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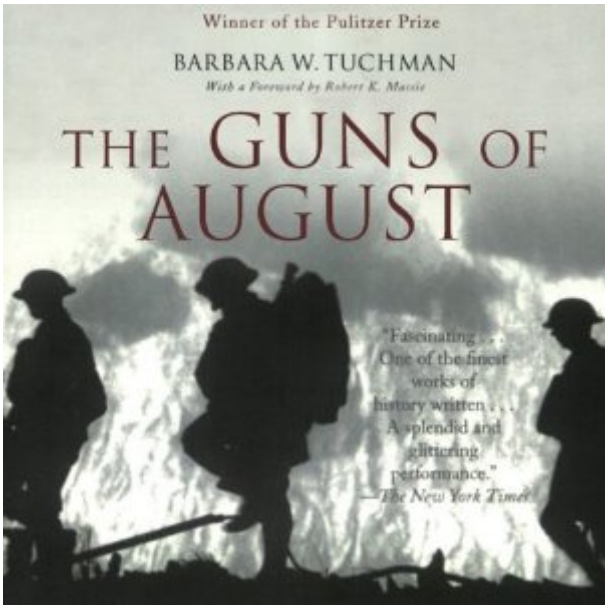
The Guns Of August



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Synopsis

"The Guns of August" is the narrative history of the first month of World War I. It describes the strategies of the generals, the preparation and morale of the armies of the nations at war and the everyday problems of the field commanders. --This text refers to the Audio Cassette edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
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Customer Reviews

Written in 1962, this is a fascinating history of the beginnings of WW1 and is the result of a vast amount of research. It’s all true, and all documented, and even though it’s a dense read, the huge cast of characters springs to life. This is the story of a war that changed the course of history. And it’s also a story of the men who make the war. The reader gets to see the blunders and the madness and the personal feuds. And the humanity of the imperfect human beings who make the decisions that result in slaughter.There are maps in the book describing the battles. There are also photographs. But I must admit that I barely looked at the maps. And I found all the photos of the elderly generals very similar. What I did love though was the sweep of the story as well as the many details that go into waging a war. Previously, most war books I’ve read had to do with the experience of the soldiers. But this book is about the experience of making decisions, often based on folly. And it opened my eyes to how vulnerable the ordinary person is to the whims of the generals and the forces of pure chance. Ms. Tuchman also had a sense of irony and humor and sometimes I found myself laughing out loud.The narrative of the month of August 1914 is described hour by hour. Belgium has to make a decision to accept an awful defeat or willingly allow the Germans to march through their neutral territory. There are alliances in place that are just waiting to

be broken. The Russians come into the war. So do the British, even though it is with much reluctance. The basic war is between France and Germany, almost a continuation of the defeat the French suffered at the hands of the Germans during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.Before I read this book, I didn't know much about WW1. Now I do.

The Guns of August may be the single most influential popular history of the origins of the First World War. It has convinced generations of readers that the war stemmed from a series of rivalries, which in turn lead to an uncontrollable escalation of events which ultimately results in an unintended conflict which sweeps up the most of the continent in a war that no one wanted. To the extent that President Kennedy is reported to have stated that this thesis influenced his thinking during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Guns of August takes on an additional level of historical importance which goes far beyond its merit as an interpretation of history. This book didn't just interpret history; it influenced history. It may have even helped to prevent a nuclear war. As such, it is an important book. This is why I've assigned it three stars; the book is historically important.The great big screaming problem is, as a history, from the very day it was published, its basic thesis of war by miscalculation was already untenable on the basis of available scholarship.The root of the problem is that while Tuchman does provide a brief overview of the historical tensions that provide a background to the war, she spends all of ONE long paragraph discussing what actually transpired between the assassination on June 28 and the July 23 publication of Austro-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia (i.e. the crossing of the threshold that establishes that a decision for war has been made and opens the door to the further expansion of the conflict). This is a STAGGERING omission.

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