

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 76

### “Today Is Better Than Tomorrow”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

As preparations for the funeral of Archduke Franz Ferdinand were being made in Vienna, in Berlin, the Austrian ambassador received a call from a German government envoy. The Germans were afraid that the Austrians would go soft on Serbia, so the envoy urged Vienna to move against them quickly.

“The sooner Austria-Hungary goes to war the better,” he told the ambassador. “Yesterday was better than today, and today is better than tomorrow.”

German fears of Austrian dithering were well placed. In fact, it would take almost a month for Vienna to formulate its response to the assassinations.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 76. Today Is Better Than Tomorrow.

Two weeks ago, we wrapped up at the funeral of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, the Duchess Sophia. By the time of the funeral, the highest-ranking officials in the Austrian government were already discussing the Austrian response to the assassination. The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, had been captured at the scene, so it was clear enough that he did the deed, and it was clear that he was an ethnic Serb native to Bosnia who had recently returned from Belgrade. It was also clear that Princip had gotten help from anti-Austrian officials in the Serbian government, but whether the Serbian government itself was ultimately behind the conspiracy, that was less clear.

But everyone in the Austrian government took it for granted that the Serbian state was ultimately culpable, and immediately leapt into the question of the Austrian response. The view of the Austrian military chief of staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf was clear enough: *Krieg, Krieg, Krieg*, was how the foreign minister, Leopold Berchtold, summarizes Conrad’s advice: War, war, war. Conrad had been arguing for years that crushing Serbia was essential to the survival of

the Empire. Now, events had vindicated both him and his proposed response. The Dual Monarchy's Minister of War, Marshall Alexander von Krobatin, supported Conrad.

Military commanders across the Empire generally were calling for military action against Serbia, but next to Conrad, the loudest voice was Oskar Potiorek, the governor of Bosnia, who was sitting across from the Imperial couple in the car when they were killed. Potiorek believed, or claimed to believe, that God had saved him from death at Princip's hand that fateful day that he might be the instrument of divine retribution upon Serbia. Very Biblical, very Old Testament in fact, and very likely to be an attempt to deflect criticism from, you know, flubbing the Archduke's security in Sarajevo.

Also, Potiorek, the same Potiorek who had assured everyone that Bosnia was stable and secure back in June, was now telling everyone that Bosnia was spiraling out of control, and that unless Serbia were punished, the Empire would be unlikely to retain control of Bosnia.

That's pretty rich. In fact, the ethnic Croats and Bosniaks in Bosnia were mostly on the government's side and angry about the assassinations. Violence had broken out in Sarajevo and other Bosnian cities, directed against ethnic Serbs and their homes and businesses. In July a poem would be published entitled "*Srbe na vrbe*," which means "Serbs on the Willows," which is to say, "Let's hang all the Serbs from the trees."

At the same time, Austrian diplomats in Serbia and Montenegro were reporting what they considered to be appalling discourtesy and disrespect of Austria in the hour of her grief. Their governments issued official statements of regret, but there was little public display of mourning. June 28 had been a holiday in Serbia, the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, which, you will recall, in part commemorated the assassination of the Ottoman Sultan by a Serb nobleman. Serbia had just taken control of the site of the Battle of Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire last year, making this year's anniversary a very special one, and there had been special events, including fireworks, scheduled for that Sunday evening, just hours after the Archduke's assassination, and those celebrations had gone ahead as planned, despite the murders, and much to Austrian annoyance.

At the Archduke's funeral on July 3, Conrad had a private chat with General Moritz von Auffenberg, who you may recall was Minister of War before he had to resign in the wake of scandal in 1912. Conrad made his case for war. Auffenberg was sympathetic, but reminded Conrad that a war with Serbia would almost surely draw in the Russians. Conrad said, maybe not. Auffenberg, who was well acquainted with the facts from his time as War Minister, pointed out to Conrad the larger size of the Russian Army, as well as the fact that it was equipped with more and better artillery than was the Austrian Army. Conrad said, "I'm aware of that, but I'm in no position to fix it now."

In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II was also pressing Austria to take harsh action against Serbia. The German Kaiser had considered the Archduke a personal friend, and was understandably

upset and angry about the assassination. On July 5, two days after the funeral, Wilhelm met with the Austrian ambassador and told him that Germany would support Austria against Serbia, even if Russia intervened. Then he left for his annual summer cruise along the coast of Norway.

This moment in the slide toward the Great War, when the Kaiser promised Austria his support, has come to be known in France as *la carte blanche*, or in English as the “blank check.” After the war, the Allied justification for punishing Germany would be that German support would encourage Austrian aggression, which would plunge Europe into war, and therefore it was reasonable to hold Germany responsible.

I don't know if that's entirely fair. I'm thinking that if Germany is culpable for backing Austria, maybe France should be held culpable for backing Russia? But I'm getting ahead of the story here. For now, let's just say that, fair or not, this is how the German pledge was interpreted later on.

It is likely that the Kaiser was envisioning that whatever action Austria took to punish Serbia be done quickly and decisively. The assassination provided about as strong a justification for military action against Serbia as Vienna was ever likely to get, and Austria had the world's sympathy. Best to strike now, and present the world with a *fait accompli* before everyone gets to debating about it.

But “quick” and “decisive” are not the first words that leap to mind when you think of Franz Josef and the Dual Monarchy. Incredibly, it would take the government in Vienna almost a month to decide how to respond to the assassination. Wilhelm's advice seems perfectly sound to me, and one wonders how this would have played out had Austria moved against Serbia immediately. I have to say as well that I'm shocked at how the Austrians missed the opportunity to use the Archduke's funeral to turn European opinion against Serbia. As we saw two weeks ago, back in episode 74, Franz Josef and his court saw the funeral as a means of expressing their disdain for the Archduke and his wife one final time before they were laid to rest (in a non-Hapsburg tomb.) Instead of one last snub, why not make a grand spectacle out of the whole thing, like the memorable funeral of Edward VII that we saw back in episode 56? Invite all the crowned heads of Europe to come to the funeral and listen to eulogies praising the saintly Franz Ferdinand and his wife. Have them look at the bodies and meet the innocent, grieving orphans.

I find it amazing that the Emperor and his government passed on this golden propaganda opportunity, and for the most petty of reasons. But hey, that's Austria for you.

And as for quick and decisive action, well, I mentioned that after giving Austria the so-called “blank check,” that Kaiser Wilhelm went on vacation. And you know who else went on vacation, two days later? General Conrad, the Austrian chief of staff who'd been agitating for war with Serbia for years now, the rough beast whose hour had come round at last. With his long dreamed of war with Serbia looming, Austria's chief military planner geared up for the coming

conflict...by leaving Vienna for a summer vacation in the Tyrolean Alps with his girlfriend, Mrs. von Reininghaus.

Well, for his sake, I hope that whenever Austria does get around to it, that her military action is carefully thought out and well planned, otherwise Conrad taking two week's vacation in the middle of a national crisis is going to look really, really bad...he said ominously.

But in fairness, it wasn't just Conrad who went on vacation. Krobatin, the minister of war went on vacation. Bilinski, the minister of finance, went on vacation. Colonel Johann Straub, the chief of the army's Railway Bureau, the office that works out all those intricate timetables to mobilize the army and move it to the front as fast as possible, *he* went on vacation. Tens of thousands of active duty peasant soldiers were granted leave to return to their homes so they could help bring in the harvest, which isn't exactly what I'd call a vacation, but still. And the Kaiser himself, Franz Josef, went back to Bad Ischl and Katarina Schrott.

That's Austria for you. In the midst of a national crisis, everyone from the Emperor down to the lowliest peasant farmer is skipping town. So who *is* minding the store? Well, the Austrian foreign minister, Berchtold, is still at his desk, even in July. In previous crises, Berchtold had been a voice for restraint, but after the two Balkan Wars, he had come around to the view that war with Serbia was inevitable sooner or later. Now, he thought, the time had come. Berchtold and the Emperor had consulted before the Emperor left town, and they had agreed that under the constitution of the Dual Monarchy, both heads of government, the Austrian Chancellor and the Hungarian Prime Minister, would have to consent to any declaration of war.

The Austrian Chancellor at this time was Karl von Stürgkh. I referred to him once before, in episode 73, although I may have called him "the Prime Minister" when I should more properly have said "Chancellor." But either way, when we last heard from him, he had recommended proroguing the Austrian parliament, the Reichsrat, because the Reichsrat had been hopelessly deadlocked by quarrelling ethnic factions, in particular the Czechs, who were agitating for recognition of the Czech language against the Sudeten Germans, who were agitating not to recognize it. Anyway, the Reichsrat was prorogued and the Chancellor is now ruling by decree. This is good news for the war party, since the Chancellor is pretty much on board with war on Serbia, and he won't have to consult with the troublesome Reichsrat. But Stürgkh doesn't want to launch a surprise attack on Serbia. He wants to present Serbia with a list of demands, an ultimatum, to appease world opinion. This way, when the shooting starts, Austria can argue that it gave Serbia a chance to avoid war, and it's the Serbians' own fault if they didn't take it.

Von Stürgkh, by the way, will persist in ruling Austria by decree until his assassination in 1916 by a disgruntled Social Democrat outraged over the Chancellor's continued refusal to convene the Reichsrat and end his autocratic rule.

The Hungarian side of the Dual Monarchy is a little more complicated. The Hungarian Prime Minister was István Tisza, an upper-class Hungarian, well educated and well traveled. Tisza was

loyal to the Dual Monarchy and to the Emperor, oops, I mean the King, because in Hungary Franz Josef is the king, not the emperor. In fact, in Hungary by law it was treason to refer to Franz Josef as Emperor. Anyway, Tisza was loyal, but he was worried. He had a more pessimistic view that war with Serbia would mean war with Russia, and an equally pessimistic appraisal of the Austrian army's chances in a conflict against Russia (and his pessimism on both points will prove to be entirely warranted.) Hungary is closer to Russia than Austria is, geographically speaking, and I wouldn't be surprised if Tisza was having nightmares about hordes of Russian soldiers swarming over the Carpathian Mountains and onto the Hungarian plain.

Another Tisza nightmare is Romania taking advantage of a war between Austria and Russia to seize Transylvania. Romania, like Italy, is nominally an Austrian ally, but, also like Italy, the Austrians are not even consulting with Romania over the crisis, because the Austrians believe—quite correctly—that Italy and Romania are unlikely to rally to Austria's side in the event of a war. The Russians have in fact been working hard to pry Romania away from its alliance with Germany and Austria, and by July 1914, have pretty much succeeded.

Nor did Tisza like the idea of the Dual Monarchy annexing Serbia, as the Austrians wanted. Like most Hungarians, Tisza believed that Austria-Hungary had too many Slavs as it was, and more Slavs meant more unrest, as well as presenting a threat to Hungary's privileged position within the Dual Monarchy.

So Tisza favored a purely diplomatic approach, to pressure Serbia to dismiss from its government those involved in the assassination, but stopping short of all-out war. The Austrian ministers spent a full week trying to persuade Tisza otherwise and prevent him from effectively vetoing the coming war. During this time the Austrian ministers were discussing in secret with their German counterparts the terms of the ultimatum they were hoping to deliver to Serbia, once they had Tisza on side.

It took until July 14 to persuade Tisza to get aboard the bandwagon. The clinching argument was that if Serbia succeeded in its plot to destabilize the Empire and weaken Vienna's grip on Bosnia to the point where Serbia could pry it away and incorporate it into Serbia, this would lay out a blueprint Romania could follow to pry Transylvania away from Hungary in a similar fashion. That was enough to get convince Tisza, but he still favored a gentler set of demands than the other ministers wanted. They were crafting an ultimatum designed to be impossible for Serbia to accept. Tisza wanted something a little more reasonable.

That dispute was kicked upstairs to the Kaiser, Franz Josef, who received two draft ultimatums at his vacation resort, along with a request from his ministers that he decide which version was appropriate to send. Typically, the Emperor sent them both back with instructions to the ministers to work it out among themselves.

Apparently, Tisza gave in, because the final draft of the ultimatum was as harsh as the ministers could make it. The price for Tisza's support was a pledge that the Dual Monarchy would not attempt to annex Serbia, in whole or in part. The goal was to cut Serbia down to size, perhaps force it into an alliance agreement with Austria, an alliance in which Serbia would very definitely be the junior partner. But no annexation. General Conrad's private response was, "We'll see."

Yes, General Conrad did take a day trip by train back to Vienna from his Alpine getaway on July 19 to consult with the ministers and perhaps remind them about those soldiers who'd been granted leave to go home and help bring in the harvest. They weren't due back until July 25, and starting a war before then could be difficult. If the soldiers' leaves were cancelled and they were ordered back early, it would disrupt the harvest, and many rural parts of the Empire were depending on what came in from that harvest to feed their families for the next twelve months. Not to mention, a sudden mass cancellation would create chaos on the railroads, which was the last thing you'd want just as the army mobilizes. Not to mention too, this whole ultimatum thing was supposed to come as a surprise, and a sudden mass cancellation of harvest leaves would be what poker players call a "tell."

There was another consideration. The President of France, Raymond Poincaré, and the newly seated French Prime Minister, René Viviani, were visiting St. Petersburg for a summit meeting with the Russian Emperor, Nikolai II. To announce the ultimatum during the summit would make it very easy for the Franco-Russian alliance to coordinate their response. So the ultimatum would have to wait until after the summit was over. Indeed, after the summit, the President and Prime Minister would be returning to France by sea, aboard the French battleship *France*, which would complicate the French government response. From the Austrian point of view, that was all to the good.

Which was just as well, since it took until July 21 for the ministers to get that final draft of the ultimatum done. It was presented to the Emperor that day, at his vacation villa. Franz Josef was surprised at how harsh the demands were, but he signed off on it. In Berlin, the German government ministers still in the capital hastily left town...because they knew the ultimatum was coming, but wanted it to look as if they had been caught by surprise.

All this discussion in Vienna and Berlin was conducted in secret, because the Austrians wanted, to the greatest extent possible, to surprise Serbia and the world. First would come the ultimatum, now scheduled to be delivered on July 23. Next, Serbia would be held to a strict 48-hour timetable. No excuses, no delays, no extensions. To drag out the diplomatic confrontation with Serbia would give the great powers time to exert their own pressure to restrain Austria. Perhaps to call a great power conference to address the dispute, you know the way the Concert of Europe has been conducted for the past 99 years. So.

The Austrians didn't want that. They wanted war. The ultimatum was just a fig leaf. They wanted a quick war, over and done with before the rest of Europe could react. And so they wanted to short circuit the whole Concert of Europe process, by moving faster than the great power diplomats could keep up. Of course, this process they were so keen on short circuiting was also the mechanism that had prevented an all-out war in Europe for the past 99 years. So.

[music: "Werdenfelser Trompeten-Ländler"]

We sometimes speak of what comes next as the "July Crisis," but as a strict matter of chronology, the Austro-Hungarian government frittered away most of July 1914 drawing up and debating the terms of the ultimatum. Foreign Minister Berchtold was said to have been agonizing over the exact wording of the ultimatum until the last possible moment before it was delivered...to make sure it was impossible for Serbia to accept.

But while these endless secret committee meetings were being held in Vienna, the assassination of the Archduke was already fading from memory in the capitals of the Entente powers, St. Petersburg, Paris, and London. The ever-turbulent Balkans were already throwing up a new crisis to engage international attention, this one in Albania. We already discussed how Albania gained its independence during the Balkan Wars back in episode 71. The great powers had selected a German noble named Wilhelm of Wied to become King of Albania. He was a nephew of the Queen of Romania and also of the Queen of the Netherlands. He had only arrived in Albania to take up his new duties in April, and already, in July, a revolt had broken out against his rule. The rebels were Muslim Albanians who objected to being ruled over by a Christian King, especially one selected by other Christian Kings. As it would turn out, Wilhelm would flee the country by September 3, never to return, although he would for the rest of his life maintain his claim to the throne of Albania. He died in 1945.

In St. Petersburg, the Russian government was always paying attention to affairs in the Balkans, of course, but the Russians were expecting a much more restrained response from Vienna to the assassination. And the Russians had other irons in the Balkan fire. You'll recall that Serbia is Russia's only real ally there at the moment. The Germans and the Austrians are taking advantage of Bulgaria's resentments over the outcome of the Second Balkan War to draw her toward the Triple Alliance, so Russian diplomats are moving to counter that. And the Russians have not failed to notice the warming relations between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, especially the 2,000 or so German soldiers now in Constantinople, helping the Empire reform and modernize its military, following the recent embarrassing defeats inflicted upon it first, by Italy, then by the Balkan League.

The Russians have also been working to draw Romania away from the Triple Alliance, which becomes easier and easier as Bulgaria slides in the opposite direction.

The Russian foreign ministry's point man in the Balkans was Nikolai Hartwig, the Russian ambassador to Serbia. You'll recall from episode 69 that Hartwig was the man who engineered

the Balkan League alliance that had wrested Macedonia from Ottoman control. The Balkan League was now in ruins, and what course Hartwig intended to pursue next has to remain a matter of speculation, because on July 10, Hartwig visited the Austrian Embassy in Belgrade to meet with his opposite number, the Austrian ambassador to Serbia, Wladimir Giesl von Gieslingen. The ostensible purpose for this visit was for Hartwig to address the rumor that he had hosted a bridge party in the Russian Embassy on the evening of June 28, the evening of the assassination. Hartwig denied this rumor and assured Giesl that he and the embassy staff felt nothing but the deepest sympathy for Austria's grief. Giesl accepted Hartwig's assurances and told Hartwig that he considered the matter closed.

Hartwig then tried to sound out Giesl about the Austrian response to the assassination, but Giesl gave only the vaguest of answers. The meeting was breaking up when the 56-year old Hartwig rose to his feet and then suddenly collapsed from a massive heart attack and died right there on the Austrian Ambassador's carpet. Wild stories flew, that Giesl had poisoned Hartwig, even that the Austrians had a special, secret high-tech chair that they had used to electrocute him. Some of these stories actually made it into the Belgrade newspapers.

It's interesting to speculate how history might have played out differently, had Harwig lived to see the Austrian ultimatum that would be released two weeks later. Hartwig was hardline pro-Serb, to be sure—people said he was more Serbian than the Serbs—but he was also a skilled diplomat and the most knowledgeable expert on the Balkans in the Russian foreign service. Had he lived, could he have threaded the needle and guided the crisis to some kind of resolution short of all-out war? Even Giesl, the Austrian ambassador, would later wonder about that.

As for the Russian Emperor, Nikolai II, and his family, they continued to be preoccupied by the precarious health of the crown prince, Alexei. They had vacationed at Yalta in the spring, mostly for the sake of the Empress, but there was no escaping worry when every day brought with it the possibility that her only son would meet a fatal accident. The family had tried taking the royal yacht on a tour of the Baltic at the beginning of July, but Alexei had fallen while on board the ship and bled terribly, forcing them to cancel the cruise. Now they were back in seclusion, as usual, at the closed off and heavily fortified Imperial compound outside the capital.

Grigori Rasputin, the oddball Siberian holy man who by now had improbably become one of the most influential figures in Russia, had returned to his home town in Siberia for a bit of summer vacation in July, and became the victim of an assassination attempt, just two days after the death of Hartwig. A woman had approached him on the street. Rasputin took her for a beggar and went to her, offering a few coins. The woman drew a knife and stabbed Rasputin in the belly. Rasputin was able to get away, running off with his hands over the wound to minimize the bleeding. He was hospitalized, had surgery, and needed weeks to recover, meaning he, too, was out of commission during the critical days of the July Crisis.



Whatever else you want to say about Rasputin, and a lot of people did, you can't deny that he had pacifist leanings. As the crisis unfolded, Rasputin sent the Imperial family telegrams from his hospital bed, counseling against war and prophesying that a war with Austria would bring disaster upon the Romanov dynasty. It was reported that Rasputin became so agitated about the news coming out of St. Petersburg that his wound began bleeding again, setting back his recovery. Again, it's interesting to speculate what influence Rasputin might have had if he had been there at the palace with the Imperial family during those critical days. Enough to put the brakes on the slide to war? Who knows?

Emperor Nikolai had sent his personal physician to tend to Rasputin, but the shock of Alexei suffering yet another potentially fatal episode of bleeding coupled with the shock of the attack on Rasputin and his subsequent unavailability to tend to the crown prince was terribly distressing for the Empress and when the Empress is distressed, so is the Emperor.

Public discontent in Russia was on the rise. The nation was experiencing more strikes and more political violence than ever, giving lie to the pleasing fiction that last year's Romanov tercentenary extravaganza had demonstrated public support for Imperial rule. The entente with Britain had hit a snag over the situation in Persia; the British were accusing Russia of breaking the agreement made back in 1907. So, with all this going on, the assassination of the Austrian crown prince was fading into the background.

In Britain, there was quite a bit of sympathy for Austria on the death of her crown prince. The King, George V, made an unannounced visit to the Austrian Embassy in London to offer royal condolences. But the British Foreign Office did not anticipate a strong Austrian response. In government circles, the assassination of the Archduke was quickly overshadowed by the death, on July 2, of our old friend, Joseph Chamberlain, the leader of the Liberal Unionists who had taken his anti-Home Rule faction out of the Liberal Party and allied with the Conservative Party and had become Colonial Secretary and *de facto* the second most powerful political figure in Britain by the turn of the twentieth century. We first met him all the way back in episode 11.

There's an irony in the fact that Irish Home Rule, the very issue that had provoked the split in the Liberal Party all the way back in 1886, and thrust Joseph Chamberlain into the spotlight as the most prominent Liberal opponent of Home Rule, was again the most contentious topic in Britain on the day he died, 28 years later. The Home Rule argument now was down to which parts of Ulster might be exempted from Home Rule, and there was a very real danger of open violence in Ireland if the parties could not be brought into an agreement. The King cancelled his summer holiday and called a conference, to be held at Buckingham Palace, with Liberal, Conservative, Home Rule, and Ulster Unionist representatives, in a final attempt to broker a compromise everyone could live with. The conference convened on July 21.

In Republican France, the assassination of some Austrian Archduke made little impact. The French foreign ministry spent far more of its time over the weeks that followed ironing out the

details of the upcoming summit meeting between the President and the Russian Emperor. And everyone else in France was transfixed by the murder trial of Henriette Caillaux.

Henriette Caillaux was the second wife of Joseph Caillaux, whom we have already met. He was prime minister of France during the second Moroccan crisis with Germany back in 1911. He resigned the premiership shortly after the crisis concluded, when it was revealed that he had been engaged in secret back-channel negotiations with Germany during the crisis.

We've already seen a few examples in this podcast of how extreme the French right wing can get. We've also seen how noisy the Parisian newspapers can be, always eager to report on scandal and corruption, and not above spreading rumor and gossip. The French right never forgave Caillaux for his conciliatory attitude toward Germany while he was prime minister, not to mention the policies he supported in the Cabinet and in the Chamber of Deputies afterward: policies like opposing military spending, opposing the Three-Year Law to increase the size of the army, and support for a progressive income tax, along the lines of what was being enacted in Britain and the United States.

While Caillaux had been prime minister, he had divorced his first wife and married Henriette, who was herself divorced. The couple was wealthy and was living a high-profile social life.

In early 1914, the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* got its hands on a set of love letters written by Joseph to Henriette, at a time when he was still married to his first wife. Needless to say, this attracted a lot of attention and was doing Joseph's political career no good at all. Henriette was horrified. And she knew that worse letters were forthcoming. There was nothing Joseph could do about it that wouldn't make the injury to his reputation even worse, Henriette reasoned, but there was something *she* could do about it. On March 16, 1914, late in the afternoon, she had appeared at the editorial offices of *Le Figaro* and asked to see the editor, Gaston Calmette. Calmette agreed to meet with her. Henriette entered his office, drew a pistol, and fired six shots, fatally wounding Calmette, who died a few hours later.

Now, in July, Henriette was on trial for murder, and the trial was a public sensation, breathlessly covered in all the newspapers, not least because some of the most important people in French government were being called as witnesses. Even the President testified, by deposition, which was unprecedented in French legal history. Henriette's lawyer argued for acquittal on the grounds that this was a crime of passion, that Henriette was overcome by emotion, and we all know that women have more difficulty than men in controlling their emotions, am I right? The Balkans seemed very far away in comparison. Henriette Caillaux would be acquitted on July 28, the same day, as it turns out, that Austria declared war on Serbia.

On July 15, the President and Prime Minister began their trip to St. Petersburg, aboard France's newly commissioned dreadnought, *France*. France, the nation, was slow to join the dreadnought race. With just two dreadnoughts in her navy, she was behind even Italy and Austria, and on a par with Brazil. The maiden voyage of *France*, the battleship, would be to take Poincaré and

Viviani to their meeting with the Russian Emperor. The French Navy would commission its fourth dreadnought, *Paris*, on August 1, just in time for the Great War.

Poincaré and Viviani could have gotten to St. Petersburg faster by train, but this would have required traveling through Germany. So, by sea it is. They arrived on July 20, met with the Emperor, observed the latest of St. Petersburg's general strikes, including clashes between strikers and police, and discussed pressing issues with their Russian counterparts. The main issue the French wanted to discuss was the rise in tensions between Russia and Britain. The French counseled the Russians to work out their differences with the British in negotiations, of course. The topic of Austria and Serbia also came up, as rumors began to fly that Austria was on the verge of taking some kind of action. The Russians had already been sending warnings to Vienna that messing with Serbia would be a dangerous step. At a diplomatic reception in St. Petersburg on July 21, President Poincaré told the Austrian ambassador that no government could be held to account merely because crimes were plotted on its soil, and warned that Serbia had friends, a warning that presumably included France. The ambassador passed this on to Vienna, but it doesn't appear that anyone in Austria paid much attention.

On July 23, Wladimir Giesl, the Austrian ambassador in Belgrade, made an appointment to visit the Serbian Foreign Ministry at 6:00 PM. Serbia was at this time in the midst of a general election campaign—the election was scheduled for August 14—and Nikola Pašić, the Serbian prime minister was off campaigning, and so was the foreign minister. And so, Giesl met with the Serbian Finance Minister, Laza Paču, who was the highest ranking member of the government in Belgrade at the time. The Austrian ultimatum was composed in French, as French was the principal language of international diplomacy at that time. Unfortunately, when Giesl began reading the ultimatum, Paču, who did not know French, could not understand it. Giesl waited while an interpreter was sent for, and then tried again. On his second try, he got as far as the first sentence before Paču stopped him and said he did not have the authority to receive such an important document. Giesl told him that Austria demanded a favorable response within 48 hours, that is, by 6:00 PM the following Saturday, July 25, just shy of four weeks from the assassination of the Archduke.

Paču replied that because of the election campaign, the government would need more time to bring together the Cabinet and discuss a response. Giesl told him that the difficulties facing the Serbian government in assembling its Cabinet were no concern of Austria's, and the deadline stood. Giesl left the ultimatum on a table as he departed, since Paču still refused to accept the document himself.

The ultimatum to Serbia included a list of harsh and intrusive demands, ostensibly aimed at curtailing Serbian expressions of hostility toward Austria. It included such things as removing anti-Austrian bias from Serbian school curricula, stronger enforcement to block weapons smuggling from Serbia into Bosnia, the dismissal of government ministers and high-ranking army officers with anti-Austrian views, the dissolution of anti-Austrian secret societies like the

Black Hand, and the censorship of anti-Austrian articles in the Serbian press. The King of Serbia would have to publicly disavow the goal of annexing Slav territories in Austria-Hungary into a greater Serbian state. Most intrusive of all, the ultimatum would demand that Serbia grant Austria the right to conduct its own investigation of the assassination plot within Serbian territory using Austrian investigators answerable only to Vienna.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening. If you enjoy *The History of the Twentieth Century*, follow us on Twitter, like us on Facebook, or come visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com), where you can leave a comment. And by the way, I post a list of music played in every episode, so if you hear a piece of music that intrigues you, go to the website to learn more about it.

Next week is the Memorial Day holiday weekend in the United States, so I will be taking the week off—ha, ha, who am I kidding? I will be reading and researching for future episodes. I like to keep a healthy inventory of episodes ready to record, in case stuff happens. Because stuff always happens. But I hope you'll join me in two weeks time, as we continue the story of what happens after Austria delivered her ultimatum. The July Crisis, in two weeks, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The Serbian Prince Regent, Alexander, made a brash statement on the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, warning that “an iron fist” awaited the Austrians, should they be so rash as to attack Serbia. But that was just talk. In fact, after two Balkan wars in the past two years, Serbia was in poor shape to fight a third war. And so while the Serbian Cabinet assembled to craft a response to the ultimatum, hoping to find a way to placate the Austrians, the Serbian Army ordered a mobilization, and plans were made to move the Serbian capital from Belgrade, which lay just across the border from Hungary, to the city of Niš, about 200 kilometers, or 125 miles, farther south. When the declaration of war finally came, ironically, Serbia would be ahead of Austria in preparing for it.

[music: Closing Theme]