



37 Days: Countdown to World War One

2 August: Germany tells Belgium to step aside

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Von Below - German Ambassador to Belgium:

We have received reports in the last 24 hours of French troops along the Givet-Namur road: and therefore in the light of this violation of your territory and of the 1839 treaty we are obliged to request of the Belgian government free access for our own troops to engage the French. You have 12 hours to respond.

Sir Winston Churchill – First Lord of the Admiralty:

This will be our casus belli

HH Asquith – Prime Minister:

It might be ...

Churchill:

It's an immaculate one too – no oil reserves, no coaling stations, no gold fields – just poor little Belgium at the mercy of the German juggernaut. Even the Radicals will be filled with indignation.

Asquith:

If Germany invades ..

Sir Edward Grey – Foreign Secretary:

Legal situation's not altogether clear – we would probably still need an official request for assistance from the Belgian government to avoid breaching the same treaty.

Asquith:

We cannot be more Belgian than the Belgians

Churchill

Surely they will ask for our help?

Grey:

I have no idea. It's possible the Belgian army will simply fire a token shot and then line the roads while the German army passes through.

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Narrator (Foreign Office clerk):

'If we are to be crushed', said the Belgian king, 'let us be crushed gloriously.' That night his government had resolved to repel every attack on its right; and King Albert himself composed a personal appeal to the Kaiser translated by German wife.