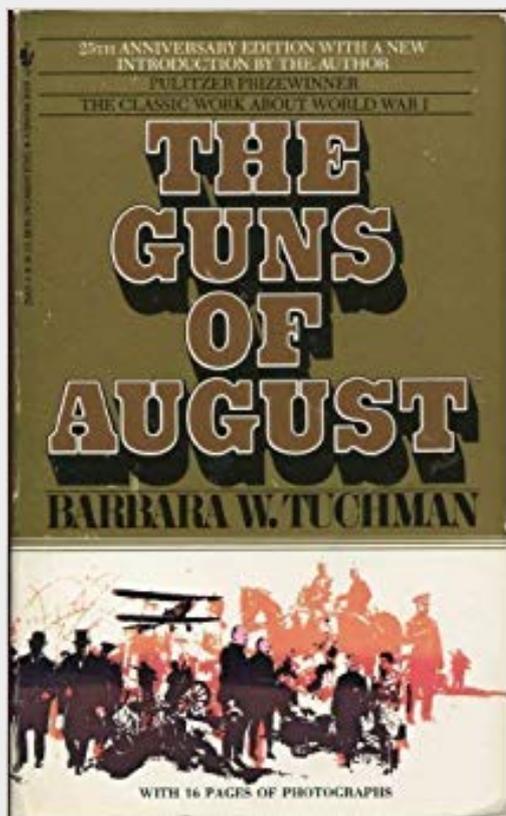


The Guns of August by Barbara W. Tuchman



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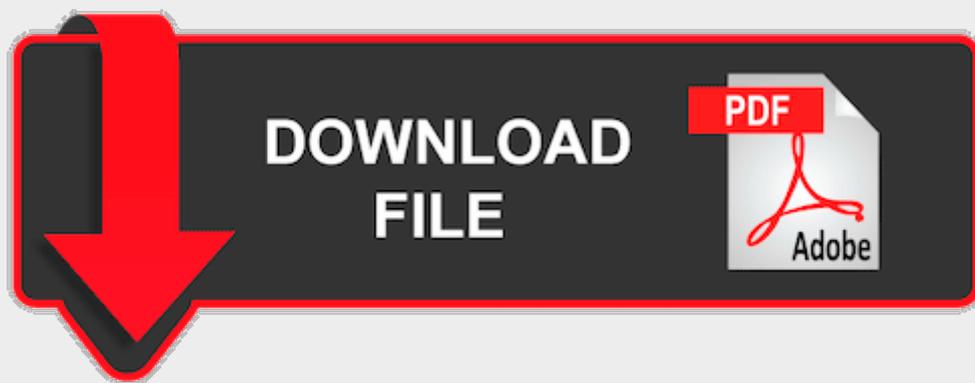
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An epic narrative based on events in Berlin, Paris, London, and St. Petersburg during the first month of World War I



Reviews of the The Guns of August by Barbara W. Tuchman

1. Rrinel

I fell in love with history at the age of 6 and excelled in it at school. One of my undergraduate majors was history and I spent a lot of time learning about the American Civil War and World War II. While I have a decent knowledge of World War I, it is a significant gap in my deep understanding of the 20th and 21st centuries.

H.W. Brands is one of my favorite modern American historians. He has written excellent books on TR, Grant, and the collision between Truman and MacArthur. In an interview, he mentioned that he has tried to copy the writing style of Barbara Tuchman, for he views her "The Guns of August" as the finest history book written. I bought it based on that recommendation.

This book was published in 1962. Ms. Tuchman is not a trained historian and does not have a PhD in the subject (neither did Gibbons or Churchill). It won the Pulitzer for non-fiction in 1962. Reading it 56 years after it was first published, I was absolutely blown away. While I don't want to fall victim to recency bias, it is clear to me that this is the finest piece on history by an American that I have ever read. Ms. Tuchman made extensive use of primary sources. She has an amazing grasp of the both micro and macro elements of the lead-up to and the first month of the war. Perhaps most significantly, she writes clearly and vividly. The book, despite having lots of information, is a breeze and a joy to read. It is fascinating.

I am deeply embarrassed that it took me this long to discover and read this book. Truly remarkable.

2. Umsida

"The Guns of August" has been called the book that saved the world. In the fall of 1962, looking at each other across the island of Cuba, the United States and the Soviet Union came nose to nose to pulling the trigger on a nuclear weapons war. United States Air Force U2 pilot Major Rudolf Anderson, USAF was shot down and killed. "Our guest has been up there for over an hour," [Russian] Lieutenant General Stepan Grechko told a deputy. "I think we should give the order to shoot it down, as it is discovering our positions in depth." With the commanding general, the only man authorized to order a surface-to-air missile launch, nowhere to be found, Grechko gave the order himself: "Destroy Target Number 33." American Generals urged President Kennedy to order an attack on Cuba. The President said that one passage from Barbara Tuchman's book gave him the courage to resist the pressure of his generals. "Your Majesty," General Moltke said to the Kaiser, "it cannot be done" when the German army began its advance into Belgium and the Kaiser ordered Moltke to stop The trains are already in motion--and with that simple phrase, a war that took over 10 million lives was launched. I have read "Guns" several

times over the years and I know how the story ends, yet I follow each decision as though it were now, each description as though it is happening, not has happened. It is an incredible story of horror, yet with examples of incredible courage. Her humor is able to shine through the darkness of the times with her characterizations of the Generals and Statesmen, Bethmann-Hollweg, "who means well feebly", British Field Marshall Sir John French, "who knows nothing at all about the subject" and most of these are simply quotations made by other participants. Her effort was tireless, her research masterful, and her writing brilliant. I work with soldiers in the recruiting group here and I have bought and given this book to several of the sergeants hoping that it will percolate upward. It's a command decision book and anyone who would think about war should understand the true horror of war. Not only were soldiers injured, blinded, maimed and killed, but the general population was starved so much that the Germans called the time "the turnip winter". No bombs fell on Berlin but Germans suffered gravely. Paris was almost reached by the German armies until German General Von Kluck made one strategic mistake and presented his flank to the retreating French army. Remember too, this deals only with August, only a single month of a war that was to last four years, and to be the trigger for the next war, World War II, in which 60 million lives were lost. I believe an entire semester course should be taught using this book, not just in college, but also in high school. One thing I should mention. I speak both German and French, and read in them, so it can be a challenge with some of the reports---but, don't give up on it. Her writing still come through, loud and clear, and clairvoyant.

Stephen Joe Payne

3. Bandiri

The Guns of August was -- and still is -- a very important landmark in our understanding of the First World War. If you have little knowledge of WWI, this book would be an excellent place to begin your studies. The Guns of August is focused on how the war began. The war's beginning was not a simple thing. Honestly, how could it be? Great nation's do not casually embark upon wars that have the potential to cause death and destruction on continental scales.

Tuchman's magnum plus starts by presenting a portrait of Europe -- and especially the major combatant nation's -- at the dawn the 20th century.

She examines their economics, culture and society, their histories from the 19th century, their relationships with each other.

She then takes the reader by the hand and guides them step-by-step through the historical minefields that are at least as bewildering as their real world counterparts. She carries her history through to the end of 1914 and the failure of the German army's attempt to deliver the fast knockout blow which would be needed, if Germany hoped to defeat the combined military forces of the Entente. (They did not come to be called the Allies until after the United States joined the war.)

4. Minha

Fantastic read. Covers so much in such a short period of time its almost dizzying. Its a global classic so I don't see what my review will really touch on that others haven't already. It covers the general global feeling that a great war was on the horizon and everyone knew. The one topic I wish she covered more was the assassination of the Arch Duke that sparked the whole thing. The amount of detail that is in this book is insane, almost every troop movement is covered from the start of hostilities by the Germans through Luxemborg and Belgium, then France. It also covers the Eastern front in just as much detail. She not only gives you the large picture of armies clashing and the stress the Politicians and Generals were under but also what the common soldiers were experiencing. The book ends just before the Battle of the Marne but for such a short period of time so much went down. I plan on reading many more of Tuchman's works.

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