

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 82

“No, Whatever the Consequences”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Near the northernmost tip of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg lies a village called Ulflingen in German, and in French Troisvierges, which in English means Three Virgins.

In 1914, one of the most important facts about Troisvierges was that there stood the last railroad station on the line that leads north through the Grand Duchy and on into Belgium. A customs house also stood there, for the collection of tariffs on imports coming into Luxembourg from Belgium. Most of the 1500 residents of Troisvierges at the time were employees of the station or the customs house or their dependents.

The other important fact about Troisvierges in 1914 was known only to the German General Staff. It was that this village was the first objective on Schlieffen’s intricate six-week master plan for the German conquest of France.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 82. No, Whatever the Consequences.

As soon as the Kaiser ordered German mobilization, the machinery was put into motion for a massive offensive in the West that would begin with the German seizure of Troisvierges. The railroad station was no doubt important, but Troisvierges also had a telegraph office, which was the nexus for communications between Germany and Belgium.

On August 1, 1914, at 7:00 in the evening, the first frontier crossing of the Great War took place. A detachment of German soldiers from the 69th Infantry Regiment under the command of a Lieutenant Feldmann, crossed into northern Luxembourg by automobile, through the hilly cow pastures of the southern Ardennes, and quickly took control of the unsuspecting village without opposition.

A half hour later, more German soldiers arrived and ordered the first group to withdraw, explaining to the bewildered village officials that it was all a big mistake. This was in response to the Kaiser’s temporary change of heart, which we saw in episode 78. But it was only temporary,

and anyway, by that time, the Luxembourgish Minister of State had already telegraphed a protest to the German Foreign Office, as well as sent cables to the French Foreign Ministry and the British Foreign Office revealing that the German Army had violated Luxembourg's borders in breach of the 1867 Treaty of London, which had been signed by France and Britain and Germany, among other powers.

By the end of the next day, August 2, the whole of the Grand Duchy would be under German occupation. The German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, responded to the Luxembourgish government's protests, claiming military necessity as the justification for the invasion, specifically claiming that France was preparing to invade Luxembourg herself, which the French government denied.

That same day, the Belgian press besieged the German embassy in Brussels with questions about Luxembourg, as well as the number one question on the mind of every Belgian: did Germany intend to invade this country next? The German ambassador told them, "Your neighbor's roof may catch fire, but your own house will be safe."

Historically, Belgium has often been a site of armed combat, from Caesar's conquest of Gaul through to the Battle of Waterloo, 99 years ago. But Belgium had been spared the sword since then, and had experienced 75 years of peaceful independence, her borders guaranteed by the Great Powers of Europe. The Belgian people can be forgiven for hoping the German offensive would pass them by as had the one in 1870.

The King and the government, however, were not so hopeful. In response to the escalating international crisis, King Albert had already ordered a Belgian mobilization. But because Belgium was so steadfastly neutral, her mobilization plans did not contain a deployment component. Belgian Army formations would muster, but where would they march?

At 7:00 PM on Sunday, August 2, twenty-four hours after the first German soldiers crossed the frontier into Luxembourg, and M-1 on the German mobilization schedule, the German ambassador in Brussels delivered a note to the Foreign Ministry. It stated that the German government had reliable information that the French Army was approaching, intent upon advancing into Germany through Belgian territory. Since Germany could not rely upon the Belgian Army to hold off the French assault on its own, she would therefore be forced to send her own soldiers onto Belgian territory in defense of the German fatherland. The note asked the Belgians not to regard this action as hostile, and promised that if Belgium did not interfere, then Germany would pledge to withdraw from Belgian soil as soon as the war was concluded, pay Belgium compensation for any losses suffered during the conflict, and guarantee Belgian independence thereafter. If Belgium resisted, the note went on to say, then she would be regarded as an enemy. The note demanded an unambiguous reply within twelve hours.

The Belgian Council of State convened at 9:00 that evening. Two hours of the twelve granted to Belgium had already passed. Belgium's 39-year old King Albert, on the throne less than five

years, opened the discussion of the German note with these words: “Our answer must be ‘no,’ whatever the consequences.”

Everyone knew the consequences would be dire. The Belgian Army had five infantry divisions and one cavalry division. Although no one present at this meeting knew it yet, against these were marching 34 German divisions, units that were better equipped, better trained, and better funded.

In its 75-year history, Belgium had never participated in a war. Military service bore little cachet in Belgium. The government had scrimped on arms and equipment. In particular, the Belgian Army was short on heavy artillery, an important component of modern warfare, as we have already seen. The government had recently made a large artillery purchase from the German Krupp Works, but...let’s just say they probably shouldn’t be expecting delivery anytime soon.

In accordance with Belgium’s commitment to neutrality, its six army divisions were not deployed with an eye toward opposing any particular enemy. Rather, the five infantry divisions were deployed all around the perimeter of the nation, equally ready to oppose the Germans or the French...or the British. Whoever. The cavalry division was held in reserve at Brussels, in the center of the country. Belgian war planning, such as it was, held that in the event of attack from a hostile country, all five infantry divisions would converge on Brussels, and then either redeploy where needed, or else hunker down to defend the capital.

Belgium also had two major sets of fortifications in the Meuse River valley, around the towns of Namur and Liège, constructed in the days of King Leopold II. The Meuse flows north from France into Belgium, then turns east for some sixty miles, then turns north again and on into the Netherlands and the sea. That sixty mile stretch of the Meuse valley, which runs roughly east-to-west across Belgium, was Germany’s highway into France.

The Belgians were well aware of the strategic importance of the Meuse valley, which was why they had built extensive fortifications around two towns at opposite ends of the valley: Liège in the east, near Germany, Namur in the west, nearer to France. In accord with Belgian neutrality, she had fortified herself equally well against armies intent on marching in either direction.

No one in Belgian government was tempted by the German offer to stand down and accept foreign soldiers on Belgian territory, in exchange for a guarantee of future independence. The Belgian Prime Minister stated bluntly his view, that if the German Empire wins the war, she will annex Belgium in any case.

The meeting broke up around midnight, and the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister adjourned to the Foreign Office to draft Belgium’s reply, which was due in the morning.

That night, there was squeamishness in Berlin. If Belgium resisted, a German invasion of an innocent and harmless country would make Germany seem the aggressor. Worse still, it was likely to guarantee British intervention. Worst of all, the Schlieffen plan all but assumed Belgium

would not resist. If the Belgians put up a vigorous fight, if they blew up bridges and sabotaged rail lines, if they continued to resist even when occupied, it could cost the Army time and resources, when the whole plan hinged on a rapid strike into France.

And so the German Foreign Office sent its ambassador in Brussels back to the Foreign Office at 1:30 in the morning, where he interrupted the drafting of the Belgian reply to make his case more forcefully that French perfidy was the real cause of the war, and therefore Belgium should cooperate with Germany. He reported to the Belgians that French soldiers had already crossed the frontier, and that French dirigibles were already dropping bombs on Germany. Neither of these things was true, but they were rumors of such things circulating in Germany during those tense hours. If the French were already attacking Germany, the ambassador argued, similar attacks on Belgium could be expected at any time.

The Belgians were not persuaded. At 7:00 AM precisely on the morning of August third, M-2 on the German mobilization schedule, Belgium's reply was delivered to the German embassy. The King took control of the Belgian military, and began ordering the demolition of bridges and railroad tunnels along the German and Luxembourgish frontiers.

[music: "Fantasie"]

Despite Belgium's defiant reply to the German ultimatum, the German Army continued to believe that Belgium would not resist. How could they? Perhaps they would fire a few shots before surrendering, for the sake of national honor. But prolonged resistance would not only be futile, but Belgium would pay a heavy price for it. Surely the Belgians understood that, and would not prolong the fight. And even if Belgian officers ordered their soldiers to fight, how long could they continue before morale would collapse?

The first German soldiers entered Belgium on the morning of August fourth, M-3 on the German mobilization schedule. These were cavalry and infantry units using automobiles—motorized infantry, as the twentieth century would come to call them. They were reconnaissance units, come to test the waters, as it were, to scout for the presence of enemy formations—Belgian, French, who knew, maybe even British—and to attempt to seize control of key bridges across the Meuse. They entered villages all along the border between the Netherlands and Luxembourg and handed out pre-printed leaflets, expressing Germany's regret at the necessity of seizing control of Belgian territory, and warning that any attempt to destroy bridges or otherwise attack or hinder the invading German Army would be met with retaliation.

Behind these advance units marched the regular infantry, by the thousands. Behind them, formations of hundreds of thousands were still mobilizing. The weather that day was scorching hot. Six brigades were detached from the German Second Army to create a formation grandly called "The Army of the Meuse," even though it was more of a small army corps. This force was ordered to advance on Germany's first major objective in the West: the fortifications at Liège. Drawn as they were from different units in different locations, these brigades moved toward

Liège from three directions: the north, the east, and the south. They arrived to discover that the bridges across the Meuse at Liège had already been destroyed. And when they attempted to put up pontoon bridges and cross the river, the Liège fortifications opened fire on them.

The town of Liège was encircled by fortifications: twelve in all, six major forts, with six smaller forts in between, so that there was no approach to the town not covered by someone's guns. The forts were built underground, with only triangular hills showing, from which could open up artillery and machine gun emplacements to fire on an enemy, then close up again when counterattacked. Only the largest of artillery shells could harm these fortifications. The Belgian Third Infantry Division was currently in the center of the ring, in the town of Liège.

Liège and her sister fort, Namur, were considered among the most heavily fortified positions on Earth. You may recall that I described the Russian naval base at Port Arthur in similar terms back in episode 32. When the Japanese besieged Port Arthur, it held out for six months. Germany can't afford a six-month siege. Germany can't afford a one-month siege. The Kaiser was telling the newly mobilized soldiers headed for the Western Front that they would be "home before the leaves fall." The German Chief of Staff, Field Marshal von Moltke, has already promised his Austrian counterpart, Conrad von Hötzendorff, that Germany will begin pulling units off the Western Front and redeploying them to aid Austria against Russia by M-40. That is exactly five weeks and two days from now. Liège has to fall, and it has to fall soon.

It had been heavy artillery that eventually won the day for the Japanese back at Port Arthur. You'll recall from episode 32 that the Japanese had acquired some 11-inch Krupp artillery for the siege, but lost those guns to a surprise attack by the Vladivostok Squadron of the Russian Navy, which sank the merchant ships that were carrying them. It was only when the Japanese were able to get replacements for the lost heavy artillery and bring them to the front lines that the Russian defenses began to crumble.

This lesson had been lost on most Western militaries, but not on the Germans or the Austrians. By 1910, the Škoda Works in Bohemia had developed a mammoth 305mm howitzer gun, which fired an armor-piercing shell that weighed nearly 400kg, or 850 pounds, heavy enough to penetrate two meters of concrete. The shell had a delayed-action fuse, meaning that the explosive inside was detonated only after the penetration of the armor, and they could fire ten rounds per hour over a range of seven miles. They were designated M11, because they went into production in 1911.

I hardly need tell you that these guns were devastating, and state of the art. They were also surprisingly mobile. For transport, the gun could be broken down into three parts, barrel, mount, and foundation, and each part transported on specially-built motorized transports. They could be set up or broken down in less than an hour, meaning they could be moved quickly to where they were needed, and were almost impossible for an enemy to capture.

As remarkable as the M11s were, though, they could not penetrate the most secure of fortifications, and so the German military asked the Krupp Works to go the Austrians one better. The result was the mammoth 420mm gun that the Germans nicknamed "*Dicke Bertha*," which literally means "Thick Bertha" which is the German way of saying "Fat Bertha," though the term is usually rendered into English as the more alliterative "Big Bertha."

Over the course of the war, the English-speaking soldiers would come to refer to several different types of German heavy artillery guns as "Big Bertha," but this one is the original. Why Big Bertha and not Big Alice or Big Ermintrude? No one can say for certain, but one plausible explanation is that the owner of the Krupp company was the heiress Bertha Krupp, who inherited it from her father, Friedrich Alfred Krupp, who committed suicide in 1902, following revelations of his love affairs with young Italian men on the island of Capri, which we discussed all the way back in episode 2. Bertha was only 16 years old when she inherited the company, and no less a figure than the Kaiser himself arranged a marriage for her, since the stability of the company was a matter of German national interest. Gustav, her husband, managed the company, but Bertha's name was on the paperwork. For the record, the use of the German word "*dicke*," meaning *thick* or *fat*, was a reference to the physical appearance of the gun, not to Bertha herself.

Big Bertha was designed in secret. Most other militaries of the day believed a mobile artillery piece this big was a practical impossibility. Even if you could build it, how would you move it? The Germans solved the first problem by 1909. Big Bertha successfully fired shells weighing over a ton across a distance of eight miles. But transporting it was another matter. It took six hours to assemble or take apart, and required ten railroad cars and two locomotives to transport. You had to build a rail spur to get the gun to where you wanted to fire it, and when you set it up, it had to be embedded in concrete, and then the concrete broken apart with explosives when you wanted to take it down and move it again.

It was an impressive weapon, but the German military wanted one easier to move, so they requisitioned a more mobile version, one that could be transported by road. Krupp designed a suitable road-mobile version that could be broken down into five sections for transport. The first one of these was delivered to the German Army in December 1913, the second in March 1914. And that was it. As of the beginning of the war, the Germans had only seven Big Berthas: five of the rail version and two of the road model.

The Austrians had loaned the Germans eight of their own M11s to help tide the German Army over until Krupp could deliver more Big Berthas. Now, with the outbreak of the war, the Germans scrambled to bring these weighty weapons to bear against Liège, and at Krupp, they worked overtime to build more of them.

But Field Marshal von Moltke isn't willing to wait for them, and he's still hoping they won't be needed. Maybe the Belgians won't fight. Maybe the infantry can take the fortresses without

heavy artillery support. How would they do that? Oh, I don't know...how about...a frontal assault against an entrenched enemy armed with modern weapons?

Are you freaking kidding me? Helmuth, Helmuth, where have you been? Where were you during episode 11 or 12 or 18 or episodes 32 through 36? Do you even listen to this podcast?

The Germans had correctly identified a weakness in the Belgian defenses. Although the old fortifications were still strong, the gaps between them had not been well maintained. Trenches and barbed wire and other obstacles that should have been in place to delay an advance were missing. There were spaces between the fortifications where Belgian fire didn't overlap the way it should.

The Army of the Meuse began its assault on August 5, M-4 on the German mobilization schedule. The German Army's lighter field artillery pieces proved ineffective against the Belgian forts. German infantry charged into the gaps between the forts and were slaughtered by Belgian artillery fire. German soldiers who managed to make it inside the minimum range of the Belgian artillery were mowed down by Belgian machine gun fire. German bodies mounded into piles three feet deep and still they came, the dead of those who advanced before now shielding their comrades who followed...at least for a little while. They made no effort to deploy or organize. They just came and came and came.

To the German command, Liège was the cork that was bottling up the mighty German military machine. Hundreds of thousands of men were lining up to the rear, waiting to advance into Belgium. There was plenty of manpower available, but very little time, or so it seemed to them.

In that first assault on Liège, we see appearing for the first time the most distinctive and memorable aspect of the Great War. Mass assaults repelled with mass casualties. It begins here, today, at Liège. But it will not end here.

The first assaults having failed, the Germans paused to regroup, intending to try again early in the morning of August 6, M-5 on the German mobilization schedule. A German staff officer, Erich Ludendorff, was accompanying one of the advancing brigades, the 14th, when he found the unit's progress stymied when two of its advancing columns ran into each other. Ludendorff rode up to the front of the unit to learn the cause of the confusion. The answer proved to be that the brigade commander had been killed by Belgian machine-gun fire. Ludendorff took personal command of the brigade and began organizing the advance between two of the Belgian forts.

For whatever reason, one of the forts failed to open fire on Ludendorff's advancing brigade, and the Germans broke through. By the afternoon of August 6, the 14th found itself through the Belgian defenses, and within sight of Liège itself.

The commander of the Liège defense was a tough old bird, the 63-year old General Gérard Leman. He had already met twice with Germans who had come under a flag of truce to ask for

Liège's surrender, and twice he had refused. The Germans then sent a team of thirty-six soldiers dressed to look British to drive into town and kidnap the general, but they were discovered. He moved his command from the city into one of the forts after that.

But even General Leman had to think twice when he received the news that a German brigade had penetrated the perimeter. The Belgians had identified German soldiers from four different army corps among the attackers. Not knowing about the *ad hoc* creation of the Army of the Meuse, Leman made the reasonable assumption that he was up against a much, much larger force and gave the order to abandon the city of Liège. The forts would fight on, but the Third Division would withdraw from the city toward Brussels to meet up with the rest of the Belgian Army.

[music: "Fantasie"]

Even as the Belgian Third Division began its withdrawal, newspapers in Belgium, France, and Britain boldly proclaimed that yesterday's failed German assault constituted a huge victory. There was even some wild talk about the Belgians taking the offensive.

King Albert, now commander in chief of the Belgian military, and his generals, set up their command at the town of Louvain, just 15 miles east of the capital. And by the way, I've been referring to the King as AL-bert all this time, and I suppose I ought to be saying all-BEAR, but you've probably noticed by now that French pronunciation is not one of my strong points, so I hope you'll forgive me if I stick to AL-bert. Anyway, it was here at Louvain that the Belgian Army would make its stand, and, if necessary, fall back from there toward Antwerp, Belgium's largest port and its lifeline to Britain and France. The Belgians sent urgent appeals to France and Britain for reinforcement. But the entire British Expeditionary Force was only six divisions—no larger than the Belgian Army—and was already earmarked for deployment to France. The much larger French Army was gearing up for Plan XVII, which called for a French offensive in the direction of Lorraine. The French command was entirely unwilling to call off their offensive for the sake of Belgium, and suggested to the Belgians that their army fall back to the west and link up with the left flank of the French Army. Sadly, the French command as yet completely failed to grasp what was becoming increasingly clear to the Belgian command in Louvain: that the German war plan was to launch a massive attack on France of unprecedented proportions, and launch it right through Belgium.

And so, what the French were proposing was entirely unacceptable to the King. It ran the risk of separating the Belgian Army from both Antwerp and Brussels, conceding most of the Belgian homeland to the Germans and eliminating Belgian ability to operate independently. It would reduce the Belgian Army to the status of French auxiliaries.

On August 7, M-6 on the German mobilization schedule, Ludendorff's 14th brigade and two others penetrated to the center of Liège. In Berlin, there was jubilation at word that the town had fallen. Kaiser Wilhelm reportedly kissed Moltke when he got the news. Only later were the

Kaiser and his generals informed that the town had fallen, but the ring of forts around it continued their resistance. There was nothing for it but to bring in the siege guns.

Meanwhile, back at the Krupp Works in Essen, the workers struggled frantically to load the two road-mobile Big Berthas onto trains so they could be shipped as close to Liège as possible before having to grind their way into position. They would not get there until August 11, M-10 on the German mobilization schedule, which was already having to be revised. The German First Army had been scheduled to advance across Belgium on M-9. That was already impossible; the advance had to be postponed to M-12.

The massive German war machine, seemingly poised to overrun France, had found itself stymied, at least for the first week of the war, by tiny Belgium. The Germans weren't the only ones surprised by this development. The French government and military were expecting Belgium to capitulate, though they frantically urged the King not to. On August 12, the neutral Dutch government transmitted to King Albert a final plea from the Germans to yield, along with strenuous promises that Germany wanted nothing more than free passage for her Army across Belgian soil, and offered guarantees to respect Belgian sovereignty in every other way. The King rejected the offer.

If the grim determination of Belgium to resist surprised her allies, it amazed the public. Tiny Belgium, a nation no one counted among the great or the powerful, was standing alone against the greatest war machine in the world, and had beaten it to a standstill.

But by the afternoon of that very day, August 12, M-11 on the German mobilization schedule, the first Big Bertha was in position and ready to fire. Several of the Austrian M11 guns were also in position. The Big Bertha gun was so large that the soldiers who fired it had to remove themselves to a distance of 300 meters from the gun, cover their eyes and ears with cotton padding, lie on their stomachs, and fire the gun electrically.

The forts of Liège had been built in the 1880s to withstand the weapons of that era, but their designers had not conceived of anything like Big Bertha. Three of the forts to the east of Liège were captured the next day, after Big Bertha and her supporting guns had reduced them to rubble. By August 14, M-13 on the German mobilization schedule, all of the forts east of Liège were captured, and the German First Army could resume its advance. The guns were moved forward into the town, and set to work reducing the western forts. The last of these was captured on August 16, M-15 on the German mobilization schedule.

On August 17, M-16 on the German mobilization schedule, the fortifications at Liège were no longer an obstacle. The bottleneck was open. The German Second Army moved through Liège and advanced along the Meuse valley toward Namur. To their left, the German Third Army also advanced. To their right, the German First Army, finally free to advance, turned northwest, toward Brussels. The Germans were done with mobilization and organization and siege; the offensive was on.

That same day, The Belgian Prime Minister traveled from Brussels to Louvain to discuss with the King the difficult question of whether to relocate the Belgian government from the capital to Antwerp. The King ordered the government to move to Antwerp.

The Belgian Army—except for the Fourth Division, which was holed up in Namur—had taken up positions behind the natural barrier of the river Gette, east of Louvain, as good a place to make a stand as any. By the afternoon of the 17th, though, advance cavalry of the First Army had already made contact with the Belgians. The French were promising that some French cavalry were on their way, and the German force was likely no more than a screen.

But King Albert and his generals knew better. Though the French did not believe them, the Belgians were now convinced that the main German offensive was coming right at them. It would outnumber the entire Belgian Army by more than four to one, it was better equipped, and a few French cavalymen waving sabers were not going to make up the difference. Perhaps it was time to withdraw the army north, to Antwerp.

The French military liaison present could not believe his ears. The Belgians were going to retreat from a cavalry probe? He undiplomatically accused the Belgians of abandoning France just at the decisive moment of the war. King Albert spent that day debating the pros and cons of withdrawal. What convinced him was the news that the French command had begun their counteroffensive against the German center. Keep in mind that at this stage, most people thought the war would be brief, and that one quick and effective blow might end the fighting. The French were pinning their hopes on breaking through the German center, leaving the British and the Belgians to guard their left flank. Once the German right flank was isolated by the French thrust, it would be rendered ineffective, so what was there to worry about? But now, King Albert, in the French view, was endangering the plan.

But from the Belgian point of view, it looked quite different. With the bulk of the French Army marching southeast, only the French Fifth Army was available to defend Belgium, and the Fifth would have its hands full. It would be operating south of the Meuse valley, leaving most of Belgium, including Brussels and Antwerp, to the Belgians to defend. The British would come, the French told the Belgians, but were not expected to be ready for front line combat until the August 24—six days from now. By then, Belgium might have no army left to fight with, no country left to defend. King Albert ordered the withdrawal.

The German First Army that marched into Brussels on August 20 was twice the size of the Belgian Army all by itself, far more than a mere cavalry probe. To the south, the German Second Army inserted itself between Brussels and the French Army to the south, eliminating any possibility of Franco-Belgian coordination. The British were still not ready. But the Belgian Army and government, relocated to Antwerp, would fight on.

The cost in time to the German offensive was manageable. The Belgians did not disrupt the Schlieffen Plan, although they did slow it down by a week or so. This was not enough by itself to

prevent a German victory in the West, but the spirited Belgian resistance in the face of a carefully planned assault from the strongest army in the world was also an inspiration to her allies. In a war that began with a confusing set of diplomatic moves that made it seem as if Europe had stumbled into a general war like a drunk wandering into a blind alley, here was a principle everyone could rally around. Belgium had harmed no one. Belgium had been subjected to an overwhelming attack by a ruthless enemy, for the crime of choosing her geography poorly.

The British, uneasy about involvement in a war that seemed not to touch upon any vital British interests, had their resolve strengthened. The French, cringing before the hammer blow of what seemed to many as though it would be a replay of 1870, had an example before them that German success was not inevitable, and perhaps even that right really does make might. They would need to hold onto that lesson, once the full fury of the German Army turned upon them.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, I'd like to offer a big thank you to listener Audun and the thirteen other listeners who have already made monthly pledges on the Patreon page. I'm touched that so many of you have stepped up so quickly to made pledges. Your contributions help pay the costs of the podcast and keep *The History of the Twentieth Century* going. And if you can spare a few bucks a month to help keep the podcast going, the place to do that is the Patreon page, patreon.com/markpainter, or head on over to the podcast website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, where there's a handy button.

I'm going to be attending the Confluence science fiction convention in the Pittsburgh area the first weekend in August, where I'm tentatively scheduled to be on the podcasting panel. If any listeners are attending Confluence, do look me up. And just so you know: I don't think I'm going to be able to post a new episode that weekend, that's three weekends from now, but we'll be back the week after that. As for the two episodes remaining in the month of July, the second one will continue this story of the German offensive after the fall of Brussels, and I hope you'll join me next week as we shift our focus to the south and take note of the activities of the two ships of the German Navy that were on patrol in the Mediterranean when the war broke out. How much trouble can two ships cause? Well, Erich Ludendorff was of the opinion that the actions of these two ships lengthened the war by two years. The Flight of the *Goeben*, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Speaking of Erich Ludendorff, for his penetration of the Liège fortifications, he was awarded the *Pour le Mérite*, Germany's highest decoration by Kaiser Wilhelm on August 22. I suspect we're going to be hearing more out of General Ludendorff before this war is over.

[music: Closing War Theme]