

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 81

“Offense to the Utmost”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

After the Franco-Prussian war, the once fearsome French Army, cowed by the Germans, settled for a defensive strategy in the event of another war with Germany. But by the early twentieth century, France had recovered her confidence, and began planning to go on the offensive at once in the event of another German invasion. They knew that war would mean that the main German hammer blow would fall upon France, but French strategists believed they were prepared for any contingency.

They were entirely wrong.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 81. Offense to the Utmost.

Today, I'd like to continue the discussion of the war plans of the Great Powers in Europe in 1914. We're going to begin now with France. France has had an alliance with Russia for the past twenty years, and has had an entente with Britain for the past ten. Italy and France have also had something like an entente going since 1903. So as far as French war planning goes, ninety percent of it is in response to the prospect of a war with Germany.

We've seen how France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was a national humiliation for France. It brought down Napoleon III's Second Empire, led to a Prussian occupation that included German soldiers parading through Paris, cost France five billion francs in reparations payments, and led to a piece of French territory, usually referred to as Alsace-Lorraine, ceded to the new German Empire.

Now, it's worth noting that France is not entirely an innocent victim here. Back when Germany was the Holy Roman Empire, and a loose confederation of small states, and France was the largest and most populous nation in Western Europe, there was a lot of French bullying of the

Germans. Successive French governments and monarchs have argued that the Rhine River is the quote-unquote “natural boundary” between France and Germany, in spite of the large number of ethnic Germans who live on the west bank of the river. Alsace and Lorraine were in fact once part of the Holy Roman Empire. France did not secure its rule over Alsace until 1697 and Lorraine until 1766.

French policy had long been to leverage her status as a large state with a highly centralized government to keep Germany divided and therefore weaker. When the German Empire was created in 1871, the new German state feared that France would eventually recover from its defeat and work to undermine—or outright destroy—the fledging united German nation.

Forcing France to pay that hefty indemnity was part of the effort to keep her weak and give Germany an excuse to prolong the occupation. But the French recovered quickly, and surprised everyone by raising the indemnity money in just three years.

And then there was Alsace-Lorraine. The demographic and nationalist argument for Germany annexing this territory was that the inhabitants mostly spoke German and therefore these lands were properly part of the new German state. But another argument involved fear of France, that France would never accept German unification and would aim to weaken or shatter the new state. Germany therefore needed the lands as a defensive buffer against a future French attack. That’s why the German territorial demand included the French-speaking city of Metz, for the sake of its fortified position.

Otto von Bismarck, the wily German Chancellor of the time, had astutely opposed the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, on the grounds that it would be a perpetual obstacle to friendly relations between France and Germany, and time would prove him entirely correct. But Field Marshal Moltke’s defense argument won the day. Having lost that argument, Bismarck next suggested that Alsace-Lorraine be given a great deal of autonomy, based on the quite sensible reasoning that to the extent the inhabitants of this region could be encouraged to discover and cultivate their unique identity as Alsatians, they would be less likely to align with French revanchism.

But that counsel was not heeded, either. The next most logical step might have been to hand over administration of Alsace-Lorraine to the bordering German states of Baden or Bavaria, or perhaps divide the lands between them. But this was not done, either. The Catholic states of Baden and Bavaria had sided with Austria over Prussia as recently as the war of 1866, and Moltke, knowing that the Army was going to be garrisoning and fortifying Alsace-Lorraine, did not want the civilian rulers of the territory to be people potentially hostile to the Prussian-dominated military.

And so, Alsace-Lorraine was administered directly by the Imperial government in Berlin, an arrangement, um, similar to the way Germany’s colonies in Africa and the Pacific were governed, which is the perfect solution if you want everyone (and especially the people who live

there) to think of Alsace-Lorraine as occupied territory. But if you want them to think of Alsace-Lorraine as an integral part of Germany, well, then...not so smart.

And so Alsace-Lorraine remained a sore spot in Franco-German relations from 1870 through to the Great War. That's two generations of hard feelings, as children in French schools were taught from early on that Alsace-Lorraine was stolen French territory. No, France was not about to let this issue drop.

We've seen, too, how Germany's population and economy grew much faster than France's during this period, putting France in the unaccustomed position of having a neighbor larger and stronger than herself.

Now, the Germans had grievances against the French, too. Despite the war in 1870 and despite forty years of being bigger, richer, and stronger, the Germans still saw France as an implacable opponent of a strong Germany, and worse, a foe that just wouldn't stay beaten. Somehow, in spite of the war and the indemnity and the humiliation visited upon France, in spite of an unstable Republican government that seemingly changed prime ministers every few months and in fact had 42 war ministers in the 44 years since 1870, in spite of anarchist assassinations and bombings, in spite of military coup attempts, in spite of the condemnation of the Pope and a curiously low rate of population growth, in spite of all these disadvantages, in the race for the title of world's pre-eminent power, France is still hard on Germany's heels.

For all of Germany's military might, the threat from France always had to be taken into account. Though Germany was stronger, France had the larger colonial empire, and it kept on expanding, even after France's defeat in 1871. In spite of Germany's scientific and technological prowess, France was right up there with her. In particular, France was the world leader in both automobile and aviation technology, even though neither the automobile nor the airplane had been invented there. The automobile was a *German* invention, for crying out loud, and yet it was France that had its *grands prix* and its *Guide Michelin*. And in the world of arts and culture, as we have seen, Germany might have Wagner and Strauss and Goethe and Liebermann, but Berlin was a cultural afterthought. Paris was still the city where if you made it there, you'll make it anywhere.

In 1911, Alsace-Lorraine finally got its own government and a degree of autonomy. Census records show that only about 10% of the population spoke French as their first language at that time. So, mission accomplished, right? Alsace-Lorraine is now fully integrated into Germany, right?

Hang on a minute. On October 28, 1913, just months before the Great War would erupt as it turned out, a 20-year old second lieutenant named Günther von Forstner, yet another of these Junker aristocrats, who was just beginning his career as an army officer, was speaking to a group of new recruits to his infantry company, which was stationed in a town in Alsace, a town known to the Germans as Zabern and to the French as Saverne. Forstner instructed his soldiers to be wary of the locals and ready to defend themselves, and then made a joke in very bad taste to the

effect that if, in the course of defending himself, a soldier happened to stab an Alsatian with his bayonet, Forster would give him a ten-mark bonus. And he didn't use the word "Alsatian," he said "Wackes," a derogatory term for Alsations that was so offensive that German soldiers were under standing orders never to use it.

Someone told the local newspaper, which reported on the young lieutenant's remarks a few days later. The Alsations were understandably offended, and began to make public protests and hold demonstrations. Whenever Lieutenant Forstner was seen in public, civilians mocked and insulted him. Local civilian authorities asked the Army to transfer Forstner someplace else—*anyplace* else—but the military backed him up all the way, and insisted that Forstner had done nothing wrong. They demanded that instead the local civilian authorities should rein in the demonstrators.

The local civilian authorities refused to take action against the demonstrators, on the narrow, technical grounds that the demonstrators weren't, you know, actually breaking any laws or anything. The army, frustrated with the situation, tried breaking up a demonstration themselves on November 28, arresting a large number of Alsatian civilians who hadn't done anything illegal, and of course, only making the situation that much tenser. The civilian government protested directly to the Kaiser, but Wilhelm backed the military.

A few days later, on December 2, Forstner was in town, reportedly shopping for chocolates, which is an Alsatian specialty. He was accompanied by four soldiers. A young disabled cobbler named Karl Blank spotted Forstner and began making fun of him. Other passersby joined in. The enraged Forstner drew his saber and smacked Blank on the head with the flat of the blade, seriously injuring him.

These events in this small Alsatian town came to be known as the Zabern Affair, and now became not only a German national scandal, but an international one. In the Reichstag on December 4, the Social Democratic Party spearheaded the first ever successful no-confidence vote in the history of the German Empire, against the government of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. The vote was purely symbolic, as the Chancellor was appointed by the Kaiser and did not need the approval of the Reichstag, but it was a blow to his prestige. The Kaiser fully backed the Chancellor as well, and refused calls to dismiss him.

Forstner was court-martialed for striking Blank, but was acquitted on self-defense grounds. Never mind that Blank was unarmed while Forstner was armed, and he had four other soldiers backing him up. The officers who had ordered those mass arrests on November 28 were also acquitted, and the Kaiser backed the military every step of the way. Prominent German socialist politicians were publicly asking whether Germans were living in a military dictatorship.

The incident brought to light how strained the relationship remained between Alsace-Lorraine and the rest of Germany, and once again made the region look like an occupied territory, as news of the turmoil in Zabern (and in Berlin) made international headlines. A satirical political cartoon

in France depicted the French government awarding the Legion of Honor to Lieutenant Forstner for his brilliant propaganda campaign against the German occupation of Alsace-Lorraine.

Forstner was only twenty years old, which might explain his being such a little snot, I suppose, but the decision to back him went all the way up the chain of command to the Kaiser himself, and so, for supporting this brilliant anti-German propaganda campaign, I would like to present this week's Kaiser Wilhelm II Award for Making an Ass out of Yourself to Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Admittedly with an assist from *Leutnant* Günther von Forstner, who, by the way, will be killed in action on the Eastern Front less than two years from now.

[music: *Élégie*]

Given how strongly the French feel about Alsace-Lorraine, it will not surprise you if I tell you that in France's military planning, the retaking of the lost provinces was a central principle.

As I said at the top of the episode, it wasn't always this way. In the immediate aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, the French Army was sufficiently beaten and demoralized that for some time, French military planning was strictly defensive in nature. Germany was now clearly the dominant military power on the Continent; therefore, in the event of another war, French planning had to center on repelling the inevitable German offensive, and avoiding a repeat of 1870.

In the early twentieth century, though, this thinking began to change, and the man credited with the change is General Ferdinand Foch. In contrast to the prevailing thinking, Foch preached offense. Never mind that Germany was bigger and stronger, it was willpower that counted. One of Foch's most famous slogans was "The will to conquer is the first condition of victory." Nietzsche would have loved this guy.

Foch was appointed Director of the French War College by Prime Minister Clemenceau in 1908. His peculiar mix of pragmatism and mysticism convinced everyone he must be a visionary. Yes, he preached mystical sounding notions of the role of will in combat, but he was also pragmatist enough to warn you that you had to get your tactical doctrine right, too.

Foch is credited with helping to boost French Army morale by shifting French strategic thinking away from a perpetual focus on fending off the seemingly inevitable German invasion toward the idea that the French Army could be and was a match for the Germans, and with the right offensive spirit, could take the war into Germany.

And what better place to launch a French offensive than Alsace? Surely the rightness of the French cause could make up for the technical advantages the Germans had. In October 1913, the same month that Lieutenant Forstner was insulting the Alsatians, the new French Army Field Regulations opened with these words: "The French Army, returning to its traditions, henceforth

admits no law but the offensive.” The posture of the Army would be, to put it in terms of a French Army slogan of the day, *offensive à outrance*, offense to the utmost.

France’s new Three-Year Law, also enacted in 1913, sought to make up for France’s smaller population by extending the active duty period for conscripted soldiers from two years to three years and eliminating most deferments, toward the goal of giving France an active duty army equal in size to Germany’s, the population difference notwithstanding.

And that brings us to the French General Joseph Jacques Cesaire Joffre, who became Commander-in-Chief of the French Army in 1911. Joffre began his military career as an engineer, and served in colonial postings. He saw action in a couple of French colonial wars, but he reached the position of Commander-in-Chief without ever having commanded a large military unit or having served on the general staff. Inspired by Foch, Joffre devised Plan XVII, the latest French war plan that was in effect when the war began.

Plan XVII was not a “soup-to-nuts” plan like the Schlieffen Plan. It was largely a mobilization plan. The French Army envisioned full mobilization in sixteen days, not quite as fast as Germany’s twelve, but faster than most anyone else. The French would organize into five armies along the German border, numbered one to five, beginning at Switzerland and counting north. In other words, if you are in France and looking toward Germany, the First Army will be on your far right, the fifth on your far left, just behind Luxembourg and southern Belgium. Unlike the Schlieffen Plan, there was no firm decision made as to what these five armies would do once they were in position. Joffre rejected a dogmatic attack plan in favor of freedom of discretion for himself to react to Germany’s initial moves.

But Joffre had a pretty good idea of what his attack was going to be. It would center on the Fourth Army, which would be held a bit to the rear, behind the Fifth and the Third. But these three armies, the Third, Fourth, and Fifth, would be the spearhead of the French offensive.

Despite German suspicions and accusations, the French never seriously considered violating the neutrality of either Belgium or Luxembourg themselves. As a matter of principle, France had pledged to uphold their neutrality. As a practical matter, a shorter front line, anchored by a neutral Belgium on one side and a neutral Switzerland on the other side would help offset France’s smaller numbers. And there was the matter of British support. Britain was not formally pledged to assist France in the event of war, but Britain *was* formally pledged to uphold Belgian neutrality. So the best way of keeping the British onside would be to stay clear of Belgium.

It did occur to Joffre and his staff that the Germans might invade through Belgium. If they did, the Fifth Army would move northeast into southern Belgium to attack the flank of the German spearhead, which the French envisioned coming south of the Meuse, through the southernmost corner of Belgium. The British and the Belgians would in turn protect the Fifth Army’s left flank by deploying to their north. That the main German offensive might come even farther north than that, as far north as Liège and Brussels, did not enter into the plan.

The Third and Fourth Armies, meanwhile, would be the center of the French offensive into Lorraine, advancing along either side of the German fortifications at Metz. In the event the Germans stayed out of Belgium, the Fifth Army would also be free to participate in this offensive. On the other hand, if the Germans did invade Belgium, well, so much the better. Then the Third and Fourth Armies would be hitting the German offensive right in its left flank, which would force the Germans either to pull back, or risk their offensive force being encircled.

There are two glaring problems with Plan XVII. The first is the overly optimistic view of what a French offensive would be capable of as it ran headlong into the German Army. Now, every other general staff in Europe was also confidently predicting that its offensive spearheads would slice right through their enemies. Some historians speak of the “cult of the offensive.” Perhaps they should have listened a more closely to Jan Bloch, who accurately predicted that modern firepower gave a powerful advantage to defenders. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the response to Jan Bloch was a stubborn insistence that a properly managed offensive, one that had the right plan, if you were German, or the right spirit, if you were French, could prevail in spite of everything. They had to believe that, because it was the only alternative to the grinding war of attrition that Bloch had predicted.

The second problem with Plan XVII was that the one contingency it doesn't seem to have covered was the essence of the Schlieffen Plan: a powerful German offensive through the Belgian heartland. An offensive through the south of Belgium, yes, but not one that moved large formations north of the Meuse River. It's not that no one in the French Army ever anticipated such a thing. It was consistent with known German military doctrine, which emphasized the flanking maneuver. And the French had sound intelligence that this was exactly the sort of thing the Germans were planning.

But all those hints ran up against the firm French conviction that such a sweeping German offensive so far north was flat-out impossible. Army doctrine of the time held that a strong offensive required something like five soldiers per meter of front line. If you do the math, not even the German Army is big enough to man a front line at that density all the way from the Swiss border to Brussels. To invade Belgium with a force large enough to make this sweeping right hook feasible would, in the French view, force the Germans to strip their defenses farther south in Alsace-Lorraine so thin that the French counteroffensive would punch right through, stranding the Germans to the north in enemy territory with their supply lines cut. That would end the offensive before it got going, and likely force a mass surrender. And so, whenever the possibility of such an offensive was raised in French strategic circles, one heard the refrain “So much the better. So much the better.” If the Germans were foolish enough to try such an extreme maneuver, it would cost them the war.

[music: *Who Can From Joy Refrain?*]

The United Kingdom is a group of islands, and from here it controls the world's largest colonial empire. As an inevitable result, British war planning looks quite different from Continental war planning. Britain does not have conscription; it fields a volunteer army, which in the home islands is about six infantry divisions and one cavalry division. Traditionally, this force was intended mostly to be ready for deployment to far corners of the world to defend the Empire. We saw this force delivered to South Africa in episode 12, for instance, when the Boer War broke out.

The British distaste for conscription is related to the fact that the army is mostly for defending the Empire. The British elites want their people to see the Empire as a boon. If young British men were getting conscripted against their will and shipped off to duty in far-flung corners of the world, then the Empire looks more like a burden on the common people for the benefit of the elites. And we don't want people thinking that, do we?

The embarrassment of the Boer War led to some rethinking in the British military, and the adoption of a British general staff. We've already seen in the podcast the reconciliation of Britain and France and the negotiation of the entente between them. The entente developed under the Balfour government, but when the Liberals took power, the new government fully supported it, at least in private, as we have seen, while publicly insisting over and over again that Britain had made no binding commitment to defend France, even as British and French military planners were hammering out the details on the deployment of the British Army to France in the event of a German invasion.

We've also seen Britain back France in the two Morocco crises, when Germany tried to pressure her into giving up a larger interest in that country. Britain played an important role in both crises, counterbalancing the German threat at a time when Russia was sidelined.

Though Britain had made no formal commitment to France, it still had a commitment to defend Belgium, which the British government took seriously. The French fully understood this, and understood that respecting Belgian neutrality was key to keeping Britain as an ally.

During this time, the commander of the British Staff College was Brigadier General Henry Wilson. In 1909, he went to France to visit his opposite number, General Foch, and the two of them got on like a house on fire. There is a story that Wilson asked Foch in the event of war with Germany, what would be the minimum commitment of British forces that would still be helpful to France. Foch reportedly told him, one soldier, "and we will see to it that he is killed." In other words, as Foch saw it, once British troops were dying on French battlefields, Britain would have no choice but to commit fully. He saw that clearly, even if the British did not.

Wilson became firmly of the view that a war between Germany and France was inevitable, and that it was crucial that Britain support France. In August 1910, Wilson was made Director of Military Operations, and under him, joint planning with France became the British Army's highest priority.

Wilson also perceived the danger of a German flanking maneuver through Belgium although, like the French, he badly underestimated the size of the flanking force. Wilson thought that rapid deployment of a British expeditionary force to the right places in Belgium could frustrate that German attack. One entire wall of Wilson's office was dedicated to an enormous map of Belgium, with every possible route the Germans might take through that country marked in black. British regulars would not have to mobilize, so Wilson strove to have them ready to deploy to the Continent on the same day French mobilization began. Wilson expected the British Army in France to be fully deployed and ready to enter combat thirteen days after French mobilization.

On August 23, 1911, the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, called a secret meeting of the Imperial Defense Committee to be briefed on the state of war planning. The Cabinet members at the meeting were the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, and the Home Secretary, the now 37-year old Winston Churchill. It would not be normal for the Home Secretary to attend a meeting like this one, but Churchill had made such a nuisance of himself carping on about military matters that Asquith invited him anyway. Churchill and McKenna, by the way, are going to swap their Cabinet positions exactly two months from now, and Churchill will be First Lord of the Admiralty when the war begins.

Henry Wilson stood in front of his enormous map of Belgium and explained to the committee the danger of a German offensive through that country, although even Wilson, Britain's greatest pessimist on this subject, could only conceive of four German divisions so far to the French left that they would come down north and west of the Meuse River. Still, Wilson argued that would be enough to unravel the French defense. It was therefore vital that all six divisions of the British Army be in position as soon as possible there on the French left. They might make all the difference.

To the amazement of the Committee, the next speaker, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, Jackie Fisher's successor as First Sea Lord, presented the Royal Navy view, which couldn't have been more different. In the Navy's view, mucking around on the French front amounted to frittering away Britain's greatest military asset, the Royal Navy. In the Navy's view, aiding the French to defeat the German Army on the ground was a fool's errand. It was the Navy, not the Army, that would keep the Germans out of Paris. By landing British forces at Antwerp, for example, outflanking the German offensive. Or better yet, landing British soldiers on Germany's Baltic coast, less than a hundred miles from Berlin. Let's see them invade France while the British Army is sitting on the Kaiser's doorstep.

The Committee endorsed the Army plan over the Navy plan, much to the disgust of the admirals, who will not give up on the concept that the key to defeating Germany was a surprise landing behind German lines. As we shall see. Churchill won't forget the concept either.

The rest of the Liberal Cabinet, mostly anti-war Liberals, got wind of this meeting and expressed their displeasure at being kept in the dark as the Government drew up its plans for making war on Germany. Asquith diplomatically reassured his Cabinet colleagues that these “conversations” with the military chiefs were purely informal discussions exploring some of the possible ramifications of Britain’s entente with France. But the fact was that the Government of the United Kingdom had entered into a *de facto* military alliance with France, whether the Prime Minister wanted to admit that or not. Whether Asquith fully understood what he was doing and was merely obfuscating to the Cabinet, or whether he was fooled along with the rest of them is a question still open to debate in our time.

[music: *Symphony No. 1 in C minor*]

The Chief of Staff of the Austrian military was Field Marshal Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, whom we have already met several times. Conrad was born in 1852 to a respected Austrian family with a long military tradition. He was appointed chief of staff in 1906, when he was 54, a protégé of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and served in that position until the war broke out in 1914, except for a brief hiatus when he was forced out of the position for a time during a military scandal, as we saw in episode 70.

Conrad had married, had four sons, and was widowed by the time he became Chief of Staff. A few months later, he met an ethnic Italian aristocrat named Virginia von Reininghaus, who was married with six children, and at once fell madly in love with her. Virginia, or “Gina,” as she is usually referred to, was effectively separated from her husband, but in Catholic Austria, reluctant to get a divorce. She was frequently Conrad’s companion at dinners and parties, and he wrote her a letter or two every day, thousands of letters in all.

Conrad was regarded at the time as a brilliant military theorist, although, like most Austrian soldiers of the time, he had had no actual combat experience. In 1914, his affair with Gina was seen as an embarrassing blemish on an otherwise brilliant résumé. Today, Conrad is regarded as a clueless fop, one of the principals responsible for the catastrophe of the Great War, and a failed strategist who spent more time pondering how to persuade Gina to divorce her husband and marry him than on how to fight the war.

As Chief of Staff, Conrad was in charge of Austria’s war planning. Austria’s situation was a bit complicated. In addition to the infamous Plan U for invading Hungary and deposing its government, Austria had a Plan I for Italy, a Plan R for Russia, and a Plan B for a war in the Balkans, perhaps against Serbia, or Montenegro, or Rumania or Bulgaria, or some combination of these states.

As we’ve seen, Conrad was perpetually pressing for war, first against Italy, later against Serbia. Modern historians suspect that Conrad was itching for the glory that would come from a successful war, and was hoping that his return to Vienna afterward as a conquering hero would

knock down the obstacles that were preventing him from marrying his beloved Gina. In light of how it actually turned out, this is ironic, to say the least.

Anyway, after the annexation of Bosnia in 1908, Austrian war planners gradually came to realize that the most likely scenario for an Austrian war was either with Serbia or with Russia, or most likely both.

Austria expected to be able to mobilize in 16 days. Her army looked large enough on paper, but budget constraints meant that her reserve soldiers were mostly soldiers on paper, with little or no actual training. Training is expensive, you see. The basic plan divided the army into three parts. One was a minimal screening force assigned to the Serbian frontier. This force would be large enough to repel any Serbian incursion into Austrian territory, but not large enough to have much hope of invading or subduing Serbia. The second force would be assigned to the Russian frontier, with the third force held in reserve, theoretically able to deploy as needed either to the Russian front, if needed there, otherwise this force would join with that minimal force on the Serbian frontier to begin an offensive against Serbia.

Conrad held his war plans close, and was surprisingly reluctant to share them with the Germans. In fact, there was surprisingly little coordinated planning of any kind between these two nations, given how important their alliance was to both of them, and the rising tensions after 1910. As we saw last week, German forces in the east were minimal, and a key assumption of German war planning was that Austria was going to take most of the heat in the east for the opening weeks of the war. Yes, Russia had a much larger army, but the Russian Army had a reputation for poor soldiering, a reputation reinforced after the fiasco of the war with Japan. And Russia would take a lot longer to mobilize than Austria would.

And so, the thinking went, Austria could mobilize rapidly, launch an early offensive against Russia while the Russians were still mobilizing, which would be sufficient to keep Russia off-balance until Germany had a chance to finish off France and was ready to redeploy to the east. Austrian willingness to gamble everything on an early offensive against Russia was a key assumption supporting Germany's plan to...gamble everything on an early offensive against France.

Well. The problem with this—*one* of the problems with this—was the antipathy Austrian officials in general and Conrad in particular had against Serbia. When Conrad spoke with Moltke, his opposite number in Germany, Moltke emphasized to him the importance of the strike against Russia. Serbia posed no threat, and could be dealt with easily enough once the race to take down first, France, and second, Russia, had been won. He thought he had Conrad's agreement on that.

But Conrad looked at it the other way around. Those ten German divisions in East Prussia could surely help divert enough Russians away from Austria to give Austria breathing room to take down Serbia. And, as we will see, that's exactly how he'll try to play it. On the down side, the

results will be catastrophic for Austria. On the upside, he'll finally get to marry Gina. So there's that.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and a big thank you to listeners T.E. and Randall and Liam and Sean and Jeff for contributing to help keep the podcast going. The Patreon page is now up and running, so thanks as well to those listeners who've already stepped up and become Patrons. If you have a few bucks to spare, why not be a patron yourself? Visit patreon.com/markpainter or visit the website historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, where there are handy links to the Patreon page or to PayPal, where you can make a one-time contribution.

Listener Liam has posted his own performance of the theme music to the podcast, performed on the Xaphoon. I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly. Go to historyofthetwentiethcentury.com to find the link. And if *you* have a performance of the theme music to share, or anything else you'd like to share, you can share it by visiting the website and leaving a comment, or reach out to the podcast on Facebook or Twitter or by email at historyofthetwentiethcentury@gmail.com.

And I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as the first shots are fired in the Great War, Germany demands that Belgium yield and allow her armies to cross through to France, and Belgium gives her reply. Spoiler alert: it's "No." That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Conrad von Hötzendorf's reputation survived the Great War more or less intact, in spite of, you know, everything. Although he was a frequent advocate of war against Serbia in the years leading up to the Great War, after the war he would insist that he was only a military strategist, and the civilian government made all the important decisions.

But there are those, even in our time, who view Conrad as a shrewd military thinker, and blame the poor quality of the Imperial Army for his record on the battlefield. In our time, both the Austrian and German armies have installations named after him. In Germany, the Conrad von Hötzendorf Barracks host the NATO School Oberammergau, which trains some 10,000 military officers from NATO countries each year.

[music: Closing Theme]