



37 Days: Countdown to World War One

1 August: Germany declares war on Russia

Prof Margaret MacMillan:

A pair of telegrams from Prince Lichnowsky the German ambassador in London bring staggering news. The British foreign secretary is apparently going to offer Britain's neutrality if Germany pledges not to attack France. The Kaiser orders champagne all round.

Kaiser Wilhelm:

Now we can go to war against Russia only . We simply march the whole of our army to the East.

Prof Margaret MacMillan:

The chief of his general staff Helmut von Moltke is horrified. It's far too late to change the German plan for a two-front war. But the Kaiser overrules him and stops mobilisation in the west. Moltke leaves, crushed. His wife thinks he's had a stroke.

Moltke's wife:

I saw something terrible had happened here. He was purple in the face, his pulse hardly countable. I had a desperate man in front of me.

Music

Prof Margaret MacMillan:

The Kaiser goes to bed early, much relieved. But he is awakened at 11:00pm by Moltke who brings a telegram from the British,

British telegram:

There must be some misunderstanding as to a suggestion that passed in friendly conversation between Prince Lichnowsky and Sir Edward Grey this afternoon.

Prof Margaret MacMillan:

Lichnowsky is desperate to avoid a war between Germany and Britain, but he has misunderstood Grey's suggestions that they must go on trying to find a way to keep the peace. Moltke asks the Kaiser if the military plans can go ahead.

Kaiser Wilhelm:

Now do as you please, I don't care either way.

With that he turns over and goes to sleep. The invasion of France is back on.