

THE GUNS OF AUGUST by Barbara Tuchman

This book won the Pulitzer Prize when it was published in 1962. It is a famous historical work. It tells the story of a long-forgotten war and how that war began. Many historians view WWI as the real beginning of the 20th century and see its ending as the prelude to WWII.

The author, Barbara Tuchman, is a marvellous writer. If you read the first chapter carefully, you will feel that you are actually present in Westminster Abbey at the funeral of the king.

CHAPTER 1 – THE FUNERAL

1. After reading Chapter 1, explain what Tuchman means when she says, “On history’s clock it was sunset.”
2. Why did William hate Edward?
3. What two “understandings” did England have under Edward?
4. What was signed in April 1904?
5. What had Bismarck warned Germany?
6. What did the Kaiser think the navy would do for him?
7. After reading the first full paragraph on p. 7, what does militarism mean?
8. How did the French feel about the Germans? Hint: “Prussia was hatched from a cannonball.”
9. What is signed in 1907?
10. What was the worst blunder of William’s reign?
12. What was the thesis of the Great Illusion?
13. Explain Bernhardt’s point of view on war.
14. After reading the whole chapter, how would you say most people who knew him felt about William?

CHAPTER 2 – Let the Last Man on the Right Brush the Channel with His Sleeve

1. What reasons could Clausewitz have for believing that war was a necessity and was his assessment accurate?
2. What clues to Schlieffen’s character does Tuchman present? Try to describe him as Tuchman sees him.
3. What were the problems associated with attacking France through Belgium?
4. Why did Schlieffen think he had to attack first? Explain his reasoning.
5. Discuss the role of German character and how generals and philosophers had contributed to the German mindset.

6. "Germans, like all people, prepare for the last war." What does Tuchman mean by this?
7. What was the thinking on long war versus short war?
8. In what respect were the Germans wrong in what they expected the French to do? What does this reveal about the German mindset versus the French mindset? How does Tuchman interpret this?
9. What did the Germans have in mind about Belgian resistance? What does the scene Tuchman describes between the Kaiser and King Leopold indicate?
10. How did Moltke differ from Schlieffen? What was he worried about?

CHAPTER 3 – The Shadow of Sedan

1. Explain French strategy as described by DeCastelnau.
2. What humiliations had the French suffered at German hands at Versailles?
3. How did the Germans treat Alsace-Lorraine after they annexed it?
4. What was the German feeling toward France?
5. How would you describe Foch's military strategy?
6. Explain Plan 17. What was the weakness of the plan?
7. How did geography play into the weakness of the plan?
8. General Michel's plan was disregarded. Why?
9. Who was Messimy and what was his reaction?
10. Why was the color of army pants controversial? What was Messimy's comment?
11. What can be said about Joffre? How would you describe him?
12. Who was the man whose head was swathed in bandages? What did he reveal?

CHAPTER 4 – A Single British Soldier

1. Why were nerves stretched tight in 1905?
2. What did Peguy's quote mean? Who was he? What happened to him?
3. In Anglo-French negotiations, what did the British indicate they would do in case of German invasion of Belgium? What did France indicate?
4. Describe John Fisher's plan.
5. What was the relationship between Wilson and Foch?
6. Who was present at the Imperial Defense Committee?
7. What did Wilson lay out for the "ignorant men" at the Imperial Defense Committee meeting?
8. What did Admiral Wilson present as the navy's plan?

9. Why was Haldane sent to Berlin and what was the outcome?
10. What was the split in the British cabinet?
11. What was the Belgian attitude toward British intervention?

CHAPTER 5 – The Russian Steam Roller

1. Why was Russian invincibility a myth?
2. How would you describe the Russian army?
3. What was going to be one of the great moments in European history?
4. Explain the significance of M-15.
5. What did the Russians agree to do in case of war?
6. What were the practical problems with Russian promises to France?
7. What were the problems for Russian mobilization?
8. Describe Russian officers.
9. What is Tuchman's opinion of the Czar?
10. What supported the regime at the bottom?
11. What was the mainstay of the regime?
12. Where did Russia's natural sympathies lie? England, France, Germany? Explain.
13. Compare Russian supplies to other countries.
14. Describe General Sukhomlinov and Grand Duke Nicholas.

OUTBREAK

1. What is Bismarck's famous quote?
2. What was the spark on June 28, 1914?
3. What was the signal on July 5?
4. What dragged the chiefs of state forward?

CHAPTER 6 – August 1, Berlin

1. For Germany, what did mobilization mean?
2. Faced with the reality of a two-front war, what was the Kaiser's reaction?
3. How is England's Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey misunderstood? What do they think he is proposing?
4. The Kaiser's solution is to do what?
5. What is Moltke's response?
6. What was the casus belli in England?

7. Why did Germany plan to saddle Russia with war guilt?

CHAPTER 7 – August 1: Paris and London

1. What was France's prime objective?

2. Why did the French withdraw 10 kilometers all along their border with Germany?

3. Who was Jean Jaures? (We will see a film that has him in it)

4. Why was Isvolsky so concerned about French reaction to a German attack on Russia?

5. What was Joffre demanding?

6. What was Grey waiting for?

7. What was the problem with the British cabinet?

8. What did the Little Englanders believe about France? What did Liberal Imperialists believe about France?

9. What epic sentence sums up all of British policy?

10. Who was the only country in Europe with no conscription?

11. What was the only thing that would convince the peace party of the need to go to war against Germany?

12. What was the crucial order the First Lord of the Admiralty issued?

13. Who was the key figure the government could not afford to lose?

14. As the chapter closes, what is Grey waiting for?

CHAPTER 8 – Ultimatum in Brussels

1. What do the Belgians decide to do with the German ultimatum?

2. What shape was the Belgian army in?

3. What did the Kaiser and Moltke do in November 1913 when King Albert was invited to Berlin that frightened the king?

4. What had the German government been telling one another for years?

5. Why did Belgians continue to hope that Germany would not invade?

CHAPTER 9 – Home Before the Leaves Fall

1. What did Grey ask the British Cabinet on August 2?

2. What was Grey's task on August 3 as he prepared to address Parliament?

3. What was the naval arrangement with France?

4. What ultimatum did the British send the Germans?

5. What did most people think about the length of the war?

6. Who were the three people who suspected that would not be the case?
7. What is the basis on which Germany declares war on France?
8. What is Edward Grey's famous quote that Tuchman says epitomized the hour?
9. What does the quote on p. 123, "When we Germans lost the first great battle in the eyes of the world," mean?
10. What would happen to the Belgian king's son in the future?
11. What did the Italians decide to do?
12. Who does the Kaiser claim is responsible for the war?
13. How does Bethmann justify the invasion of Belgium?
14. What did Admiral Tirpitz consider the greatest blunder ever spoken by a German statesman?
15. What phrase would resound around the world?
16. How did Germans react to Britain's declaration of war?

CHAPTER 10 – Goeben ...An Enemy Then Flying

1. Why did Turkey have no allies? What was she called? Why?
2. Who were the Young Turks?
3. What had Russia wanted for ten centuries? Why?
4. Who had been the traditional protector of Turkey? Why?
5. In July 1914, why were the Germans wanting Turkey as an ally?
6. What was the chief task of the British and French fleets?
7. Why were they watching the Goeben and Breslau?
8. What was Souchon's purpose in disregarding Tirpitz's second order to not go to Constantinople?
9. How was Turkey forced into the war on the German side?
10. What consequences did this have?

CHAPTER 11 – Liege and Alsace

1. After you have read the chapter, explain Tuchman's closing statement, "What Belgium gave the Allies

was neither two days nor two weeks but a cause and an example."

CHAPTER 12 – BEF to the Continent

1. After reading this chapter, what did the British decide to do with the BEF?

CHAPTER 13 – Sambre et Meuse

1. What warnings is GQG refusing to accept?

2. What problem was developing with the Schlieffen Plan?
3. What was the German reaction to being slowed down by civilian resistance?
4. What shocked the world of 1914? Why?
5. Who was writing about this?
6. When the Germans occupied Brussels, what did they do?
7. What mistakes was the French army, particularly Joffre, making?

CHAPTER 14 – Debacle: Lorraine, Ardennes, Charleroi, Mons

1. What had French Field Regulations miscalculated?
2. What revealed itself at the slaughter of Morhange?
3. Why was Joffre determined to attack through the Ardennes? What problems were there with that?
4. Why did Lanrezac order the retreat of the 5th Army?
5. How does Joffre explain the failure of the offensive?
6. How long until Namur had fallen? How long were they supposed to be able to hold out?
7. What were the consequences of the greatest battle of the war?

CHAPTER 15 – The Cossacks Are Coming!

1. What does the Russian mean by, “William to St. Helena!”?
2. Whose quarrel had precipitated the war?
3. What do you suppose Tuchman means by the statement, “There was an aura about 1914 that caused those who sensed it to shiver for mankind”?
4. What were the problems with Russian mobilization?
5. How did the government cut its source of revenue and by how much?
6. Why were German soldiers dressed as peasant women?
7. What were the problems with supplies for the Russians?
8. How did the Japanese use the war to their advantage? Whose side did they fight on?
9. What have some accused Rennenkampf of since he didn’t pursue the German army?
10. What is Tuchman’s explanation?
11. Why was retreat impossible for the German army?
12. Who became Chief of Staff of the 8th Army? Commanding General? (These two are extremely important, not just for WWI, but also WWII)
13. What was the famous monogram that ruled Germany until the end of the war?

14. Finally, what do the German commanders decide to do?

CHAPTER 16 – Tannenberg

1. What astonishing news did Ludendorff hear from OHL? Why was he so upset?
2. What had changed OHL's mind?
3. Why does Samsonov kill himself?
4. What was the real victor of Tannenberg?
5. What happens to Hindenburg as a result of the battle?
6. After reading the last two pages of the chapter, what was the real significance of the battle of Tannenberg for Russia?

CHAPTER 17 – The Flames of Louvain

1. What did German militarist theory believe about war?
2. Why did some Germans believe they deserved to be the most powerful?
3. What were the aims of a German businessman?
4. What had become the image of Germany and what caused it?
5. What happened at Andenne? What happened at Tamines?
6. What violation of international law were the Germans concerned about?
7. According to the Germans, who was responsible for civilian deaths?
8. How did the Germans view civil resistance?
9. What was famous about Louvain before the war?
10. Why did the Germans burn Louvain?
11. What is Tuchman's explanation for why the Germans destroyed Louvain? What conclusions did much of the world make about Germany?
12. What became the supreme issue of the war?
13. What were German plans if they won the war?

CHAPTER 18 – Blue Water, Blockade, and the Great Neutral

1. What were the British naval fleet's tasks?
2. Who built the German fleet?
3. What was the German plan for the navy?
4. What book had a major impact on the Kaiser and the naval building program of Germany?
5. What did the naval building program challenge?
6. Why does Tuchman say Germany would have been a stronger power without a navy?

7. What did Wilhelm think his navy would do to Britain?
8. What would a blockade do to Germany?
9. So what did the Kaiser do with his navy during the war? Why?
10. In August, who did the primary enemy seem? What was the primary duty of the German fleet?
11. Ultimately, what were the two reasons the navy wasn't used in August?
12. What was Britain's problem with the U.S.?
13. What was Wilson rigidly attached to?
14. In Wilson's view, what was the role of the U.S. for this war?
15. What are the figures of trade with the Allies and Central Powers in 1914 and 1916? What caused the change?
16. What did the U.S. become to the Allies?
17. What moved Wilson the most to his anti-German sentiment? What did he think would happen to the U.S. if Germany won?
18. Why was the German navy Sherlock Holmes' dog in the night?
19. The success of the blockade drove Germany to what?

You may skip Chapters 19 – 22.

AFTERWARD

1. What was the outcome of the Battle of the Marne?
2. What did the battle become known as?
3. What was Kluck's explanation?
4. What is Tuchman's explanation for the outcome?
5. How does the world remember the battle?
6. How had the Schlieffen Plan succeeded?
7. What was the hope for WWI?
8. Why does Tuchman believe the Battle of the Marne was one of the world's great battles?