

Welcome to our second book, *Historians!*

We have moved from the American Revolution and Alexander Hamilton to Europe at the beginning of World War I with Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*. These two time periods actually have more in common than you might imagine. The American Revolution showed the world the unimaginable—a colonial amateur army defeating the greatest empire in the world. And World War I was truly unimaginable—the twilight of the great empires in the trenches of the western front.

Barbara Tuchman takes us through the month of August 1914 from the political meetings to head off war to the military meetings intended to ensure that each country's army is the first in the field. We end in early September at the Battle of the Marne and the beginnings of trench warfare and the growing realization that this will be a much longer war than anyone envisioned. Today we can look back at WWI and see how completely the world changed. Tuchman shows us why that happened.

As you read, you will find that Tuchman references events in the Franco-German War of 1870 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. If it has been a while since your last European History course, let me recommend these two web sites for a quick refresher. Both sites are the *Encyclopedia Britannica* summaries of the events, succinct and factual with links to other sites if you are interested in reading more.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Russo-Japanese-War>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Franco-German-War>

I also encourage you to read Robert K. Massie's *Forward* to the book. It is an excellent introduction to *The Guns of August* and to Barbara Tuchman. By the way, if Massie's name is familiar, it is because he is the highly regarded author of several books on the Romanovs, most notably, *Nicholas and Alexandra*.

As you read *The Guns of August*, focus on the individuals involved in the events of August 1914. What were their motivations? What influenced their decisions? As you read the sections on the battles, it is easy to get lost in the minutiae of battle plans and battalions. As always, feel free to skim. But note that Tuchman breaks up the battle details with thumbnail sketches of the men involved, often in their own words. It is one way that Tuchman brings history to life. Finally, Tuchman is renowned for her descriptions, something Massie notes in the *Forward*. Make notes on the descriptions that you like best and bring them to our meeting. It will be interesting to share favorite descriptions as we once again share the joys of reading and discussing history. I look forward to seeing you at our meeting on October 4 at 6:30.

*Donna McBride*