

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 111

“The Bulgarian Summer”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

With Germany stymied in the West and unable to advance any farther in the East, some in the German government began searching for other places to strike. Where else could Germany put pressure on the Allies?

Someone suggested the Balkans, the place where this whole war began. Serbia remained unconquered, and there were neutral states in the Balkans that might be persuaded to join in. Soon, German and Allied diplomats began courting Bulgaria. A French journalist of this time would later refer to the summer of 1915 as “The Bulgarian Summer.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 111. The Bulgarian Summer.

Today, we turn our attention back to the Eastern Front of the Great War, which we last visited back in episode 101. As you’ll recall, the German offensive in the East in 1915 succeeded beyond expectation. The Russians were pulling back in the time-honored Russian military tradition of trading space for time.

Though the Russians were retreating, they were not broken. They had adopted a scorched-earth strategy. Towns that were to be surrendered to the Germans were first evacuated, then put to the torch. Crops were burned and farm animals slaughtered to deny them to the advancing Germans, just as had been done 103 years ago when the French Army under Napoleon had invaded.

This strategy cost the Russians as dearly as it cost the Germans. Food was already in short supply; the loss of those crops and animals exacerbated the shortages, so did the waves of dislocated townspeople, crossing east into Russia, as far east as Siberia even. Russian communities far from the front knew little of the war, other than that food was becoming scarce and they were being forced to share what little they had with starving refugees trudging in from the west. What would *you* think?

The Germans struggled as well. Getting supplies to their advancing armies across the wide spaces of Russia, with few railroads and poorly maintained roads was a challenge. Horses grew weary drawing supply wagons for fifty or seventy miles from the nearest railroad station to the hungry German troops.

But the Germans had pushed the Russians almost entirely out of Austrian territory. They had taken control of Poland and Lithuania and Courland. In September, the German advance had reached the edge of the Pripyat Marshes, an enormous expanse of low, sandy ground around the Pripyat River. It's about 100,000 square miles of forests, marshes, and ponds that expand and contract with the seasons. It is sparsely inhabited, with few roads, and poses a logistical nightmare.

Erich von Falkenhayn, the German Chief of Staff had had enough. With the armies in the East exhausted and disorganized and advancing far faster than their supplies could keep up, not to mention with another *rasputitsa*, the season of mud, looming, to advance into the Pripyat Marshes would be madness. He ordered a halt.

The Eastern commanders, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, disagreed vehemently, as usual. The Russians were in trouble, but they were retreating in good order with their forces intact, just as the French had done a year earlier. The lesson of that 1914 offensive into France was that capturing ground meant nothing, so long as the enemy could preserve his armies to fight another day. Hindenburg and Ludendorff wanted more forces committed to the East, enough to create a gigantic pincer movement, on a larger scale than history had ever seen before, to surround and destroy the bulk of the Russian Army. Given the resources, they argued, they could knock Russia out of the war.

Falkenhayn didn't agree. In his view, the kind of offensive Hindenburg and Ludendorff were proposing would require numbers that Germany simply didn't have. He was skeptical of the claims that Russia was near collapse. The Germans had put out peace feelers in an effort to work out a separate peace with Russia that would end the two-front war and allow Germany to focus its attention on the West, but the Russian Emperor had rebuffed those efforts and his taking personal command of the Russian Army was hard to interpret as anything other than a commitment to see the war through to the bitter end.

But there was another proposal, one that had bubbled up from the German Foreign Office and was now under discussion at the highest levels of the government. It had originated with one Arthur Zimmerman, or Arthur Zimmerman, if you like, a 50-year old career Foreign Office official whose name you should probably remember, because I have a feeling you're going to be hearing it again. Anyway, Zimmerman's big idea for Germany to escape the giant siege she was now under involved looking neither west nor east, but to the south.

Yes, I'm talking about the Balkans, that region of Europe that has already been the source of so much conflict, controversy and woe. We've already examined some of the history of the region,

the violence it experienced in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, the two Balkan Wars, and of course the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, which led to the July Crisis, which led to the Great War. Most recently, in episode 85, we saw Austria-Hungary's unsuccessful attempt to overrun Serbia in the fall of 1914.

Zimmerman's suggestion was simply this: the Balkans remained the one region in Europe where the Central Powers could reasonably hope to make gains. Serbia had managed to stand her ground against an Austrian offensive last year, but after fighting three wars in as many years, Serbia was like a dazed prizefighter, somehow still standing but only one sharp jab away from collapsing to the canvas.

Only, there was no way the Austrian Army was going to be the one to deliver the knockout punch. After the beating it had taken from the Russians, and now the need to defend against Italy, Austria was incapable of taking on Serbia again in addition to these two other opponents. No, if the knockout punch was going to come, it would have to come from Germany.

In Zimmerman's view, defeating Serbia at last would have the advantage of taking one of the Allied nations out of the war. And not just any nation, but the very nation that the other states in the Allied coalition had gone to war to defend. With Serbia gone, the Central Powers would get a morale boost and the other Allied governments would find it harder to justify carrying on.

You can probably guess what Falkenhayn thought of this idea. He hated it. He ridiculed it as *das Balkan Abenteuer*, the "Balkan Adventure." With the Russians in retreat, it was time to turn back to the most important front, the Western Front, not open up a *third* front. Or rather, I should say, a *fourth* front, since Italy was already the third front. Falkenhayn was acutely aware that in the West, the combined Belgian, French, and British armies now outnumbered the German forces facing them by a half a million. Ingenious trench engineering had held the line so far, but that couldn't last forever.

[music: *Tragic Overture*]

Almost a year has passed since we last examined the international situation in the Balkans, and since one year of Balkan history is like 25 years of history anywhere else, I want to take a few moments here to update you. You'll recall from our episodes on the Balkan Wars that after the First Balkan War ended, Bulgaria was left holding the short end of the stick. Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro had all won significant territorial gains, while Bulgaria had won very little. Bulgarian soldiers had practically reached to the gates of Constantinople, but it had gotten them nothing in the end. Bulgaria lashed out at its former allies in the Second Balkan War, which ended in a humiliating defeat and the loss of further territory to Romania.

You'll recall, too, that her truculence had cost Bulgaria her alliance with Russia. Afterward, Russian diplomacy turned toward Romania, a state that had just a few years ago been virtually the fourth member of the Triple Alliance, along with Germany, Austria, and Italy. When the

Great War began, though, Romania remained neutral. The Romanian King, the 75-year old Carol, had been Romania's first and only monarch since Romanian independence had been achieved in 1877. He was a member of the German Imperial family, a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's, and felt duty bound to support Germany, but the Romanian public leaned more toward the Allies and wasn't keen on getting mixed up in the war in any case, a very reasonable position, if you ask me.

But King Carol passed away in October 1914. He had no sons, so his nephew succeeded him as Ferdinand I. The German government very badly wanted Romania to join the Central Powers because Romania bordered on Russia, and Romania joining the war would mean a new army attacking Russia and a new front for the Russian army to defend. In this regard, the German government pressed Austria-Hungary to offer Romania Transylvania, the region of Hungary where the population was predominantly ethnic Romanian, in exchange for Romanian entry into the war. Vienna and Budapest didn't like this idea any better than they had liked it when Germany suggested territorial concessions to Italy.

Farther south lay Greece. Greece had done well for itself in the Balkan Wars, and Serbia and Greece had agreed to a secret defensive alliance against Bulgaria. After the Austrians delivered their ultimatum to Serbia in July 1914, and even before war was actually declared, the Serbian government had appealed to Athens to help defend Serbia against Austria.

The Greek government declined. The alliance had been intended to defend against Bulgaria, not against a nation as large as Austria-Hungary, and the Greeks regarded Serbia's position as hopeless. But there was more to it than that. The internal politics of Greece were complicated. The previous Greek King, George I, had been assassinated by an anarchist in 1913. His successor was the 45-year old Constantine.

During the Balkan Wars, Greece had seized the islands in the Aegean Sea from the Turks, but the Ottoman Empire did not recognize the occupation. The Turks were now busily rebuilding their navy, which from the Greek point of view looked suspiciously like the Turks are arming themselves to take back the islands. Ethnic Greeks in Anatolia experienced rising persecution. These tensions almost led to war in June 1914, but then the Great War intervened.

Once the war broke out, the German government tried to recruit Greece to join the Central Powers. King Constantine was Kaiser Wilhelm's brother-in-law; he was married to the Kaiser's sister. Still, both the King and the Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, agreed that this was a bad idea. And this would be about the last thing they ever agreed on. Venizelos queried the Allies about Greece joining the war on their side. Greece could not only help defend Serbia, but it could make its ports and rail lines available to the Allies to supply and assist Serbia, but it would likely need British and French assistance to defend itself in the event of an attack from Bulgaria or Turkey.

The British government replied that it believed it would be best for Greece to remain neutral for as long as Turkey remained neutral. But as you know, Turkey would in fact enter the war in November, and soon the Allies would be pressing Greece to join them.

Now this is where things get complicated for the Allies, because the Allies were also putting out feelers to Bulgaria about entering the war. Given the resentment in Bulgaria over her neighbors Serbia and Greece getting all the goodies out of the Balkan Wars at Bulgaria's expense, the natural offer for the Allies to make would have been for some of those Serbian and Greek territorial gains to be ceded to Bulgaria in exchange for Bulgarian support. Only Serbia wouldn't play ball. Serbia resisted any suggestion that it exchange territory for allies, just as much as the Austrians had.

As for Greece, the Allies suggested to the Greek government that they might be able to get some Turkish territory across the Aegean Sea in Anatolia in exchange for surrendering some Macedonian territory to Bulgaria and entering the war. Prime Minister Venizelos loved this idea. We've met this man before. He was an ardent Greek nationalist, born in Crete during Ottoman rule. He had Greek irredentist visions of a larger Greek nation that would expand its rule into southern Macedonia, Thrace, Constantinople, the Aegean Islands, and western Anatolia. In his view, the Great War, and Turkey's joining the Central Powers, represented for Greece a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ally with Britain and France, help them dismantle the Ottoman Empire, and claim a Greek share of the spoils.

Only, this didn't sound so great to King Constantine. Allied propaganda will accuse Constantine of being swayed by his family connection to Kaiser Wilhelm. His defenders will dispute this and argue that Constantine wanted to keep Greece neutral simply because who wants to get involved in this crazy war? I mean, the Romanians are being sensible about all this. Why shouldn't the Greeks? Greece had fought a war against the Ottoman Empire as recently as 1897, a war she lost badly. History was all too likely to repeat itself unless the Allies were willing to make a substantial commitment to support Greece. And if you haven't noticed, the Allies seem to have their hands pretty full everywhere else.

The result of this disagreement was a period of Greek history known as the National Schism. Venizelos wanted to go to war, but the King didn't. Neither did the Director of the Army General Staff, Ioannia Metaxas, who foresaw military disaster if Greece entered the war. Venizelos resigned the premiership, triggering a general election, which his Liberal Party won handily, returning him to office as prime minister once again. But the King still resisted going to war and dissolved the government a second time, precipitating a second general election. We'll talk more about that in a few minutes. The Liberals would boycott this second election and so by early 1916, the King finally got a government that agreed with him. Its legitimacy was another matter.

As complicated as all that sounds, it was as nothing compared to the internal chaos roiling Albania. When we last looked at Albania, the newly independent nation had risen up and ousted

Wilhelm of Wied, the German nobleman whom the Great Powers had installed as the new King of independent Albania. In the south, ethnic Greeks seceded from Albania, declaring an independent Republic of Northern Epirus, which sought union with Greece.

The rest of the country fell under the rule of various local rulers, the most powerful of whom was Essad Pasha, who had previously been Wilhelm's prime minister. You may remember Essad Pasha. We last met him in episode 69, when Montenegro was besieging an Ottoman garrison at the town of Shkodër in what is now Albania in 1913, when it was still part of the Ottoman Empire. Essad Pasha was the guy who murdered his commander and surrendered the town to the Montenegrins in exchange for ten thousand pounds. In 1914, he betrayed Wilhelm of Wied, and while as a Muslim and a former Ottoman military commander, he leaned toward Turkey in the Great War, you should not be surprised when I tell you that all it took was a wad of Serbian cash and an Serbian offer to help him secure control over all of Albania to persuade Essad Pasha to ally with Serbia.

But the Republic of Northern Epirus wasn't pleased with the idea of being ruled by Essad Pasha and fighting broke out. In October 1914, the Greek Army occupied and annexed Northern Epirus, with the consent of the Republic's government. The Italians weren't pleased by any of this. Remember that they claim Albania, or at least some of its coastal region, for themselves and they sent in marines to occupy the Albanian port city of Vlorë, or Valona, as the Italians called it.

So, with Serbia and Montenegro in the war on the Allied side, Albania kind of, sort of in the war on the Allied side, Romania neutral and very happy about it and Greece neutral and very conflicted about it, we turn to the star of this story: Bulgaria.

Bulgaria was still resentful over all the territory she felt she had earned in the Balkan Wars but had been stolen from her by her Balkan neighbors, and she felt diplomatically isolated after the Russians terminated their alliance. Bulgaria cast about for a new Great Power patron, and hit upon the Ottoman Empire of all nations, the very same Ottoman Empire that Bulgaria had fought in the First Balkan War like, you know, last week. In August 1914, Bulgaria and the Ottomans signed a secret defensive treaty, but three months later, when the Ottoman Empire entered the Great War, Bulgaria remained neutral, on the grounds that the Ottomans had attacked first, and therefore their purely defensive treaty wasn't applicable.

When the Russians terminated their alliance with Bulgaria and began wooing Germany's ally Romania instead, this naturally opened up an opportunity for German diplomats to begin pitching the woo at Bulgaria. Bulgaria was in financial straits after the two Balkan wars, but no worries, here come some helpful German bankers with some helpful lines of credit. Low, low interest rates and easy repayment terms.

And of course, then when the war began, the Germans tried to use their new leverage with the Bulgarians to get them into the war. The Russians wanted them in the war, too. Their big idea was to pressure Serbia to concede to Bulgaria at least some of that territory in Macedonia that

was supposed to have become Bulgarian all along but had somehow ended up in the hands of Serbia. Only Serbia wasn't too keen on that idea. As for the Germans, whatever hope they had of getting Bulgaria on side began to fade as the Russians advanced into Galicia in the fall of 1914 and repeated Austrian offensives into Serbia failed in the face of that plucky Serbian defense. From the Bulgarian point of view, Germany was very far away and Austria is very near and losing on all fronts. It was hardly an inducement to sign on with the Central Powers.

The situation began to look a little brighter, though, once the Ottoman Empire entered the war. This suddenly put Bulgaria in a much more strategic position. Both of the warring alliances upped their offers, but the Bulgarians were in no hurry to choose sides. Perhaps it would be best to wait and see who looks the most like a winner.

Then the spring of 1915 came. The Austrian fortress of Przemyśl fell in March, the Allies landed at Gallipoli in April, and Italy entered the war in May. Just for the record here, the Italian Army is only about 500 miles away from Bulgaria. Przemyśl is a little bit closer, maybe 450 miles, and Gallipoli and the ANZACs are only about fifty miles from the Bulgarian Aegean coast.

So from the Bulgarian point of view, it's beginning to look as if Allied armies are all around her, and so the Bulgarian government began to lean that way. The Allies promised Bulgaria everything it wanted in exchange for entering the war: Serbia would concede the territories in Macedonia that were supposed to have gone to Bulgaria, Greece would concede some of the lands it held along the northern Aegean coast, and the Allies were prepared to award Bulgaria all the lands in Thrace it had previously captured in the First Balkan War, including Adrianople. Oh, and you have southern Dobruja back from Romania, too.

That sounded pretty sweet to the Bulgarians, but the deal began to go sour as soon as it became clear that although the Allies were willing to go along with these transfers of territory, neither Serbia nor Greece nor Romania were on board with this plan.

Spring became summer, and with the warm weather came the feeling in Sofia that the momentum of the war was now turning in the other direction. The Italian Army had been stymied by the Austrians, the Gallipoli campaign had fizzled out, and in the north, the German offensive had driven the Russians out of Przemyśl and out of Galicia and out of Poland and the Central Powers are now moving into Russian territory.

With these setbacks, Allied pressure on Bulgaria increased. German diplomats, meanwhile, were fully aware of the negotiations between Bulgaria and the Allies and brought forward their own plan. It was very similar, but the big advantage of the German proposal is that they could promise Bulgaria Serbian territory without the trouble of asking Serbia's permission.

Hey, Bulgaria! It's Crazy Wilhelm's discount war emporium! You want low, low prices? How much would you expect to pay to get back that piece of Macedonia Serbia stole from you? Wait, don't answer yet, because I'm throwing in the other piece of Macedonia, the piece everyone

agreed would be Serbia's from the beginning. But wait! There's more! You want a piece of Serbia proper? You want additional loans to finance your war? We can arrange all that, too! All for the low, low price of four divisions. Yes, you heard right, just four divisions! Act now, because at these prices this deal won't last. Call 1-800-GO-TO-WAR and ask for Paul or Erich. If the line is busy, call again!

It's awful hard to say no to a deal like that. Bulgaria said yes, and on September 6, 1915, she signed a secret treaty with Germany and Austria. The Allies were unaware of this treaty, but when Bulgaria mobilized its army on September 22, it wasn't hard to figure out what was coming next. The Serbian Army made plans for a pre-emptive attack on Bulgaria and asked the Allies for help, but the Allies had no support to give. Over a year into the war, Britain, France, and Russia had still not found a way to give more than token support to their Serbian allies. This was partly because of the demands of the war and partly a matter of Balkan geography. Serbia is a landlocked country, Greece is divided, and the Austrians have a navy in the Adriatic. On the other hand, even taking all these problems into account, it's hard to escape the feeling that the Allies could have done a little more to help the Serbian Army prepare for what's coming next.

[music: *Farewell of Slavianka*]

As tensions were rising between Bulgaria and Serbia, the situation in Greece was also getting dicey. I already mentioned how the Prime Minister resigned because he wanted Greece to join the Allies but the King and the Army wouldn't go along. There was an election in June, and by the end of August, he was back in the premiership. Only by this time, the Allies were pressing Greece to make territorial concessions to Bulgaria in Macedonia as part of their strategy of swaying Bulgaria into joining the Allies, or at least remaining neutral. After Bulgaria mobilized on September 22, the Greek government ordered its own army to mobilize the next day.

At this point, Serbia made another plea for Greek assistance under the terms of their mutual defense treaty. But Greece was only able to muster about 160,000 soldiers, less than half the number of the Bulgarian Army. With the Serbian Army mostly tied down in the north, Greece would not be able to hold off Bulgaria all by herself, so the Greek government asked for 150,000 Allied soldiers to help support them. Britain and France wanted to say yes, but they didn't have a force that size available to deploy to Greece.

The Allies did send one British and one French division from Gallipoli to Salonika as a sort of down payment. The Allies had an understanding with the Greek government about how this was going to go down. The units would be stationed in Salonika officially for the purpose of securing a communication and supply line to Serbia. The Greek government, for its part, would of course protest this Allied violation of Greek neutrality but they would not act otherwise to oppose the troop landings.

These British and French divisions were in Salonika by October 2. On October 5, the Greek Parliament voted narrowly in support of the Prime Minister's war policy, but King Constantine thought Venizelos had stepped way out of line and dismissed him a second time.

Meanwhile, in the north of Serbia, on October 5, the same day the Greek Parliament was debating Greek war policy, the Central Powers began their long-awaited offensive against Serbia. The commander was the 55-year old August von Mackensen, who had been commander of the German Eleventh Army and had played an important role in the offensives against Russia. Recently he was promoted to field marshal and was now in command of the German Eleventh Army and the Austrian Third Army and assigned the task of eliminating Serbia at last.

Fighting began with a heavy artillery barrage of Belgrade, just as in 1914. German and Austrian units crossed the Danube and moved into the city and after days of bitter house-to-house combat captured Belgrade on the 9th.

The Serbian Army had recruited new soldiers since the fighting in 1914 and by this time was actually larger than it had been a year ago. Morale was still high, but in terms of supplies and equipment, the situation was bleak. The losses of 1914 had not been replaced. On October 14, Bulgaria formally declared war on Serbia and attacked from the east. In the northern part of that front, the Bulgarian First Army, also under the command of Marshal von Mackensen, struck at the right flank of the Serbian line and drove toward the city of Niš, then turned northward toward Kragujevac, which had become the Serbian capital. It was also the headquarters of the Serbian military and the location of Serbia's arsenal. On November 1, the Serbians blew up the arsenal and withdrew from Kragujevac.

Farther south, the Bulgarian Second Army, which was under independent Bulgarian command, drove toward Skopje, in Serbian-controlled Macedonia. These Bulgarian advances made the Serbian position in the north untenable. The Serbian Army had to withdraw, or be surrounded. At Salonika, the British and French divisions made a half-hearted attempt to advance north and link up with the retreating Serbian Army, but they were unable to fight their way past the Bulgarians, who were at least forced to slow down their offensive and divert some of their units to hold off the British and the French.

The Serbian Army withdrew to Kosovo, hoping to meet up with the Allies there. But on November 23, an Austrian unit captured Mitrovice, in northern Kosovo while the Bulgarians took Pristina, in eastern Kosovo. This ended any hope of a link-up.

On November 25, with the battered Serbian Army surrounded, the Serbian army commander, Marshal Radomir Putnik made the hard decision to order his army, now numbering about 200,000, to retreat west, through the mountains and into northern Albania.

Winters are very hard in the mountains of the Balkans. The Serbian Army had to march through howling snowstorms across a rugged mountain range that the Serbs call *Prokletije*. The name

translates as “The Accursed Mountains.” They had to do it without their supply wagons, which had been captured. And they had to do it along with the thousands of civilian refugees who were accompanying them.

The Serbian soldiers marched all the way to the Adriatic Coast, where survivors were picked up by Italian transports. This evacuation would not be completed until February 10, 1916. Half of the Serbian soldiers and God only knows how many civilians died from the rigors of their journey. The surviving Serbian Army would be relocated to Salonika, where they would be re-equipped and return to the war, but this would take until 1917.

In January 1916, Austria went on the offensive against tiny Montenegro, which fell in two weeks. After the evacuation of the Serbian Army, the Austrians would move south and occupy most of Albania as well, although French and Italian soldiers would take control of the southern regions of that country.

The Central Powers suffered about 70,000 casualties. Serbian casualties were much heavier, even if you don't include the 170,000 or so taken prisoner. The campaign has to be regarded as a smashing success for the Central Powers, although there were still those British and French units in Greece, along with those Serbian Army survivors.

The Germans and Austrians were not prepared to advance their armies into Greece, which was still officially neutral. But the fall of Serbia and the entry of Bulgaria into the war meant that now at long last there were secure lines of communication and supply all the way from Germany to Constantinople. This also made the Allied campaign in Gallipoli untenable, and the Allies began their withdrawal.

The failures of the French offensives in the West and the fall of Serbia led to the resignation of French Prime Minister René Viviani in October 1915. He was succeeded by Aristide Briand, who had served as Viviani's justice minister, and had already served as prime minister twice before. Viviani became foreign minister in the new government.

Bulgaria became the fourth nation to join the Central Powers, and she would be the last. For those of you keeping score at home, the Allies or Entente Powers now consist of seven nations: Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Japan, Italy, and San Marino, with Luxembourg, Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro occupied by the Central Powers.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks to all of you for listening, and I'd like to especially thank Garrett and Nicholas for their donations and Jeff for becoming a patron of the podcast. You can help keep the podcast going by becoming a donor or patron. Go to historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the buttons. You can also help out by leaving a rating and review at the iTunes store and by liking and sharing our Facebook posts and liking and retweeting our tweets.

I'm still not where I'd like to be in terms of preparation, so I'm going to stick with the "three weeks on and one week off" system for a while longer. So this is the first of three, and then I'll be taking off the last weekend in April. But I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look to the Caribbean for The Banana Wars, Part II, and investigate the situation on the island of Hispaniola. Wait, I thought it was called Santo Domingo. Or Haiti? Well, no worries, we'll sort it all out next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. We first met the Serbian military commander, the now 68-year old Field Marshal Radomir Putnik, in episode 85. I told you then how he was suffering from bronchitis and was spending time at a spa in Austria when the July Crisis began. He had tried to slip out of Austria and back into Serbia, but the Austrians caught up to him and put him in prison. Then Kaiser Franz Josef ordered him released in a very old-school gesture of chivalry. He returned to Serbia in poor health and led the Serbian Army through the 1914 and 1915 campaigns, mostly while lying in bed.

When the Serbian Army retreated through the Accursed Mountains, Putnik had to be carried by his soldiers in a sedan chair because of his poor health. Sadly, and strangely, in the aftermath of that retreat, the Serbian government in exile dismissed its entire General Staff, including Putnik. He retired to the French city of Nice, where he received a much warmer welcome from the French than from his fellow Serbians, but he never recovered from the hardships of the war and he passed away in May 1917, at the age of seventy.

[music: Closing War Theme]