Expeditionary Force to France, something that had been promised. Their concerns were realized when he stated his disapproval of the plan. On August 5th, the civilian officials of the government were represented by Asquith, Grey, Churchill and Haldane and the army was represented by eleven generals. Kitchener stood somewhere in between the two groups. He didn't like the Belgium plan because it made the British Army appear to be the tail of French strategy. The meager six divisions that were planned to be sent would have absolutely no impact on the conflict. Kitchener had a long career in the military and had been named Secretary of War based on that career in hopes that his presence would ease public feeling. For England to go to war without Kitchener would have been unthinkable.

In the end Kitchener was alone in his prediction of a lengthy war. How he came to that conclusion, no one knew and he didn't explain. He also foretold the pattern of the German offensive west of the Meuse. Many thought he had the gift of divination. Kitchener felt British soldiers dispatched to Maubeuge would be destroyed. He instead recommended that they be sent to Amiens, seventy miles farther back. Just as the



generals had feared, Kitchener's redirection of troops would make the British Army look weak and timid. Sir John French was the Commander in Chief and responded most to the ideals of war – valor and combativeness. He was known as not well-educated or particularly smart. He was described as irritable and having an awful temper. Douglas Haig, a friend of French's, didn't think that French was fit for the position of Commander in Chief at a time of crisis. During the debate about how to dispatch the British troops, French suggested that they be sent to Antwerp where the Belgian Army had retreated to in a defensive crouch. No one else was in favor of this odd suggestion. Churchill vetoed it.

Kitchener still preferred staging at Amiens. It was agreed that the transport of the troops should happen at once. The British settled on sending four of the six divisions that were originally slated to go. Exactly where they would be staged would be decided later. Their decisions receive criticism from all sides. Some were upset that any soldiers were being sent; others worried that England proper was being left inadequately defended. Kitchener was enraged at Henry Wilson for telling too much to the French. Wilson thought Kitchener talked nonsense.

From August 6th through 10th while the Germans at Liege were waiting for the siege guns and the French were battling at Mulhouse, 80,000 British troops, 30,000 horses and guns and ammunition were mobilized and transports across the Channel began. The soldiers were received with rapture when they arrived at Rouen. The British landings were successfully kept from the Germans. Back in England, the King asked Haig his opinion of John French. Haig was honest and said he had reservations because of his lack of knowledge military operations along with his bad temper.

The struggle over strategy between Kitchener and the generals concluded the next day. Kitchener felt the Germans would be coming through Liege with great force. If the British resources were placed at Maubeuge, they wouldn't have a chance. He still favored an Amiens staging area. French and others argued that a change from the original plan would upset the French campaign. French remained determined to go to Maubeuge. Kitchener told the French that their plan was dangerous and that they should not take the offensive; rather, they should wait to counter attack a German advance. Kitchener stood alone and eventually agreed to the original plan.

Kitchener took the reins after losing that debate. It was obvious that he was most concerned with limiting liability in the early stages of war. He wrote to his generals telling them that their job was to support and cooperate with the French and eventually restore Belgium to neutrality. He was most concerned with a minimum of loss. His overarching goal was to preserve the British Army as "a nucleus for the future." Kitchener had cancelled the concept of unity of command and would ultimately haunt the war effort. Back in France, the British soldiers were welcomed like rock stars.

Analysis

Chapter 11



The Germans waged a vicious attack on Liege, Belgium. Gigantic weapons called siege cannons were first introduced during this assault. The Belgians put up a fight and burned the bridges leading to Liege but the Germans persevered and were eventually able to cross. The Belgium government warned its people not to put up resistance. The Germans would shoot them. Resistance or not, the Germans were shooting innocent people and even priests on the very first day. It was a brutal attack. By the end of the second day, the Germans were victorious. But King Albert became a hero in the hearts and minds of the Belgians. He had stood up to the German aggressors. Both England and France were sending help.

In the meantime, a French force had invaded Alsace-Lorraine a territory that Germany had taken from France years before. The French flag was raised on the territory once again. The Germans counterattacked and the French withdrew. Their retaking of Alsace-Lorraine was short-lived.

The Germans advanced into Belgium territory and fought their way across it. They used the siege guns which blew people to bits and leveled buildings.

Chapter 12

There was more disruption and disagreement in the British government with the appointment of Field Marshall Lord Kitchener. The British had promised to send an Expeditionary Force to France, but Kitchener was against it. The addition of Kitchener threw another wrench into the already contentious debate about the war. Kitchener proved to be adept at predicting the way the war would go. He appointed Sir John French as the Commander in Chief. The two men would be in their respective positions during the first stages of the war. They were both disagreeable and often stood alone in the decisions they made. But, they were strong leaders and held fast to their ideals.

Vocabulary

gendarmerie, improvisation, luminous, vanguard, reconnoiter, vexation, clandestine, prodigal, divination, apoplectic, innate, quixotically, mercurial, permutations, antipathy, bumptious



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

Chapter 13: Sambre et Meuse

The offensive fighting began on the fifteenth day of the war. The French opened the offensive into German-occupied Lorraine. The far right wing renewed the offensive in Alsace. Other French units marched on other occupied towns. At both Sarrebourg and Morhange the Germans were hunkered down behind barbed wire and in trenches. It would take an attack of heavy artillery to dislodge them. The French Army had no heavy artillery – proudly traveled light. The Germans held the Lorraine front with a mission to hold the French troops there in order to keep them away from the main front opposite the German right wing. They would tempt the enemy with a tactical victory but inflict him with a strategic defeat.

For the first four days, the Germans fought only rearguard action against the French. The French entered the territory that was once theirs. The French seemed to be victorious against the retiring Germans. On August 17th, the French reached Chateau Salins and was within striking distance of Morhange. On the 18th Dubail's army took Sarrebourg. Confidence among the French soared. But things were falling apart with Plan 17.

General Lanrezac wanted to shift part of his army to the left bank of the Meuse near the Sambre where they could block the Germans. Lanrezac had received intelligence that the Germans were literally pouring through Liege in the hundreds of thousands. Joffre eventually authorized Lanrezac to make this change. But things had changed and Lanrezac wanted to move his entire army westward. Joffre refused insisting that his army remain largely eastward. Lanrezac was so adamant about the importance of his request that he visited Joffre in Vitry. Lanrezac declared that the Germans would be allowed to complete their enveloping maneuver without resistance. Joffre told him that his fears were premature and that the Germans were ill-prepared for such a move.

After receiving disturbing intelligence about the size of the German onslaught, Gallieni visited Joffre to himself. Joffre all but ignored him and referred him to aides. Lanrezac had not given up. He sent another urgent message that mirrored the report that Gallieni brought to Joffre. Joffre weakened a bit and promised to study Lanrezac's report. He would allow Lanrezac to make preliminary arrangements for the movement of his army. Lanrezac received a phone call the next day telling him to prepare but not to begin the transition until given the order by the Commander in Chief.

Ten-thousand Germans had crossed the Meuse at Huy and fighting had ensued. One of the first casualties in that battle was a twenty-four-year old lieutenant named Charles de Gaulle. Joffre ordered the move but still clung to the offensive element of Plan 17. Order No. 10 of Joffre's orders outlined other complicated transfers and changes in an effort to



deal with the overwhelming force the German's were showing. Bottom line, Lanrezac was given the heaviest and riskiest task with the least amount of manpower. Where were the British who was supposed to guard the left? Joffre pulled other units to fight against the German right wing but would not give up any manpower from his offensive. He still believed that the greater the German right wing, the more chances it gave France to defeat the Germans on the left and center.

The German march across Belgium was unstoppable. The Meuse River was nestled on beautiful land that was cherished by all Belgians. Now the Germans were trudging through it destroying its forts and villages and killing civilians and soldiers. Namur's forts were the last bastion before France. The Germans expected to be through Namur in three days. Two German divisions were converging upon the area where the Meuse and Sambre just as Lanrezac's army was heading to it.

Things weren't all smooth sailing for the Germans. One snag the German's had to deal with was their poor communications abilities. The Belgians had cut lines and it sometimes took twelve hours for a message to get through it was able to at all. Starting with the French attack on Lorraine, Moltke's resolve to rely upon the German right wing began to fade. Ironically, the Germans considered moving some of their right wing to the left to bring about a decisive battle in Lorraine. It would mean a double victory – one each on the left and right flanks. Moltke became beset with indecisiveness.

On August 16th, Prince Rupprecht wanted permission to counterattack. He argued that his task to engage as many French troops as possible on his front could be accomplished by attacking. The request was debated for several days. A staff major even went to visit Rupprecht to discuss the matter in person. But nothing was settled. A reconnaissance report indicated that the French movements were backward and the best thing to do was attack immediately. More intelligence told the Germans that the French were transferring troops to the west and that they were leaving Lorraine less protected. They could fight a decisive battle in Lorraine which could keep the British away. Rupprecht felt there was less risk in attacking than in retreating. They could take the enemy by surprise. After all the back and forth, Rupprecht was finally told to make his own decision something he'd already done.

Unknown to the Germans the British had already landed and were moving toward their designated position on the French left. Commander French arrived in Paris and visited the President who was disappointed to hear that the British troops would not be ready to take the field until August 24th. John French had developed a "wait and see" attitude which was a departure for him. The change in him was inexplicable. John French also seemed to be on his own schedule, ignoring the French Army's timetable. Joffre found John French to be stubborn and not anxious for compromise. Sir John looked down on the French generals assuming they had come from poor backgrounds.

Joffre wanted the British troops to assist Lanrezac on the Sambre on August 21st. He would try – despite what he told the President – but he would not yield command of his men to Lanrezac. The next day Sir John told Lanrezac that his men would not be ready on the 21st but rather on the 24th. Lanrezac was enraged – did he think that the



Germans would wait for them?! Lanrezac reported back to Joffre that Sir John French and the Brits were basically useless to them.

In Belgium, Premier de Broqueville discussed moving the government from Brussels to Antwerp with King Albert. The King felt that the Germans would eventually occupy Brussels. Joffre had promised the King that French troops were on their way to help. On August 18th, the King ordered a general retreat of the Army and a removal of headquarters from Louvain to Malines. The French were enraged and accused the Belgians of abandoning them.

Joffre's Order No. 13 clarified the matter. The French would be in another direction and the Belgians could guard the passage west of the Meuse from one of the French Divisions and from the British. That night all five Belgian divisions withdrew to Antwerp which they reached on August 20th. Joffre's order was what the French pinned all their hopes on. They would attack through the German center and defeat the Germans. The specific orders to Lanrezac were confusing, confounding and contradictory. Lanrezac pushed on to the Sambre River where he could stop the Germans from crossing.

On August 19th after the Germans had found that the Belgian Army had withdrawn, they attacked the small town of Aerschot where mass execution took place. One-hundred fifty civilians were shot. The process was repeated by other German armies in Ardennes and Tamines adding another 644 executions. There were also arrests, punishments and other atrocities conducted by the Germans. Much of this behavior was pre-planned. When German troops entered a town they plastered posters on the walls warning the people against acts of hostility. There was a whole litany of what "acts of hostility" consisted of and what the punishments for them were. General Von Kluck was amazed at the evil of the people and how they continued to show hostility toward the Germans. A remarkable group of reporters who were on the scene reported to the world the atrocities that the Germans were perpetrating. Many of these reporters were Americans.

On August 20th, Brussels was occupied. The Germans rode into town in fresh uniforms. The cavalry was mounted on their horses. Heavy guns of the artillery rattled loudly on the cobblestone streets. The soldiers sang songs of victory and songs in praise of Germany. The residents who still remained in the city were amazed at the show of power and strength. The parade seemed to last forever as thousands of German soldiers marched in as occupiers. Staff officers rode in on motorcars and messengers were on bikes ready to take messages back and forth between German officers. The march of the conquerors lasted all afternoon and evening and into the next day. In all, 320,000 German soldiers tramped into Brussels. There was a celebration in Berlin after word had spread.

Rupprecht's counterattack had begun in Lorraine. General Pau had retaken Mulhouse but his soldiers were needed to replace some of Lanrezac's soldiers who were being moved. Alsace was abandoned in favor of the Joffre's offensive plan. Some French commanders believed that the reports of the numbers of Germans in Belgium were greatly exaggerated. On the night of August 20th, Joffre gave the order for Lanrezac's army to begin the offensive.



Chapter 14: Debacle: Lorraine, Ardennes, Charleroi, Mons

From August 20th to 24th, the entire Western Front was embroiled in a vicious battle. It was known as the Battle of the Frontiers. The results of the battle in Lorraine which began on August 14th were communicated all along the frontier. On August 20th, the First and Second French armies were bruised and bloodied against the more prepared German army. They were out fought and out gunned. The French had underestimated the power and capability of machine guns. The Germans advanced into French territory with looting, shooting and burning in their wake. Civilians were shot and bayoneted. French General Castelnau ordered retreat. The French doctrine of the offensive was also a victim that day. All that was visible on the fields around Lorraine that day were corpses. General Castelnau got word that his son had been killed in battle. He told the soldiers that they would continue.

The next day four thousand shells fell on Ste. Genevieve in a relentless bombardment that lasted an incredible seventy-five hours. The French saw a possible opening. Intelligence showed that Rupprecht was exposing his flank to the Army of Nancy. The success of Rupprecht in turning back the French from Sarrebourg and Morhange resulted in Rupprecht winning the Iron Cross and the revival of Germany's belief in a decisive battle in Lorraine. Perhaps, a double envelopment was possible.

After the success of Rupprecht's counterattack, he contacted Moltke demanding to know whether he should halt or continue on. Finally, he was told to "Pursue direction Epinal." It was a surprising order and meant that the Sixth and Seventh Armies would be committed to a frontal attack something that the German's avoided whenever possible. Rupprecht's forces were locked in battle with Foch's for several days.

Joffre was not discouraged by Rupprecht's success. He held fast to the idea that engaging the German left wing would weaken the middle and right. On August 20th, he ordered the attack in the Ardennes, the basic part of Plan 17. The fifth Army was ordered to take the offensive across the Sambre against the enemy's right wing. Joffre made this order even though he knew that the Belgians and British did not support the offensive. But France was committed to Plan 17. It was the only design it had for victory. France would not go on the defensive. What dominated all its planning was their certainty that the German center would be thinned out and therefore vulnerable. Joffre forbade any reconnaissance because it might tip the Germans off. He wanted it to be a complete surprise attack.

Crown Prince William was the Commander of the German Fifth Army. The Fifth and Fourth Armies were to be the pivot of the right wing. The Fifth Army was to advance through the southern Ardennes, the Fourth Army taking the north. Opposing the Crown Prince's Army was the French Third Army under General Ruffey. He was one of the few French military men who favored heavy artillery and an air force. The plan was for the two French armies to make their way through the middle and lop off the German right wing. General de Langle reported that the Germans were in strength in the forests. His report was viewed as pessimistic. General Ruffey took the reports about the German presence seriously.



The fog was thick on the morning of August 21 in the Ardennes. The German fourth and Fifth Armies had been moving forward on the two days before. They expected a French attack. A battle erupted. The Germans were entrenched and the French soldiers attacked boldly with bayonets. They were mowed down by machine guns. On the 22nd, there was a full-scale battle in the lower Ardennes. Thousands died – both French and German. Some of the dead were “still standing” supported by other dead bodies. French units were retreating in disorder, obviously not a planned retreat. Ruffey was outraged that Joffre had taken his unit of 50,000 reservists for the Special Army of Lorraine. Ruffey claimed he could have won the Battle of Virton had he had those extra men.

De Langle reported to Joffre that it was impossible to carry out the orders for August 23rd due to the losses his army sustained. Joffre refused to believe it and told him to resume the offensive. Fighting continued on the 23rd; but, by the end of the day it was obvious that the French Army had been overwhelmed and had retreated. That night, Joffre did not realize the full extent of defeat. He planned to renew the offensive. Lanrezac's Fifth Army was to attack across the Sambre River. He asked that Sir John French cooperate with the action. Von Kluck's Army was to reach the water barrier by August 23rd and Bulow's would reach it earlier. The British army would also reach the canal on the 23rd.

To Lanrezac, the doctrine of the offensive was dead. He didn't know that three Germany armies were converging on him, but he sensed their presence. Lanrezac saw the Germans as a great rolling wave while Joffre and his staff saw a weak German center. The Germans were estimated by the French as having 17 or 18 divisions while in reality they had 30. He feared the British was both ill-prepared and unreliable. If he followed orders and crossed the Sambre, he was sure he would be outflanked by the Germans on his left. The horrific sound of the gigantic siege guns could be heard in the distance as they attacked Namur. Reports indicated that the forts would not hold out another day. A French regiment of 3,000 men was sent in to join the defense of Namur. The total defense numbered 37,000 men while the Germans numbered at different times between 107,000 to 153,000 and were equipped with 400 to 500 pieces of artillery.

The German sweep that Kitchener had predicted was becoming a reality. The British staff commanders refused to believe it. They thought the reports were exaggerated. Kitchener dispatched the 4th Division – the division he had kept to defend England – based on the German advance through Belgium and the withdrawal of the Belgian Army. General von Kluck was concerned about the whereabouts of the British force.

Kluck moved onto Mons acting on orders to cross the canal and force the enemy back. Bulow was having problems with the other two Generals. Kluck worked his way ahead of him and Hausen lagged behind. Bulow decided to act alone and attacked the line at the Sambre. It was the Battle of Charleroi which Hausen joined by the end of the first day. A wounded commander was driven back to headquarters. He said to tell the general they had done their best. The Third Corps reported terrible losses. By nightfall, all French units retreated and had suffered severe casualties. Those soldiers who weren't dead or injured suffered severe exhaustion. Lanrezac asked Sir John French to



attack Bulow's right flank but Sir John could not comply. Hausen brought in four fresh corps and more guns and attacked during the night.

Bulow's army had taken as much punishment as they had given. In some spots the French were holding the Germans back. Belgian refugees were lining the roads trying to escape to a safer place. Lanrezac was feeling the pressure of an enemy that was against him on all sides. Word came that the Belgians had evacuated Namur. Some were urging him to allow a counterattack on the far left to relieve pressure on the British at Mons who were engaged with von Kluck's Army. But Lanrezac was taking a wait and see attitude. De Langle sent word to Lanrezac that things were worse than first thought. The Fourth Army had been defeated and was in retreat thus leaving a large swath of the Meuse unguarded. Word also came that the IIIrd Corps in Charleroi had been attacked and was in retreat. Germans had taken the northern forts of Namur and entered the city. The Fifth Army's right was completely unprotected. To save France from another Sedan, the Fifth Army had to be saved. Lanrezac gave the order for full retreat. Joffre disapproved but not that night. He and others were fixated on "again."

The British were defending the Mons Canal against von Kluck's forces. Sir John French was as reluctant to mount an offense as was Lanrezac. He told his men that the British offensive was off due to the retreat of the French Fifth, although the Fifth was not fully in retreat. Sir John had to blame someone other than his own reluctance. The British ordered that the bridges over the canal be prepared for demolition. The British and French were still in denial about how outnumbered they were. The Germans attacked in the morning but were pushed back by the great marksmanship of the British. But the Germans were relentless and continued their attack finally weakening the British who fell back to a second line of defense. By that afternoon, they were ordered to withdraw. Further up the canal, the British were having problems rigging the bridges with explosives. The battle took its toll on the Germans, too, who retired for the night. Von Kluck's forces sustained major losses. One German reserve captain found himself the only surviving soldier in his company. The losses were so great that they feared the English would run over them if they knew.

After hearing two contrasting accounts of German strength, Sir John French put an end to the thought of an attack. Worse news came when Sir John was informed of Lanrezac's withdrawal of the French Fifth leaving the British forces in peril. Orders were drawn up immediately for a British retreat. It was an end to a long day for the British. Henry Wilson blamed Kitchener and the Cabinet for sending four divisions instead of six. In the Battle of Mons, the British lost 1,600 men and held up the Germans for only one day. During the Battle of the Frontiers, the French lost more than 140,000 men.

Belgium was devastated – dead bodies, dead horses, acrid smells, destroyed and flattened buildings. Joffre, who blamed everyone but himself, stuck to the offensive and appeared extremely confident. At the root of the failures were the shortcomings of the commanders. There were some failures among the commanders – including emotional collapses and suicides. Joffre demanded the names of the commanders who had showed weakness. Joffre noted a lack of coordination between artillery and infantry divisions. Joffre clung to the "offensive plan" like a dog on a bone. Although Joffre tried



to place blame on Lanzarec's retreat, the British Army believed that the retreat saved both English and French forces.

The world was shocked when it was reported on August 25th that the Germans had taken Namur and 5,000 prisoners. The Times of London had predicted that Namur would withstand a six-month siege – not fall in four days. The Germans experienced a huge burst of confidence.

Analysis

Chapter 13

The French opened their offensive into German-occupied Lorraine. The far right wing renewed their offensive in Alsace. The Germans seem retiring and not willing to engage. There was much maneuvering of the troops by the French in Brussels. Suddenly, ten thousand Germans were pouring into Belgium at the Meuse River. The German march across Belgium was unstoppable.

Lack of communication skills haunted the Germans. Moltke proved to be an indecisive leader leading to confusion and delays on the battlefield.

The British had landed and were moving toward their designated area on the French left. There were conflicts between Joffre and Sir John French about the use and deployment of the British soldiers. The Belgians finally retreated and moved their headquarters. The French felt that the Belgians had abandoned them.

The brutality of the German soldiers against innocent civilians was increasing. One-hundred fifty civilians were shot in one small town, 644 in another. The executions were part of their strategy in weakening the enemy. By August 20th, Brussels, the capital of Belgium, was captured by the Germans.

Chapter 14

The Battle of the Frontiers took place from August 20th through 24th. Battles took place all along the Western Front. Germany was more prepared and were getting the better of the French. The French had underestimated the size and capabilities of the Germans. The Germans continued their brutality by killing innocent villagers and burning buildings.

General Rupprecht was successful in turning back French forces. He won the German Iron Cross. The French Third Army was led by General Ruffey who, unlike most French commanders, favored heavy artillery. General de Langle reported that due to so many losses it was impossible to carry out the offensive orders. General Lanrezac was an outspoken commander who considered the French offensive doctrine as dead. He saw the Germans as a great rolling machine that destroyed everything in its wake. Joffre did not appreciate his negative comments. The two men did not get along.



General von Kluck and General von Bulow were two German generals who led different wings of the German efforts. There was a rivalry between the two, and von Kluck refused to appear subservient to von Bulow in any way.

Sir John French was becoming more and more nervous with the obvious dominance of the German army. He began thinking of ways to disengage.

The Germans took Namur, Belgium, along with 5,000 prisoners which gave the Germans a huge boost of confidence.

Vocabulary

citadel, bastion, reconnaissance, anathema, pugnacious, superfluous, billets, perfidious, implacable, phalanx, envisaged, scion, colonelcy, filial, poseur, antagonism, omnipotence, apostle, sequestered, confluence, pusillanimous, pantheon



Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

Chapter 15: The Cossacks Are Coming!

The Russians were grateful to the French for standing by the alliance. They were eager to show their support to the French. The Czar proclaimed that the annihilation of the Germans was their priority. He ordered the Grand Duke to open the way to Berlin as soon as possible. The French asked Russia to put a move on their involvement. But, there was a disconnect between Russian rhetoric and Russian readiness. The Grand Duke reportedly shed tears when he was named Commander in Chief. He didn't know how to approach his duties. There were other tears – Messimy burst into tears while giving a talk before the Cabinet on August 5th; Churchill broke down and cried during a discussion with Henry Wilson.

Russia was not prepared for the advanced date of attack which they had promised to the French. The First and Second Russian Armies were ordered to prepare for attack against the Germans in East Prussia on August 13th. The vast geographical distances and the lack of reliable communication systems presented an organization as did the lack of good transportation. Graft and corruption ran rampant through the Russian military. When meeting his staff officers for the first time after being named Commander in Chief, the Grand Duke said, "Gentlemen, no stealing."

Early on the morning of August 12th, the Russian invasion of East Prussia took place. It was a preliminary attack in advance of the full invasion. There were signs of German preparation in the towns and countryside. Large stacks of hay were being burned to mark their route. Wooden watchtowers had been built. Young boys were given bikes so they could act as messengers. German soldiers were dressed as peasants, even peasant women. This told the Russians that the Germans were not planning a serious resistance. General Rennenkampf opened his offensive on August 17th with 200,000 men. This army would be joined by Samsonov's Second Army to form a joint front in the area of Allenstein.

Due to the lack of an east-west railway across Poland to East Prussia, Samsonov's army was on foot and several days behind Rennenkampf's. As a result, there would be a six-day period in which the Germans would be facing only one army. The Russians were disorganized and imprecise. The Russian Army was moving farther and farther into hostile territory and was out-distancing its supply train. Lacking wire to lay their own communication lines, the Russians depended on the enemy's telegraph lines. Their staffs lacked codes and cryptographers to keep their messages secret. In firepower and fighting ability, the Germans outclassed the Russians. The fact that the soldiers despised their War Minister and Commander in Chief didn't help matters. Before fighting was a month old, the Russians were running out of ammunition. They sent urgent messages to the Grand Duke for more.



The cry that the Cossacks were coming in East Prussia caused the Germans to think twice about leaving the province with only minimal protection. The orders from Moltke were to defend East Prussia but not at the risk of being overwhelmed by superior forces. The Germans felt more pressure when on August 15th Japan declared for the Allies freeing up more Russian forces for the European war. The German Eighth Army expected Rennekampf's army to advance first and meet it on the battle field on August 19 or 20 in Gumbinnen, near the Russian front. Another unit would be sent south to meet Samsonov's army that was approaching the staging area.

General von Francois commander of the First Corps was difficult to control. He reached the staging area and wanted to be on the offensive. His commander, General Prittwitz, told him to halt because it was already accepted that part of East Prussia would be lost. To Prittwitz' astonishment, the next morning he got word that Francois and his corps were engaged in battle. Rennekampf's army crossed the front in full force. Again, Francois was told to stop his actions, but he refused. The Russian advance was unprotected on its left the regiment the Germans fired upon fled. Francois was jubilant over his "victory."

Rennekampf was beginning to feel the burden of scant supplies and bad communications. He came under the impression that the Germans were evacuating East Prussia. Due to the confusion, Rennekampf halted his troops. Francois pleaded with Prittwitz for permission to counterattack instead of retreating. There were advantages and disadvantages to such an attack. The decision was made more difficult when the Germans intercepted a message that Rennekampf was halting. But, how long was he halting? The time frame when the Germans would only have to fight one Russian army was running out. It was decided that Francois would attack Rennekampf the next morning, August 20th. The next morning Rennekampf was taken off guard by the attack. The Russians were doing well and getting the best of the attacking Germans until suddenly their guns were silenced – the Russians had run out of ammo. Francois took advantage and inflicted damage at the rate of 60 percent. Francois ordered his men around to the Russian center and left. The Russian forces there were prepared for the attack and were not out of ammunition. The Germans were on the receiving end of heavy gunfire and were devastated. A whole company threw its arms down and ran. Although Francois had an early victory, on the whole the Battle of Gumbinnen was a Russian victory. On the evening of August 20th, Prittwitz told Francois to retreat to Vistula, but Francois argued against it.

Rennekampf decided he could not pursue the fleeing enemy due to his shortage of supplies and ammo. Although the Russians were victorious, they were hit hard with casualties. Word reached the Germans that the Russians were advancing over a front 50 to 60 miles wide. Prittwitz ordered that the fight be ended with a retreat to Vistula. Moltke was upset. Ceding part of East Prussia was an enormous moral as well as economic defeat. They needed reinforcements but from where? They couldn't pull troops from the Western Front and risk losing it to the French. A proposal was made to bring Francois' army south by rail to reinforce the XXth Corps in its fight against Samsonov's left wing. Moving all the men and their equipment would not be easy but the German rail system could handle the challenge. Two more corps could head south



by foot to join in the fight against the enemy's southern army. This strategy would only be successful if Rennenkampf stayed put. Prittwitz gave his approval, but he immediately regretted it. He told Moltke that he needed reinforcements which sealed his dismissal.

General Ludendorff was taken from the Second Army to serve as Chief of Staff of the Eighth Army. Ludendorff had been a hero in the Battle of Liege. Now a replacement for Prittwitz had to be found. The offer was made to Retired General Hindenburg, who accepted immediately. Hindenburg, who fought at Sedan, had received the Iron Cross and was a veteran of the Austrian War of 1866. The most pressing issue when Hindenburg joined the fight was whether two corps should remain where they were to defend against a possible advance by Rennenkampf or move south to oppose Samsonov. The Germans were uncertain on what to do.

The Russians were also trying to figure out what to do with Rennenkampf and the other corps. There was the ever-present problem of supply and ammo shortages and the lack of a good communication system. The French were constantly pressuring them for reinforcements. The army was also short on horses to pull the supply wagons. Samsonov was pressured to travel more quickly but replied that he could not. The men were exhausted, the horses had no oats, and the men had no bread. Samsonov's forces encountered German XX led by General Scholtz and a battle ensued. Russians had taken over two small towns and ordered the bombardment of another. General Scholtz was forced to back up. Samsonov was told that the Germans were retreated and he had to contend with only a weak German force. He was ordered to execute an energetic offensive to cut off Rennenkampf's retreat from Vistula.

Rennenkampf was on a westward rather than southward move, fearing that he would be hit from the rear. The Russians had orders to take out the German trenches at all costs. Even though the Germans had the machine guns, the advancing Cossacks with their glistening bayonets frightened the Germans who abandoned their trenches and machine guns. By the end of the day on August 23rd, the Germans were on the run but not routed. Losses were high on both sides. Communication was so poor that the Russians were relying on mounted horsemen to deliver messages. After an intercepted message from Rennenkampf pinpointing Samsonov's position, the Germans made up their minds and dispatched two more corps south.

Chapter 16: Tannenberg

Ludendorff was anxious to engage with Samsonov before Rennenkampf showed up. He wanted the first stage of the battle to start on August 25th. Francois was to attack Usdau with the intention of the envelopment of Samsonov's left wing. Francois declined because his men and equipment were still on the train. He couldn't fight without ammo. Ludendorff was miffed by the insubordination and traveled by car to Francois' headquarters. There he again ordered him to begin the attack. To some the intercepted message seemed too specific. Perhaps, it was a ruse and the Germans would be lured in and ambushed.



On August 26th, orders were issued for the Germans to perpetrate a double envelopment. The Germans would literally surround Samsonov. But, by the next day Ludendorff was second-guessing his decision. The intelligence could be wrong. He was having the same doubts and fears as Prittwitz. The hero of Liege was losing his nerve. Hindenburg helped to stiffen Ludendorff's spine with a convincing argument. Francois had not begun his battle as ordered. He was waiting for artillery to arrive. Francois was stubborn and got his way.

Ludendorff got a call from headquarters. He was offered reinforcements from the Western Front. He discouraged the movement of these troops. He knew the war plans and knew that removing troops from the important German right wing was not the thing to do. The panic in German headquarters was from the fact that the Russians mobilized a full four weeks before what was planned. Moltke was under the impression that the battle on the French front had been fought and won. Thus, he wanted to shore up the Eastern Prussian front and save the country from the Russians. The Kaiser was very distressed at the thought of losing East Prussia.

General Samsonov was preparing for battle on August 26th. His objective was to capture the main German railway which would make it easier to advance into Germany. But, Samsonov's soldiers were exhausted and starving not to mention their horses. His complaints were ignored by the superiors. Samsonov came to realize that the Germans weren't in retreat but were reorganizing and advancing toward him. He asked for permission to move westward. His commander, General Jilinsky, believed that Samsonov was acting like a coward and demanded he continue with the offensive.

There was a sense of disaster among the Russian high command. Jilinsky considered an East Prussian offensive a lost cause. However, Russia was committed to help France and could not go back on their promise. Communication problems continued to plague the Russians. They didn't know where their own armies or enemies were at times. The Russian generals couldn't communicate effectively with each other Jilinsky was worried about Rennekampf's failure to support Samsonov. On the morning of the 26th, Samsonov followed orders. His corps began the march to the center. It was a disaster, and the Russians suffered great losses. One division lost 5,000 men. By the end of the day, Samsonov knew that it was no longer a question of enveloping the enemy; rather, it was one of survival. Yet he decided not to break off the battle but renew it the next day. He was following orders. He hoped that he could hold off the Germans until Rennenkampf showed up to strike the decisive blow. The success of the battle depended on them holding firm.

Francois finally received the artillery. Before first light, a bombardment of great impact assaulted the Russian First Corps at Usdau. By 11 o'clock that morning, the Russian First Corps had abandoned the battlefield. By late in the day, the Russians finally recognized that the Germans were not retreated but rather were advancing against Samsonov. Jilinsky sent orders to Rennekampf to move as soon as possible. The battle was in its third day. There were different clashes along the front which was forty miles long. Shells smashed into farmhouses and villages, artillery roared and horse-drawn gun batteries moved through villages and forest and across fields. There were hordes of



prisoners. Field commanders lost track of their men; German planes flew overhead; staff cars sped by. It was a chaotic scene.

Francois opened battle at dawn on the 28th with another barrage of artillery fire. Francois was determined to envelope Samsonov's flank. Lundendorff and Hindenburg waited at Scholtz's field headquarters two miles from a small village called Tannenberg. The Germans were moving satisfactorily and pushing after the broken Russian right wing. Anticipating victory, the Germans were upset when they learned that Rennekampf was on the move but wouldn't make it to the staging area in time to be of any help. The collapse of the famous Russian First Corp and the collapse of the Sixth Corps spelled the end for General Samsonov. He could hear the guns of Francois' advancing troops. Samsonov ordered his things to be sent back to Russia and mounted a horse to join the front.

The Russians retreated over two days, August 29th and 30th. The two center corps which fought the longest and hardest were the last to retreat. Most were caught in the German envelopment. The Russians were tromping around in the woods and surrounded on all sides. Those who survived were starving. Horses were unfed and unwatered. Five Cossacks tried to escort General Martos through the forest but were shot and captured by the Germans. The rest of Martos' soldiers were killed or captured. General Samsonov was killed while trying to flee to Russia.

In all, 92,000 Russians were taken prisoner. There were between 300 and 500 captured guns. Herds of horses were captured. There were 30,000 missing and dead. The Germans also suffered many losses, but they began to think that they had won the Battle of Tannenberg. There were many contributing factors to the victory, but there was one that no one planned on – the intercepted Russian messages. To many of the German public, Hindenburg was the savior of East Prussia. The Russian defeat was somewhat blunted by the recent resounding victory the Russians had over the Austrians. But, the defeat took its toll. The Russian Second Army was no more, General Samsonov was dead. His commanders were either dead, captured, or found to be incompetent. Rennenkampf was chased out of East Prussia in an ensuing battle. He lost his nerve, deserted, and drove back to Russia in a car. He was discharged in disgrace.

Germany began making peace proposals to Russia right after the battle and continued to do so through 1916. Russia never accepted any of them.

Analysis

Chapter 15

To the Russian Czar, the annihilation of the Germans was his number one priority. The Russians were grateful to the French for standing by the alliance and were eager to show their support for the French. The Czar ordered the Grand Duke to open the way to Berlin as soon as possible. But there were problems with mobilizing Russian troops and



they were unable to meet the same timetable that the French had. The Russians invaded East Prussia. As they moved deeper into German territory they were attacked and eventually outclassed by the Germans. The Russians were ill prepared and running out of ammunition. The Russians and Germans each won some of the skirmishes in East Prussia which was an important stronghold of Germany. The Russians were plagued by shortages in supplies and ammo and by the inability to communicate effectively.

Chapter 16

Still engaged in battle in East Prussia, the Germans planned a strategy that involved double envelopment. They would encircle and capture two armies simultaneously. Russian General Samsonov wanted to capture a German train which would make movement into German territory much easier.

The Germans seemed to be in retreat but they were just reorganizing. Russian General Jilinsky and other commanders began to think that East Prussia was a lost cause. As battles waged on, the Russians began to suffer great losses. One division lost 5,000 men. Eventually the Russians retreated.

Generals Ludendorff and Hindenburg oversaw the fighting and maneuvering.

General Samsonov was so upset by the defeat that he had his things sent back to Russia, mounted a horse and joined the front. He was later killed on the battlefield.

The Germans captured 92,000 Russians. The Germans had won the Battle of Tannenberg which is what the battle was referred to.

General Hindenburg became a hero to the people and was called the Savior of East Prussia.

Vocabulary

annihilation, bravado, commissariat, forays, cryptographers, preponderance, retrograde, formidable, procrastinate, marauding, indubitable, ponderously, bivouac, presaged, vexation, equanimity



Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

Chapter 17: The Flames of Louvain

Although the war had only raged a mere twenty days by the time the Battle of the Frontiers ended, the world had changed forever. Nationhood rose up and swept away all the safeguards that were supposed to prevent war. The Germans felt war was ennobling. Some thought that war sprang from the “unconscious boredom of peace.” Thomas Mann felt that the highly intelligent and educated Germans deserved to dominate.

A German scientist told American journalist Irwin Cobb that Germany would enlighten the world and that there would never be another war. Germans had talked for years about how they would one day basically take over Europe, crushing England and depriving it of its navy. This kind of rhetoric fostered distrust for the Germans on a global basis. H. G. Wells said that the enemy was German imperialism and militarism. In August of 1914, national hatred of Germany hadn't taken place yet. The Germans were seen more ludicrous than menacing.

But, there was a change in the sentiment about Germans. It had begun with what happened to Belgium. The Germans believed that to be effective militarily, the people of a country had to feel the pain and misery of war. This theory was put into practice in 1870 when French resistance emerged after Sedan. The world was stunned at the brutality of the Germans. There were executions of prisoners and civilians. It was the emergence of terror. The terror stimulated resistance which caused the war to be lengthened— not shortened as the Germans had contended.

On August 23rd as retribution for their traitorous manner, General von Bulow gave permission for the people of Andenne to be punished. The entire town was burned to ashes and 110 people were shot to death. Villages across Belgium were treated in the same way. In Tamines, 400 citizens were herded together and shot at. Those not dead after the shooting were bayoneted to death. The Germans routinely took hostages in the towns and villages they stormed through. For every German shot at, a hostage would be executed. In some cases, people were deported to serve as harvest laborers in Germany.

In Dinant, men were lined up on one side of the square and women on the other. Two firing squads marched in between them and fired until all were dead – 612 people in all. After the executions, the German soldiers pillaged and burned down the town. There was a paranoia about the Germans. The Germans believed that someone above – an authority figure or leader – conspired with the people to cause resistance. There was self-delusion. Ludendorff viewed the Germans as chivalrous and humane. Germans would rather have order than justice. Disobedience was synonymous with treachery. To



“sell” their version of the war to the general populace, the newspapers carried stories about the revolting cruelties of the evil and murderous Belgians.

The burning of Louvain began on August 25th. Louvain was an old Belgium city, founded in 1426. It was famous for its university and fabulous library that had 230,000 volumes and a unique collection of medieval manuscripts. There was a beautiful stone tapestry of knights and ladies on the façade of the town hall. In the Church of St. Pierre were works by Flemish masters. Louvain was burned for six days and then it was abruptly stopped. When Louvain was first occupied, the Germans spent money in the shops and there seemed to be no problem. Things deteriorated and led to the taking of hostages and executions. There was a fire fight in the dark. The Germans claimed that Belgians were shooting at them. The Belgians claimed the Germans were shooting at each other. The burning of Louvain resulted from the incident. House after house and street after street, all burned to the ground. Dead people and dead horses were everywhere. The world was appalled.

The Rector of the University was rescued by the Americans. He tried to describe the burning of the Library but choked on his words. He couldn't continue and wept openly. Worldwide publicity was completely against the Germans. Unlike the German newspapers, they looked like the thugs and murderers they were to the rest of the world. The Germans stood alone in blaming the Belgians for the horrors. People wondered why the Germans committed the heinous crimes. Some said they were envious and inferior people. Others said they were unbalanced. To the world, it was the work of barbarians. The Germans hoped to induce submission from the rest of the world. Instead, the people saw an enemy with whom compromise was impossible.

How Belgium had been treated had turned the heads of the world. How Louvain was destroyed captured the full attention of everyone. The entire world was against Germany. The Germans – everyone from the Kaiser to professors and intellectuals – tried to convince the world that the Germans weren't at fault. They were forced to do what they did. By the end of August, the Allied nations were not intimidated by the Germans. They were more convinced than ever that they had to be beaten. On September 4th, the British, French, and Russian governments signed the Pact of London in which they vowed to fight for peace together.

On September 2nd, Matthias Erzberger, Leader of the Catholic Centrum Party, enumerated German's goals going forward. The Germans would use victory to control the European continent for all time. The plan included the abolition of neutral states at Germany's borders, the end of England's “intolerable hegemony” in world affairs, and the destruction of Russia. The defeated were to pay at least ten billion marks for war costs. The Allied forces were talking in terms of destroying German imperialism.

Chapter 18: Blue Water, Blockade, and Great Neutral

In 1914, the British naval fleet was Britain's most prized possession. It prevented the invasion of the British Isles and it had to bring troops back and forth to the Continent where they defended the territories. Most important it safeguarded ocean-going



commerce the world over. England depended on the food that was brought in by sea. Britain feared that swift German steamers could be converted into destroyers and destroy some of the fleet.

To be successful a naval fleet had to be superior to every other fleet it might encounter. The British Navy had to do its best to be superior in its home waters and avoided risk elsewhere. The German fleet was more of a risk-taker. The Kaiser had proclaimed that Germany's future was on the water. The Germany navy was ready to battle at sea and worry about consequences later.

One of the main concerns of the British Navy was the increased use of submarines and torpedoes. The site that the British chose for its wartime base was at Scapa Flow the farthest and most northern tip of British territory. The base was positioned to defend its own and block Germany's commerce lanes through the North Sea. In August 1914, Scapa was still being built and was not equipped with dry docks or fixed defenses. None the less, the fleet was mobilized by Churchill and reached Scapa on August 1st while the debate was still raging with the Brits on whether to get involved in the war. Sir John Jellicoe was named Commander in Chief of the Grand Fleet.

The base lacked land-based guns and fixed minefields and was open to submarine and destroyer attacks. Jellicoe worried when he learned that German trawlers that had been captured had links to submarines. When one of his light cruisers rammed and sank a submarine, he was more married than pleased. It proved to him that the submarines were out there. The fleet was moved twice once to Scotland and once to Ireland; but, it left the North Sea open to the Germans and made England vulnerable to attack. The main function of the fleet in Scapa Flow was to patrol the North Sea and be on the lookout for the enemy.

The British ships were superior to the German ships, but the Germans had more incentive to engage in fighting than did the British. And the Germans were far more daring. Days went by and nothing was sighted which made the Brits worry even more. Churchill was worried that it was the calm before the storm. He suggested that the fleet be moved to the theater of action. But, Jellicoe maintained his constant patrol of the North Sea.

Grand Admiral von Tirpitz was the "father" of the German Fleet and former Secretary of the navy. The navy was a threat to the allied forces and that fear was partly what sparked the war. But, there was no active role for the fleet after the war started. The Kaiser was a big fan of the fleet and believed that "he who controls communications by sea controls his fate." He was determined that Germany become a major power at sea. The enhancement of the Germany navy began. Though it could not equal the British fleet, it was a threat to them. It could prevent them from blockading the waterways. The Kaiser saw a robust German fleet as intimidating the British and forcing them into a "peaceful" relationship with the Germans. The German ambassador to England was unable to persuade the Brits on this friendship or a naval holiday.



The revamping of the German Navy was a drain on resources – men and money. Although magnificent ships were being produced, the Kaiser could never believe that they were a match for the British ships. And the thought of his little “darlings” being shattered by gunfire sent the Kaiser reeling. Tirpitz only saw the ships as a weapon to use in battle and was soon frozen out of the Kaiser’s inner circle. Naval policy was left to Admiral von Pohl became the Chief of Naval Staff and his underlings. Kaiser Wilhelm wanted the High Seas Fleet to be a “fleet in being,” a constant threat to other fleets and ships. It would be a drain on the enemy’s manpower and money. The Kaiser viewed the fleet as something he could “bring” to the negotiating table.

In August, the primary enemy was the Russians not the Brits. The fleet’s priority was to guard against Russian interference with supply ships from Scandinavian countries by controlling the Baltic Sea. It was too risky to use the fleet against England because it would be weakened and could cause them to lose control of the Baltic. The Russians could access land and defeat the Germans. However, blockades would not be an important matter if the Germans' expectations of a short war and decisive victory were correct. The Germans conducted one sweep by submarines during the first week of the war while the rest of the fleet remained in the Baltic or in port. The British were able to report on August 14th that there was safe travel across the Atlantic.

Britain had gotten into a conflict with the Great Neutral – the United States. A conference was held to reaffirm and revise the rules of the sea. The Declaration of London favored the neutral's right to trade against the belligerent's right to blockade. The American delegate, Admiral Mahan, objected to the policy but was overruled. Goods were divided into three groups: absolute contraband (items for military use); conditional contraband (items that could be for military or civilian use); and free list which included food. The first two categories could be seized by a belligerent who had declared a blockade.

Mahan and his supporters were appalled. What was the use of denying the use of the sea to the enemy if it was permissible to supply the enemy with goods? They mounted a campaign against the Declaration of London which proved to have impact. The House of Lords failed to bring the matter to a vote. The declaration was never ratified.

On August 6th, the Declaration of London was still viable. The United States requested that belligerents be made to declare their adherence to it. There was confusion about the regulations. It was suggested that the doctrine of “continuous voyage” be applied. “Continuous voyage” was a concept created by the British which referred to one’s ultimate voyage and one’s initial destination – the former being the determining factor relative to disposition of contraband and other issues. Britain went a step further and proclaimed that conditional contraband would be subject to capture if the items were destined for the enemy. The effect was that the regulation made everything contraband.

The United States strongly resisted the new regulation covering contraband and the right to search. In a short war, the Allies didn’t need the United States. However, if the war were to be a long, drawn out affair, they would have to turn to America for food, arms, and money. No one at the time was thinking of American boots on the European



ground. Britain and the allies had to stay on the good side of the great neutral. The British stance was to secure as many blockades as possible without angering the United States.

President Woodrow Wilson was bent on keeping the US out of the war. He did not want to look partial to the British by going along with their harsh contraband and search regulations. Wilson saw himself and the US playing a larger role in the war – one of neutral arbiter. Wilson had no appetite to argue about seafaring regulations. Goods were flowing to America and that was deemed most important. American became involved in the war on a financial level. The loans to the Allied forces drew interest, and an Allied victory meant the borrowers would repay their loans plus the interest.

Wilson's determination that America would stay neutral failed to prevail not because of the Allies' greatest asset – the British Fleet – but because of German folly. Wilson fell deeply for the people of Louvain and condemned the Germans – not just the Germany Army but the German people, too. He saw the writing on the wall. If Germany won the war, it would change the course of civilization and draw the United States into the war. To Wilson, a German victory, especially after Belgium, was a threat to the world. Every time the Americans were able to make an issue about the search and contraband regulations, the Germans would do something to distract attention from it. When a stiff rebuke of the order was about to reopen the controversy, German Zeppelins bombed Antwerp and killed civilians.

Wilson feared that something would happen on the high seas that would bring them into the war. The Germans stayed mainly docked in their wartime base. The one exception was a battle with the British in which the British suffered 75 casualties, but lost no ships. Germans lost more than 1,000 men, including Tirpitz's son, and sustained either total loss or some damage on a number of their ships. The Kaiser was horrified and ordered that the fleet not be risked again. It was the British fleet that became the "fleet in being" while the German navy sat passively by. But, the Germans weren't finished with their sea adventure. Their U-boat submarine offensive was the sea connection that Wilson feared.

Analysis

Chapter 17

The Germans continued their savage march through Belgium. They burned towns and executed innocent people. In Tamines, 400 citizens were herded into the center of town and shot. Those who didn't die were bayoneted.

Louvain was a turning point in the war as far as public and worldwide opinion is concerned. Louvain was a small Belgium city that was founded in 1426. It was a historic village with a library that had priceless medieval manuscripts. There was a beautiful church that had an ancient stone tapestry. The town had a university. The Germans invaded the town, executed the people, and burned the town for six days.



President Woodrow Wilson of the United States had stayed neutral until he heard about Louvain. He knew then that America couldn't stay neutral. If the Germans won the war, civilization would be changed forever.

Chapter 18

The British Naval Fleet was England's most prized possession in 1914. It was the finest fleet in the world. It protected England and also safeguarded ocean-going commerce the world over. The British were worried about the use of submarines and torpedoes which were a threat to its fleet. During the war, the British moved the fleet north to Scapa Flow. While there it patrolled the North Sea to keep the Germans from gaining access.

Kaiser Wilhelm envied the British Fleet and ordered a German fleet be built to emulate it. He felt a grand fleet like the British would earn him more respect and give him something to bring to the negotiating table. The German fleet patrolled the Baltic Sea to keep Russians from accessing it.

Britain got into a controversy over contraband and search regulations with the Great Neutral – the United States. Britain kept a low profile during the controversy. They knew that if the war expanded, the allies would need resources and money from the United States – not boots on the ground.

President Woodrow Wilson was determined to keep America out of the European War. He was careful never to make statements in favor of either side. However, with the brutality that the Germans were guilty of in the burning of Louvain, Wilson changed his mind about staying neutral.

Vocabulary

poignant, decadence, indemnity, ebullience, ludicrous, corollary, burgomaster, indomitable, pillage, chivalrous, heretic proliferated, parsimony, resonant, fervent, inertia, eclectic, enmity, pederast, nonentity, nullified, dreadnoughts, vociferous



Chapters 19 - 20

Summary

Chapter 19: Retreat

After the Battle of the Frontiers, the Germans cut into France from Belgium. A million soldiers made up the invading force that entered France on August 24th. The German right wing was on the march to Paris in a front that was seventy-five miles wide with Kluck's army on the right wing. Joffre had to deal with his retreating armies. He issued a new general order that proposed creating a new Sixth Army in the German path by taking men from the Lorraine front. It would join the forces of the French Fourth and Fifth Armies and the British forces in September. The retreating French were trying to arrest the advancement of the Germans. The German goal was envelopment. Both sides had Sedan on their minds. In retreat, the French fought with competence, which had not always been the case at the start of the war. They frustrated the enemy's goal to surround them.

Despite their rearguard efforts, the German advance was too large to stop. The French delayed them when possible. There was a terrible ambush in which hundreds of French soldiers were mowed down. Hundreds of skirmishes happened up and down the front. The soldiers were slowed on the road by citizens who were fleeing their villages. As the French retreated, they were yielding their land, their country. The men asked the commanders why they were retreating. The commanders responded that they would fight again. The soldiers were exhausted – marching all night and facing the enemy by day. They rarely slept. The Germans follow behind burning villages as the advance.

On August 25th, the Germans penetrated Sedan and shelled Bazeilles which was the scene of the Battle of the last Cartridge in 1870. There were skirmishes with losses on both sides. That night the French blew up all the railroad bridges in the area. Each day the units had to report their losses and receive replacements of men and officers. One unit alone lost 8,000 men. The French had learned the utility of new tactics including the digging of trenches.

The government was in a state of chaos. Messimy was in panic; fear was on his face. President Poincare felt it was his duty to tell the people the truth. Paris and its people had to be prepared for an invasion of Paris. Sadly, fortifications to safeguard the city existed only on paper. Their construction had not begun yet. Messimy received a telegram from Joffre who blamed the defeats on the soldiers who had not shown the offensive qualities expected of them. Incredibly, Joffre was pulling two divisions from Paris to help up north. It would leave Paris more open and vulnerable. Poincare exploded when he heard the news.

Retired French General Gallieni was brought in, initially not named to a position. Some wanted him to replace Joffre as Minister of War. Gallieni was old and suffering from a



terminal illness; yet, he was called upon to fix a botched job and defend Paris without an army. It was morally essential and economically sound that the capital be held. Gallieni told Messimy that he could defend Paris with three active units. But where was Messimy to get three active units? Joffre would not want to give up even one unit. Messimy worked all night and found a law that gave him authority to take the units. The law stated that the government was charged with the vital interests of the country. Keeping Paris from falling was certainly in the vital interests of the country.

Messimy penned a telegram to Joffre telling him to dispatch three active corps in good condition to Paris. The government was in total chaos. Everyone was blaming someone other than themselves. Approaches were being made to France's leading political figures to join the government. Messimy was removed from office. He was blamed for the false optimism of his communiqués. He was being replaced by former Minister of War Millerand. Messimy had the choice of staying on as a minister. When he was told that he was being replaced, Messimy was irate and said he refused to yield his position to Millerand. Messimy finally agreed to cede his post but chose to go to the front lines in Dubail's army where he served until the end of the war. He achieved the rank of general.

Gallieni still had no army, although his title was Commander of the Armies of Paris. Joffre had not sent one unit much less three. He had, in fact, chosen to ignore the request. Gallieni visited Joffre's headquarters and was told that the men couldn't be spared. It was Joffre's opinion that there was no useful defense of Paris and every man was needed for the battle that would decide the fate of the entire nation. Joffre was not moved by the potential loss of Paris. Joffre's first goal was to bring in the newly created Sixth Army.

If the French frontier could have been seen from above, there would have been a red rim representing 70 French divisions followed by a tiny wedge of khaki representing four British divisions. Those divisions were soon joined by another one. The British found themselves in the most risky position which they hadn't expected. Four German corps were advancing toward them. The French offensive had completely collapsed. Sir John French believed that the campaign was lost. He wanted to save the British soldiers and officers from envelopment. Under pressure, some British soldiers fell into lines of retreat. Food was dumped at crossroads for the starving soldiers. The British reached Le Cateau on the evening of August 25th. Sir John was miffed, feeling betrayed by Lanrezac's retreat. One group of French troops encountered another group of French troops who suddenly turned on them and attacked them with bayonets. They were actually German soldiers from von Kluck's army. General Haig, the commander, called for help. Sir John feared envelopment and sent orders for the line of retreat for Haig's army for the following day. Another blow to the British happened that night when General Smith-Dorrien sent word that his unit was trapped and he had to take a stand.

Henry Wilson who had been ebullient at the beginning of the war, was now deluged with defeat. Wilson called Smith-Dorrien warning him that if he stayed and fought, it would be another Sedan. Smith-Dorrien again explained that he was trapped. The gunfire had already begun. Things were deteriorating for the French and British. Von Kluck told his



men to pursue the “beaten enemy.” One of von Kluck’s units went off-route. In reality, Von Kluck had only three infantry divisions in battle against Smith-Dorrien's three units. Losses for the day at Le Cateau were over 8,000 men and 38 guns. The Germans sustained major losses as well and were exhausted. They stayed quiet over night. The next morning Kluck told them that he expected the enveloping move to take place. Blame for the loss of the battle went to the British. The first five days of action rendered 15,000 casualties among the British soldiers. More than ever, Sir John wanted to get his men out of France.

Joffre issued new orders, but the British failed to agree to them after discussion at a meeting. Joffre received reports from the front that the English had “lost cohesion.” Kluck received the same intelligence and had renewed hopes of a double envelopment. The French Fifth Army was also a beaten enemy. German armies had entered France from Cambrai. The French were beaten all along the line and was in full retreat. There was tension between Kluck and Von Bulow on the right wing who both had big egos and who both thought they should be in charge. Hausen was complaining, too, about his overnight accommodations and about his exhausted men. Supplies and food were lagging behind the troops. They had to live off local food.

Kluck received a telegram from the Kaiser thanking him for his decisive victories. Kluck’s goal was to press on and celebrate the anniversary of Sedan before entering Paris. Kluck wanted to outflank the French but received orders to advance to the Seine southwest of Paris. Bulow was to move directly on Paris while Hausen was to bring his army down to the Marne east of Paris. Rupprecht’s role was a little more vague, but his army was expected to cross the Moselle between Toul and Epinal if the enemy retired. Speed was of the essence so that the French could not reorganize. Severe measures against the population were to be used to break any resistance.

This order of August 28 followed the original war plans; however, the Armies were significantly diminished since those plans were first drawn up. The loss of manpower necessitated that the right wing be stretched out. Moltke discussed whether reinforcements should be sent to the right wing from Rupprecht’s armies. Their main goal remained to smash through the French line and pull off the double envelopment. The left wing would take Lorraine at the same time that the right wing was taking Paris. If the envelopment were successful, it would end the war. Moltke decided not to move any of Rupprecht’s left wing. He wanted dreams of the double envelopment to come true.

A fierce battle raged in Lorraine between two German armies and the armies of Castelnau and Dubail. On August 24th, Rupprecht launched a murderous attack on the enemy. The French were in full defense and found ingenious ways to shield themselves against fire. On the 25th, Castelnau launched his troops on the offensive and recaptured three towns and ten miles of territory. The bloody battle went on for three days. Joffre praised the armies at Lorraine for using all their strength and ability to keep the door closed against the enemy. If they broke through at Lorraine, the war would be over. General de Langle’s Fourth Army kept the Germans from crossing the Meuse near Sedan in a fierce three-day conflict. Lanrezac’s Army was still in retreat. Foch was



dispatched to the front to command a special army. On that same day he learned that his son and son-in-law had both been killed in the line of duty.

Joffre, in an attempt to inspire and bolster the British, sent Sir John a telegram expressing his gratitude for the brave assistance of the British soldiers. The timing was bad. When the telegram was sent the British had just evacuated St. Quentin, exposing Lanrezac's left precisely when he was supposed to attack. The British soldiers were beaten and exhausted and incapable of providing any serious support. They needed a break for days or weeks. Lanrezac was reluctant to follow through on his orders to attack. It was almost "insane" he said. Lanrezac was pushed to advance, but he still balked.

Lanrezac had lost respect for Joffre and didn't trust his judgment. He had lost faith in the Allies. Lanrezac would decide for himself when it was best to proceed. In the early morning hours of August 28th, Joffre visited Marle where he found Lanrezac exhausted and stressed. Joffre asked if Lanrezac wanted to be relieved of his command. He had to march immediately without discussion. Lanrezac insisted that Joffre give him written orders. Still, Lanrezac could not move until the next morning.

Sir John was so anxious to remove his troops from danger that he ordered the supply wagons to throw off their supplies and ammunition and carry troops instead. The British commanders on the ground felt that Sir John was overly pessimistic. The French were battling on and the British were prepared to continue fighting with them. But, the British retreat continued. One British commander had given the mayor of St. Quentin a written promise to surrender in order to spare the town from further bombardment. Sir John was convinced that the Kaiser out of personal rancor was targeting the British soldiers. Kitchener refused to send him the Sixth Division which could not be spared. The British soldiers continued to move back. Sir John's priority was to leave France.

Chapter 20: The Front Is Paris

The shops in Paris were closed and shuttered. There were no signs of life. Buses, cars, and horse cabs had disappeared. Gallieni knew that Paris could not take a shelling from the siege guns. He still did not have his armies. He was convinced that trenches protected by barbed wire and manned by trained troops with machine guns would be impregnable. Every day he contacted Joffre or his staff demanding the three corps. By August 29th, he received one naval brigade. His plan for victory consisted of military defense, moral defense, and provisioning.

Gallieni suspected that the President wasn't being honest with the people. He was having problems with getting permission to level buildings he needed for the city's defense. On August 28th, the zone of the Armies was extended to include Paris. It brought Paris under the authority of the Military Governor. The move allowed Gallieni to proceed with the work on his defense plan. He made preparations for the dynamiting of bridges in the area around Paris. All entries, including sewers, were barricaded. Gallieni requisitioned all forms of transport including taxis to move ammunition.



Rupprecht was still holding off the Germans from Lorraine. The villages in the surrounding area that the Germans did take received the same treatment as was delivered to the Belgium villages. Despite his knowledge of a battle planned for the next day, Sir John continued to pull out his troops. Haig informed Sir John that he and his troops were ready to attack and support the French troops in its planned action in St. Quentin. However, Sir John would not approve the action. His troops needed at least a day of rest. Even without Haig's forces, Lanrezac had no choice but to attack. Joffre came the next morning to lend support and found Lanrezac displaying the expected authority. He felt comfortable enough to leave after a few hours.

Joffre next visited Sir John French. Joffre wasn't able to dissuade Sir John from his belief that due to losses his forces had sustained, the army was in no condition to fight without rest. He didn't reveal to Joffre that he planned for his troops to retreat to the south. Sir John, who had been very aggressive at the beginning, was now filled with fear – fear that he would lose his army and his reputation. The next day French sent Joffre a message that his forces would not be ready for action for ten days. He was anxious for Lanrezac to break off the battle and retreat. Joffre refused to give Lanrezac permission to retreat. He had to see it through to the end. Sir John, upon receiving this news, gave orders for the British forces to resume their retreat the next day.

Lanrezac's advance on St. Quentin was not going well. His regiment was under heavy fire and the attack on St. Quentin was thrown back. General d'Esperey was called in to rally the Third and Tenth Corps on the left and right at Guise. He managed to do so, and the French enjoyed an afternoon of small victories. The Germans were running away. There were many dead among the French, but it was deemed a good day because it gave them two nights to sleep. Lanrezac was redeemed but would be alone. The British and the Fourth Army continued their retreat and uncovered his flanks with every step. Lanrezac wanted to break off and rejoin his partners, but he could get no response from Joffre.

Joffre was more concerned than ever because the Germans had penetrated further into France. He did not yet know about Lanrezac's fight and that it had inflicted damage on Bulow's army. He saw that the Fifth Army was left in jeopardy. The Sixth Army was still forming; yet, it was already under siege. Perhaps, more territory would have to be yielded back to Marne or even to the Seine. With all the problems that were falling upon him, Joffre maintained a calm exterior.

On the night of August 29th, Joffre issued orders for Lanrezac to retire and blow up the bridges on the Oise. Other generals were issued similar orders. Even the general command offices were moving back. Finally, Joffre and Lanrezac were on the same page. They both wanted to bring the Fifth Army out of danger and in line with the other French Armies. The threat to Paris was increasing. Joffre instructed Gallieni to lay charges under the bridges of the Seine on the west of Paris and on the Marne to the east.

Politicians and businessmen in Paris were panicking. Paris was being turned over to the Germans! Poincare assured them that as soon as the Sixth Army was ready, the



offensive would resume. However, in his private thoughts, Poincare was afraid that the worried men were right. Joffre's goal to check the German right wing had failed. Paris could fail. There was a discussion about whether the government itself should move their offices. Millerand, Minister of War, recommended they leave so that they are not cut off from the rest of the country. Joffre was contacted and agreed. Gallieni told Poincare to leave because Paris could not hold out long. For the time being, Poincare and his staff were for staying until the outcome of the battle for Paris was known. There was uncertainty about reconvening Parliament before such a departure. Gallieni told Poincare that he and his staff were no longer safe. With no army an assault could not be warded off. The entrenched camp could offer little resistance. Three to four corps were needed to properly defend the capital.

Millerand claimed that the city was unprepared because there were those who felt it should be an open city and not defended. Guesde, the socialist on Poincare's staff, said that Paris would burn. It was finally agreed that Paris should be defended. There was on-going debate about whether the government should stay or go. German bombs and propaganda leaflets were beginning to drop. Mass evacuation was taking place. The first blackout of Paris was ordered after the bombings started. A radio report said that three Russian corps consisting of 70,000 soldiers had been captured. The good news was that two German corps were transferred to the Eastern front.

Joffre visited the front line and passed a large group of retreating soldiers. After only twenty days of fighting, they looked beaten and old. Horses were emaciated with bones sticking out and bleeding harness sores. Ruffey's 42nd Division on the other hand look crisp and confident. Joffre chose to send the division to Foch against Ruffey's protests. Ruffey was removed from his post because of his defeat in Ardennes. Ruffey complained that he had not had adequate resources. Joffre agreed; but, he told Ruffey that they couldn't share that thought.

On August 30th, England received a shock. The papers carried the stories about the British losses in Mons and Cambrai. The writer wrote of a broken and retreating army. The article was planted to provoke debate. The article also focused on the disparity in numbers between the British troops and the Germans. The article was a plea for reinforcements. The British troops were depicted as brave and as saving the French, although the British had encountered only three corps out of Germany's more than 30 corps. The German advance had been concealed for patriotic reticence. The public was appalled.

Sir John informed Kitchener that he was unable to remain on the front line. He did not like Joffre's plan. He would have preferred a vigorous defense. He reversed himself with his next statement that he considered the French beaten and wanted to come home. He had no confidence in a French victory. Kitchener regarded Sir John's plans to desert the French in their hour of need as calamitous. Kitchener asked the Prime Minister to summon the Cabinet immediately. He responded to Sir John's request with "surprise" and delicately asked him what his departure would do to relations with the French.



With the support of the Cabinet and Prime Minister, Kitchener later informed Sir John that he must stay the course and conform to Joffre's plans. It was well known that Sir John and never gotten on with Joffre. As a result of Sir John's request to retreat, Kitchener never had confidence in him again. When Joffre learned of Lanrezac's partial victory at Guise, his spirits were boosted. Based on that victory and word that Bulow's army had sustained major loses, he even told Poincare that the government may not have to leave Paris. Joffre sent a letter repeating this news and asking him to not retreat. Joffre asked Poincare to use his influence to convince Sir John. Sir John refused to take calls from the President's office. Sir John sent a message to Kitchener repeating the reasons for his recommendation to retreat.

Kitchener decided to go to France himself. He met with Sir John at the British Embassy in Paris. Kitchener ultimately got his way. Sir John's troops returned to the line and would remain there as needed. Sir John was not a happy commander. By September 1st, Kluck's Army had fought its way to within thirty miles of Paris.

Analysis

Chapter 19

After the Battle of the Frontiers, the Germans accessed France from Belgium. One million soldiers invaded on August 24th. The march to Paris, the French capital, began. The French War Minister and other strategists worked feverishly to deal with the massive number of invaders. There was no way to stop the advance.

As a reminder of another devastating loss, the Germans invaded Sedan, France, where the Germans had crushed the French in 1870. The Germans continued their violent march, murdering civilians and pillaging and burning houses and villages.

French President Poincare felt he should tell the people the truth. The Germans were heading for Paris. Retired French General Gallieni was brought in to defend the city, but he needed an army to do so. There was a long delay in Gallieni getting the resources he needed.

The Germans went through several differing plans of attack and changed the direction of their flanks in an effort to effect an envelopment. The three Generals leading the three flanks toward Paris were von Kluck and von Bulow. The French Generals defending Lorraine were Castlenau and Dubail. Other French Generals were Lanrezac and de Langle.

Sir John French was anxious to remove the British soldiers. He feared they would be lost and he'd be responsible.

Chapter 20

Paris was shuttered and nearly abandoned. Gallieni thought that President Poincare wasn't being honest with the people.



General Rupprecht was holding off the Germans at Lorraine.

English General Haig was prepared to help the French in their attack at St. Quentin. Lanzarec was the French General who led the charge on St. Quentin.

Gallieni advised President Poincare and the rest of the government to leave Paris. It wasn't safe.

Sir John French was still planning on retreating and taking the British soldiers home. Kitchener informed him that he must stay and comply with the French plans.

Vocabulary

fusillade, perambulator, incessant, laconic, supplant, effusively, purveyors, taciturn, sangfroid, Byzantine, provisioning, supererogatory, desultory, emaciated, vehemence, calamitous, propitious, illusory



Chapters 21 - Afterword

Summary

Chapter 21: Von Kluck's Turn

M. Albert Fabre had a villa twelve miles north of Compiègne. As he drove up to his villa on August 30th, he found it commandeered by the Germans. A tall German with a terrible air stalked forward. It was von Kluck. Just like everyone else, things had not gone as planned for Kluck. He was at the time contemplating how he would have to change directions for the envelopment to succeed. He was sure that the enemy was for all practical purposes defeated.

Moltke was less elated by news of victory than others. It was the 30th day of fighting and according to plans, victory over France should be a reality by the 36th to 40th day of the war. He was skeptical that the British and French had been decisively beaten. Why weren't there more prisoners? A victory on the battlefield is not a true victory unless there is envelopment. Moltke still worried about a surge by the Russian Army. He also knew that the losses had caused a thinning out of the line and that reinforcements were needed. Moltke sent Major Bauer to investigate first hand. Bauer interviewed some front line commanders. Some thought the French were retreating and were confident of ultimate success. Others complained about the wooded areas that would make the attack more difficult. The report of the French retreating was disconcerting. It meant that enemy soldiers would be available to strengthen the German right wing.

Von Kluck resented the failure to have reinforcements. The French were beaten; they just needed to be captured. He was in direct pursuit of Lanrezac's Army which would expose his flank to attack by the French. Von Kluck was in possession of an intercepted message in which Sir John indicated that he wanted to retreat. As a result, Kluck did not view the British as a threat. Kluck was not tempted to attack Paris. According to German military procedures, it was more desirable to defeat the soldiers in the field before attacking an encampment. Von Bulow asked and Von Kluck agreed to be the inner wheel in a right wing sweep.

Victory was neigh. The Germans would defeat the French by the planned 39th day of fighting. Then they could focus on the Russians. Kluck's army ran upon a unit of Brits who they thought they were retreating. But the Brits turned on Kluck's forces and fired on them. As a result Kluck lost a day. They probably needed a day off since they were fatigued and literally ready to fall over. They had been marching with their eyes shut. The soldiers were drinking heavily which seemed to help them persevere. Throughout their march through France, they burned villages, shot civilians and looted. Moltke was nervous about the flank being exposed to Paris. He issued a new order which called for Kluck's army to follow "in echelon behind the Second Army." It was an insult to Kluck. He was not about to march behind anyone. He ordered his troops to continue advancing to Marne.



Captain Lepic was northwest of Compiègne on August 31st when he spotted enemy cavalrymen followed by infantrymen. The French knew that the battle was nearly over. They had abandoned any thought of attack. Their entire focus was on defending Paris. Envelopment of the Fifth Army was still a real possibility. A new plan was needed. At headquarters, mere survival was the priority. Joffre, not willing to completely give up his offensive strategy, suggested that the French hold out until the French Armies could recover and remobilize and resume the offensive. They all knew that a French defeat on French land was a final defeat.

The French Army could reform behind the Seine. It was the eve of the defeat of Sedan. Official word came that the Russians were defeated at Tannenberg. An order was issued that all arms would be in retreat. But as soon as the Fifth Army as eluded envelopment, the offensive would resume. Reinforcements were vague referred to. There were no dates or times included with the order. There was a conflict between Joffre and Gallieni. Joffre wanted a general battle at Marne – the Battle of Brienne-le-Chateau. The town was near the Marne and had been the location of a victory by Napoleon.

Those in Paris did not like the turn of events. They were uncovered as a result of the armies retreating to the Seine. Gallieni still needed three units to defend Paris. Joffre had Paris put under his authority as Commander in Chief so that he could use the mobile unit that he assigned to Paris as he saw fit. But, Gallieni had an army. Joffre added the 45th Division of Zouaves from Algiers which had just arrived by train in Paris. He also had his pick of one active group. He chose the Fourth Corps of the Third Army.

Inside the ministries, Millerand was distraught. He told the President “all our hopes are shattered; we are in full retreat all along the line.” He wanted the President and the government officials to leave within the hour. The entire administration would move to Bordeaux. Gallieni would have full military and civil authority over Paris. Although he was pretty well abandoned, Gallieni at least had the opportunity without debate to defend Paris as a fortified camp. He expected the Germans in two days. A map was found in the body of a dead German officer that indicated Kluck was sliding by Paris. Still it was decided that the administration must move. Ambassador Myron Herrick of the United States vowed to stay and protect the museums and monuments and use his influence as a diplomat.

The plan was for France to hold out and fight. England would cut enemy communications and the Russians would continue to advance and defeat the Germans. Gallieni issued a brief proclamation stating that members of the government had left and that he would defend Paris until the end. The public was angered because they had not been fully informed all along and because the President and his administration left in the dark of night – it was like the sneaked out.

Commanders were anxious to blow up bridges behind them. There were eighty bridges around the Paris area. The order was to not the enemy to have access to any bridges. By the evening of September 2nd, the British had reached the Marne. The Fifth Army was a day behind them. Joffre did some switching around of troops and units in



anticipation of the expected battle. He made it clear to his commanders that the upcoming battle was the battle “upon which the salvation of the country depends.” Gallieni received confirmation that Kluck was heading to Marne, not Paris. By doing so, he was leaving his flank open.

Chapter 22: Gentlemen, We Will Fight on the Marne

Gallieni knew that the Army of Paris had a great opportunity. He decided to attack the flank of the German right wing and then resume the offensive. Gallieni needed Joffre's support in order to use the British. Gallieni ordered that French aviators make reconnaissance flights. The Sixth Army was more beaten and exhausted than Gallieni had expected. The Army had suffered great losses including two-thirds of its officers. Von Kluck reached the Marne on the evening of September 3rd after Lanrezac's army, which he was pursuing. He planned to cross the Marne in the morning and keep up the pressure on Lanrezac's force. In his fervor to defeat the French, he had nearly depleted his supplies and artillery. Kluck said that after the Franco-British army was defeated, they would march into Paris.

The French Fifth Army was not in good shape physically or morally. Lanrezac's loss of confidence for Joffre and his scraps with liaison officers affected his staff. But the Fifth Army made it across the Marne. There was a dark mood among the soldiers and officers. A gloom settled over the French Armies when word came that Rheims was abandoned as an open city to Bulow's Army on September 3rd. Rheims' great cathedral was where every French king had been crowned. Joffre decided that Lanrezac must go. Lanrezac was depressed and had unpleasant personal relationships. He was not a morale booster.

Although Joffre would never admit it, Lanrezac was annoying because he'd been so right about many things, including the underestimation of the German right wing and his insistence to break off battle at Charleroi, which saved the French left wing. German commanders later admitted that single act alone upset Germany's entire battle plan. Joffre met with Lanrezac and told him he was through. Joffre claimed Lanrezac was relieved; Lanrezac claimed he argued with Joffre. But, he was gone and Franchet d'Esperev was chosen to replace him. D'Esperev transformed from a jovial and friendly sort to a tyrant imposing a reign of terror on his staff and soldiers.

To Gallieni, September 4th felt like a special “decisive” day. The Germans felt the end of this battle was near. They would be “rounding up” the remaining French troops soon. The French offered the Germans an armistice which the Germans refused. Moltke was his usually gloomy self and was worried how everything would work out. There were still no prisoners! He was afraid the Germans were fooling themselves. Moltke was exposing his flank to Paris. Since Moltke was unable to reinforce the diminished right wing, he ordered that it stop. He feared that forces would overwhelm the right flank once they reached Paris. The War Minister thought it was madness to stop at the threshold of victory. Reports of French planes over Paris made Gallieni understand that they had to act quickly. He would send General Maunoury's army forward to form a liaison with the British units against the German flank. Joffre discussed the plan with his top



commanders. There were diverse opinions and much debate. The final decision was Joffre's. He felt the weight of his decision. It meant the salvation of France or the loss of her. He would be held responsible if they failed. Joffre sent word to d'Esperey and Foch to learn the readiness of their troops.

Sir John had rejected Gallieni's request for the assistance of the British soldiers. Sir John was inspecting the troops when Gallieni arrived at his headquarters to make a personal appeal. Gallieni explained the situation to an aide and that the British were crucial in the carrying out of his plans. The British Chief of Intelligence, Colonel Macdonough, arrived at the headquarters and showed the staff a map marking the exact location of the enemy. D'Esperey was present and made the decision to commit his army.

Without hearing any advice, Joffre made up his mind to take action that was to begin on September 7th. He got word that d'Esperey had committed his army. The troops were exhausted. However, like Gallieni, d'Esperey felt there was no other choice. Foch was on board as well. The British, however, issued orders for further retreating. Gallieni learned that Joffre preferred the attack be conducted south of the Marne on September 7th. Gallieni saw his opportunity slipping away. He reached Joffre who said that the plans to attack at Marne could not be changed. Joffre agreed to change the date to September 6th. Joffre was stunned by John French's response that he needed time to study the situation. Sir John was backing out again. In just thirty-six hours the battle to save France would commence.

On September 5th, Klunk's army was on the march. He was not worried about his flank like Moltke was. He didn't think the French had the forces to be a threat to his flank. Klunk was not going to let up on the pressure and give the enemy time to regroup. That night, Klunk received word that there was significant French resistance and that Moltke had ordered retirement until further word. Kluck had no choice but to retrace the steps his soldiers had advanced over the last two days. There had been no sign and no word that an offensive by the whole French Army was imminent.

In Paris, Gallieni told Maunoury that there was no line of retreat should the French be overwhelmed. There was an order to destroy all resources should they be defeated. Bridges had to be blown up. Joffre asked Millerand to use government influence to convince the British to support them. After several contacts and appeals, Sir John finally agreed to cooperate. After hearing that his response had been "lukewarm," Joffre rode the 100 mile journey to speak to Sir John in person. He told him it was the supreme moment and the last chance to save France. The honor of England was also at stake if they refused to help. Finally, with tears in his eyes, Sir John said he would do all he possibly could do.

With the forces finally all in place, on the morning of the battle Joffre stated that "the battle is joined on which the safety of the country depends, everyone must be reminded that this is no longer the time for looking back."

After the first thirty days of war, everyone was sure that glory lay ahead.



Afterword

The Battle of Marne ended in German retreat. The Germans did not get the decisive victory they were so confident they would get. But, the French victory fell short of what it could have been. The Germans had come close to victory and the French to disaster. The Battle of Marne was not important because it predicted a winner. It was important because it determined that the war would go on.

Analysis

Chapter 21

German War Minister Moltke was not as exuberant as most of the other commanders about the progress of the Germans in their march to Paris. He feared that von Kluck's flank would be attacked from the rear. Major Bauer went into the field to interview the commanders to get their view of the situation.

Although he resented that reinforcements hadn't been sent, Von Kluck considered the French defeated.

The entire focus of the French was to defend Paris.

President Poincare and the government moved to Bordeaux.

Myron Herrick the United States Ambassador offered to do anything he could do for the French.

Chapter 22

Finally, Gallieni was given the armies he requested to defend Paris.

Von Kluck reached the Marne River on the evening of September 3rd and was in pursuit of French General Lanrezac.

Joffre relieved Lanrezac of his position because of his negative attitude and because he always argued with the orders Joffre issued.

Franchet d'Esperev took Lanrezac's place.

Gallieni addressed his troops, telling them that they were saving the country.

After thirty days of war, everyone was sure that glory was ahead.

Vocabulary

commandeered, indoctrination, echelon, prudent, adamant, inglorious, extricate, draconian, peremptory, dossier, armistice, plenary, malign, ineluctable, laconic



Important People

King Albert

When signs of the First World War were first surfacing, King Albert was the ruler of Belgium. Despite being a royal, King Albert disliked the pomp and circumstance associated with his position as ruler of Belgium which was a neutral and sovereign European nation. King Albert worried about being drawn into a war and was determined to do his best to keep Belgium neutral. However, upon learning of Germany's growing aggressiveness, King Albert ordered the mobilization of the Belgium Army. King Albert sent a letter to the German Kaiser asking for his assurance that Belgium's neutrality would be respected. Instead of this assurance, King Albert received an ultimatum. Germany needed to protect itself from the French who planned to travel through Belgium to attack them. If Belgium did not allow the Germans through their country, Germany would consider it to be an enemy.

During the war King Albert was made Commander in Chief after Belgium was attacked by Germany. The Belgian Army consisted of only six divisions of infantry and one cavalry division. But even though King Albert did not have a grand army at his disposal, he stood up to the Germans. After continuing pressure to surrender, King Albert stood fast. He would not surrender his country to the German aggressors.

King Albert became a hero not only to the Belgian people but to the entire world. The loyalty he showed for his country and countrymen and his bravery and strength in the face of a menacing enemy were heralded throughout the world. The French government conferred the French Military Medal upon King Albert.

General Joseph Joffre

General Joseph Joffre was the Chief of the French General Staff. His predecessor, General Michel, had been relieved of his duties and there were high hopes for Joffre who had a long and storied military career. Without much discussion, Joffre adapted Plan 17 which was originally created by General Foch.

After assuming his position, Joffre spent the next eight months reorganizing the army according to the plan and to the new Field Regulations developed by the Supreme War Council. Plan 17 contained no over-all objective and no schedule of operations. It was ideal for Joffre who had a very French mindset about military preparedness.

Joffre believed that weaponry and training were both secondary to elan – to the spirit and will to win. It was the French way and the only genuine winning way. Joffre totally disagreed with his predecessor who wanted to use a defensive approach to warfare. To Joffre Michel's plan was pure foolishness. He advocated just the opposite. To win the French had to implement a strictly offensive plan. Joffre was not a big fan of large artillery. All the French soldier needed was his saber, his pride, and his spirit to win.



Joffre stubbornly stuck to his offensive plan even in defeat. Even though some battles were lost, he remained confident that the French mindset and spirit would win the war. Joffre made decisions based on this faulty thinking. As a result, he placed his soldiers in jeopardy and the war on the line.

Kaiser Wilhelm II

Kaiser Wilhelm II was the Emperor of Germany prior to the beginning and the first days of World War I. He had personally tried to persuade Belgium to allow the Germans to have access through their country so his forces could attack France. The Kaiser was obsessed with having a naval fleet that could rival the British fleet which was the best in the world.

President Ponicare

During the early days of the First World War, Raymond Poincare was the President of France. He entered into an agreement with Russia to support each other in the event that a German attack occurred. An attack leading to a war was fully expected.

Alfred Schlieffen

German strategist Alfred Schlieffen's first plan to violate Belgium's neutrality was formulated in 1899. Schlieffen dreamed of a double victory against France on two fronts referred to as "envelopment."

General Alexander Samsonov

General Alexander Samsonov was a Russian soldier who failed to keep the Germans from advancing. He felt guilty about his failure and joined his soldiers on the field. He was killed in the line of duty.

General Rennekampf

Russian General Paul von General Rennekampf had failed to stop a German advance. The combat proved to be too much for Rennekampf who ultimately deserted and drove a car back to Russia. He was discharged in disgrace.

Winston Churchill

Winston Churchill was the young and active First Lord of the Admiralty under the Secretary of War, a position which had temporarily fallen to Prime Minister Asquith. Churchill had a clear view of what England should do and advocated acting



immediately. Before the war, Churchill decided that the British naval fleet be on war footing even before a final decision was made as to whether or not Britain would be involved.

Paul von Hindenburg

General Paul von Hindenburg was a retired German military man who was called back to be the Chief of the General Staff in the early days of World War I. He was a beloved and heroic figure who was very popular with the German people.

Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson was the President of the United States during the World War I. He was determined to stay neutral and stay out of the war. However, his feelings changed drastically when he learned of the brutal treatment of the Belgians by the German soldiers. He felt that if Germany won the war, civilization would be devastated forever.



Objects/Places

“Again”

During the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Germans had soundly defeated the French at Sedan, France. The proud French army was humiliated by the defeat. When the Germans began threatening again in the lead-up to WWI, the French had one thought in mind that haunted them. Could they be defeated "again" like they had been in Sedan?

Elan

In the lead-up to WWI, French commanders were not as concerned about having the latest weapons or the most highly trained officers. What was most important was that the French soldiers had the spirit and the will to win. Having this mindset, which was known as elan, was felt by many in the French military to be the most important path to victory.

Iron Cross

The Iron Cross was one of the highest medals in the German Army which could be awarded to a soldier. Hindenburg was awarded the Iron Cross for the Battle of Sedan. General Rupprecht won the Iron Cross for turning back the French from Sarrebourg and Morhange,

French Military Medal

In order to encourage a reluctant Belgium to ally itself with France, the French government conferred the French Military Medal upon King Albert, who was the very popular ruler of France. King Albert had stood up to the Germans by refusing to let them have access to Belgian territory in order to access and attack France.

Siege Guns

The Germans had a surprise weapon – a gigantic siege cannon that was so large and powerful that no one imagined it could be mobilized. These powerful weapons blew men to bits and obliterated buildings.



Envelopment

German victory was dependent on envelopment in which the German armies would have left, right, and center flanks that would advance on the enemy. The left and right flanks would swing around, while the center held, encircled, and captured the enemy.

Offensive Strategy

General Joseph Joffre was the Chief of the French General Staff and responsible for wartime strategy. He believed in an offensive as opposed to a defensive strategy. He paid little attention to defense and failed to build trenches and have other barriers to protect his soldiers.

Terrorism

The German soldiers were the first modern army to use terrorism as a pathway to victory. They burned and pillaged villages and executed innocent citizens. Their thinking was that by terrorizing the enemy it would bring about their surrender more quickly.

Entrenchment

The Germans were well-trained, physically and mentally able, and well equipped for war. Unlike the French who paid little attention to defensive tactics, the Germans were adept at digging trenches laced with barbed wire that would protect them and give them a safe spot to fire on the enemy.

The British Fleet

The British Fleet was the supreme fleet of all the seas. It was integral for the enforcement of maritime regulations and for the smooth operations of international commerce. Kaiser Wilhelm envied the British Fleet and ordered that a German fleet be built in its likeness.



Themes

Arrogance

There was a long and protracted lead-up to the World War I. European countries and Russia knew for many years that Germany was the problem child of the European continent and undoubtedly would someday wage war against any country that stood in its way of European and even global dominance. As a result, the British trained their soldiers and obtained the necessary machines and arms of war to be effective and provide a defense for England and for their allies. Germany was a country that was always focused on the military and perhaps did have the best army on the continent. Most countries did their best to be prepared and ready. There was one glaring exception.

Perhaps, it's not surprising that of all the countries the French took a more romantic approach to military preparedness than the others. To the French commanders, they need not have the most powerful guns because they had their gleaming sabers. They also believed that they didn't need an overly-trained army. They had something more important – they had *elan*! In their hearts, they felt that the spirit and will to win could and would triumph over guns and strategy.

They were proud of their bright uniforms – blue pants and bright red jacket. Some officers wore white caps with large white plumes and white gloves. When one of the more studied French commanders suggested that they should change their uniform for dull blue-gray or green-gray fatigues, the older commanders found it insulting. Their bright uniform was part of their pride and their spirit of victory.

It all sounded whimsical. As it turned out, it wasn't very practical. When the French soldiers were faced with the challenge of a modern army, their fanciful ideas of war collapsed. Unfortunately, their front lines did the same. The arrogance of the French commanders stood in the way of preparing their soldiers for combat and in obtaining modern weaponry so that they would be on a level field with the enemy.

Self-Delusion

At times during World War I, commanders on both sides suffered from self-delusion. Perhaps it was a necessary defense mechanism that allowed them to avoid reality in order to get through the impossible tasks they were challenged with. But ego always played at least a role in their inability to face the truth and have to admit that they had been wrong in a tactic or strategy.

General Joffre, the French Staff Commander, was an advocate of the offensive approach to victory. When it was obvious that what the French sorely needed was a defense strategy because they were getting pummeled by the Germans, Joffre refused to change his plans. Having avowed for so long how victory was possible only through



the offensive, he was not able to admit that he may have been wrong or even partially wrong. He portrayed each defeat as an opportunity for his offensive strategy to win the day.

King Albert of Belgium was a heroic figure, but he did not possess a great military mind. It was his duty and responsibility to try to save his country from the advancing Germans. To do so, he named himself Commander in Chief and called up his ill-prepared and under-trained soldiers who lacked the most recent weaponry. The King told his rag-tag soldiers – and himself – that they had to stand up to the Germans and defeat them if Belgium were to survive as a nation. King Albert was an intelligent man. As such, he must have known that he was asking for the impossible. However, he had to delude the officers as well as himself. He saw it as their only chance.

During fierce battle when the French were far-outnumbered by the Germans, the top French commanders refused to believe the intelligence that indicated just how outnumbered they were. No matter how many reports they received to the contrary, they discarded the intelligence that told them they were outnumbered at least two to one. Had they admitted their weakened position, they would have had to surrender and that wasn't in the cards for the French. Self-delusion was the only solution

Of course, no one involved in the war had more self-delusion than the Germans who felt they were special and should rule the world. This mindset started World War I and, ultimately, World War II.

Grandiosity

It is not difficult to trace the root cause of the World War I. Without a doubt, there were multiple reasons. But, there was one unrelenting force which overshadowed every other cause, an entity that could not be satisfied or sated until it was filled with the destruction and blood of war. The root cause of the war can only be laid at the feet of one nation and one people – the Germans.

Part of the German psyche for some time – perhaps no one knows how long – was the innate feeling of superiority. The Germans were open about their belief in their vaunted supremacy. A German scientist told an American reporter that the world would be grateful when the Germans took it over. The German's had a grating sense of entitlement. This belief allowed them to do whatever it took to reach their goal of world domination.

To attain their rightful place on earth the Germans gave themselves permission to invade, pillage, and burn villages as they tortured and executed innocents. The executions had a random feel to them, but there was a plan and purpose behind the murders. The Germans believed in the warfare theory that the enemy was defeated from within. If the people were terrorized of the invading Germans, it would have an impact on the nation's commanders and armies.



It was the German military's belief that by witnessing the slaying of their family members, friends, and neighbors, the ordinary citizens would submit and surrender. The Germans felt that the sentiment would spread and grow. In the end, it would help the Germans win the war and ascend to their rightful place as ruler of Planet Earth.

The Germans failed in their quest but that stirring within didn't die. It manifested itself again in the 1930s and culminated in World War II. The world fought back and rejected their claim to the global throne. Hopefully, the grandiosity of the Germans that led to two brutal world wars died on the battlefield along with the thousands and thousands who gave their lives to defeat Germany.

Styles

Structure

“The Guns of August” by Barbara W. Tuchman consists of twenty-two lengthy and detailed chapters. The story begins with the funeral of English King Edward in 1910 when talk of war was stirring in the hearts and minds of military and political men in Europe and Russia. German Kaiser Wilhelm attended the funeral but detested the dead King. Part of the sentiment fueled the Kaiser’s desire for war. He wanted Germany to rule Europe including the hated British. From this starting point, the story proceeds in a generally chronological order with infrequent references to past events.

“The Guns of August” tells the story of the first days of the war that started on August 1, 1914. It also tells the complicated story of the lead-up to the war – how the leaders of each country viewed the war, what their part would be in such a war, and what the consequences of the war would be. There was much pain and angst on the part of many who finally decided to go to war or felt that they were being forced into it.

There are maps throughout the narrative that highlight the geographic regions in which various battles were being fought. There is a photo insert at the conclusion of the book along with a “Notes” section and a section about the author.

Perspective

Tone



Quotes

But on history's clock it was sunset, and the sun of the old world was setting in a dying blaze of splendor never to be seen again.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: The beginning of the end of the importance and relevance of the old world's monarchy is described.

The will to conquer is the first condition of victory.

-- General Ferdinand Foch (Chapter 3)

Importance: The French War College director believed that victory depended on spirit, strategy, and common sense.

Viviani was 'haunted by a fear that war might burst from a clump of trees, from a meeting of two patrols, from a threatening gesture... a black look, a brutal word, a shot.

-- Rene Vivian (Chapter 7)

Importance: Viviani was the Prime Minister of France. The quote captures the pressures and stress that the French were under as the war approached.

Could this country stand by and witness the direst crime that ever stained the pages of history and thus become participators in the sin?

-- Gladstone (Chapter 9)

Importance: Sir Edward Grey quoted former Prime Minister Gladstone when Grey spoke before Parliament in an effort to win support for the British naval fleet being dispatched to protect France's Channel coast.

You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees.

-- Kaiser Wilhelm (Chapter 9)

Importance: The Kaiser expected a very short war. His statement was made to a group of troops that was being mobilized.

Like the smile of a temptress, it overcame years of single, wedded devotion to the right wing.

-- Colonel Tappen (Chapter 14)

Importance: The Germans always held that they could win battles using a strong right wing. The idea that they might be able to wage a two-prong attack resulting in a double envelopment excited the German military chiefs.

There was an aura about 1914 that caused those who sensed it to shiver for mankind. Tears came event to the most bold and resolute.



-- Narrator (Chapter 15)

Importance: This expresses the sense that some Allied commanders had about the toll the war would take on the world and mankind.

When the Battle of Frontiers ended, the war had been in progress for twenty days and during that time had created passions, attitudes, ideas, and issues, both among belligerents and watching neutrals, which determined its future course and the course of history.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

Importance: The statement captures the vast impact of World War I. Its tentacles spread all over the world and have never retracted.

We Germans are the most industrious, the most earnest, the best educated race in Europe. Russia stands for reaction, England for selfishness and perfidy, France for decadence, Germany for progress. German culture will enlighten the world and after this war there will never be another.

-- German scientist (Chapter 17)

Importance: German arrogance was one of the drivers of the First World War. This passage captures the general feeling among Germans that they were superior and should be the dominating force in the world.

Extraordinary silence and inertia of the enemy may be the prelude to serious enterprises... possibly a landing this week on a large scale.

-- Churchill (Chapter 18)

Importance: This passage captures the concern that the British had that the Germans planned a sneak attack by submarine on the British fleet which was docked at their wartime base in Scapa Flow.

It was stupid to lie down; one might as well keep moving... here and there men lay flat on their stomachs or on their backs. They were dead. One of them, under an apple tree, had all of his face missing; blood drowned his head.

-- French soldier (Chapter 20)

Importance: General Lanzarec was forced by Joffre to move forward instead of retreating. His unit was met with heavy fire. This quote describes the horrors that the soldiers who weren't killed had to face.

Asking each to understand the situation and extend his utmost efforts, Joffre made it clear that this would be the battle 'upon which the salvation of the country depends.

-- Joffre (Chapter 21)

Importance: Joffre knew that the French had one more chance to defeat the Germans. If they didn't defeat them, the war and France would be lost.



Topics for Discussion

1

Kaiser Wilhelm I detested King Edward of England. Look back a few years before WWI began to learn why the Kaiser abhorred the English King. What incidents ruffled the Kaiser's feathers? How did the Kaiser's personal hatred for the King transfer to his feelings for England in general and fuel and intensify ill feelings in the lead-up to World War I?

2

General Joseph Joffre was named French War Minister. What type of military strategy did he support? How did his personality combine with his steadfastness as a commander to cling to his values and ideals? How did Joffre's strategy and tactics effect victory or defeat?

3

The Russians allied with the French just before the beginning of WWI. What contributed to the difficulty in mobilizing the Russian troops? What was the recent history between Germany and Russia? What was the fear that the Germans had about the Russians becoming engaged in the war?

4

How did the status of "neutrality" impact the war? What rights and protections did a nation that declared itself neutral have in times of war? Name some pacts that were made between neutral nations and active nations. What reasons did a nation have for staying neutral? What country was known as the Great Neutral and why?

5

King Albert of Belgium sent a letter to the Kaiser asking for his assurance that Belgium's neutrality be respected. What response did the King receive and what actions did he take as a result of that response? Ultimately, what role did Belgium play in the war and why was it an important country to both France and Germany?



6

Why was Turkey important to the Russians? Why did England's relationship with Turkey deteriorate? What pacts did Turkey attempt to make at the onset of the war?

7

Why were the British reluctant to get involved in the war? What was the one event that would force them into war? What were Kitchener's predictions about the war that were contrary to the other military minds? Why was it essential that he be part of the war planning?

8

Why did the Kaiser envy the British Fleet? What was the importance of the British Fleet beyond just protecting the British Isles? Why was the Fleet potentially a key to defeating the Germans and what worried the British about the German's maritime maneuvers?

9

What was President Woodrow Wilson's stance on World War I at the beginning of the war? What did he fear might draw the United States into the war? What caused President Wilson to have a major change of heart about America's stand on the war?

10

When all signs indicated that the end of the war between France and Germany was coming to an end, how did the different commanders – Moltke, Joffre, Gallieni, and French – react to this possibility? What were their emotional and mental states of mind? What plans did they make for prolonging the battle or for winning? In the end, what commander had more insight than the others?