



V T M U N C

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**The Guns of August, Prelude to  
War, 1914 Specialized Committee**

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## Letter From the Secretariat

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**Dear Delegates of VTMUNC II,**

We appreciate your participation and dedication to the premier Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference's efforts to promote productive and civil discourse and conversation. Nevertheless, please be warned that some presentations, discussions, and or information found in the background guides may contain delicate or triggering material. At Virginia Tech, we prioritize fostering a safe and inclusive environment, so we want to ensure that you are prepared for the nature of the discussions to occur.

That being said, the following content areas may contain sensitive material:

1. **Conflict Zones & Human Rights Violations:** Some conversations may involve sensitive global problems including human rights violations, armed conflicts, and or other difficult themes.
2. **Sensitive Cultural or Religious Topics:** Some topics may raise sensitive cultural or religious issues for individuals.
3. **Violence and Trauma:** In their speeches or resolutions, delegates may reference incidents of violence, trauma, or abuse in real-world scenarios that may potentially be a sensitive topic to delegates in committee.
4. **Discussions about Discrimination and Marginalization:** Emotionally intense discussions concerning discrimination, marginalization, or inequity may arise during committee.

As you prepare for the conference, we encourage all of our delegates to approach these discussions with both respect and empathy for differing perspectives. If the content of these committees is something that you are uncomfortable with, we recommend that you take the appropriate steps to prioritize your well-being, such as seeking support from conference staff or Secretariat of VTMUNC II. Bound by the motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), we serve to ensure that we will promote constructive and respectful dialogue during committee sessions. As you prepare and participate in the conference, we promise that VTMUNC I will stay committed to creating a space where all your voices are heard and are welcome. Thank you for your

compassion and cooperation to our goal of respectful and intellectual discourse for all. We hope that as you progress with our conference, you continue to bloom.

**Sincerely,**

**Shriya Chemudupait, Secretary General of VTMUNC II**

**Anneli Sample, Under-Secretary General of General Assemblies of VTMUNC II**

**Holly Johnson, Under-Secretary General of Crisis Committees of VTMUNC II**

**Thomas Quinn<sup>2</sup>, Under-Secretary General of Specialized Agencies of VTMUNC II**

## **Conference Guidelines**

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The first iteration of the Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference, otherwise known as VTMUNC I, is committed to providing a safe and pleasurable experience for all delegates, advisors, and individuals involved with VTMUNC I. Although participating in Model UN is being involved in competitive activity, its fundamental purpose is to uphold and put into practice both the principles of diplomacy, collaboration, and cooperation. Any individual that violates the policies and procedures of VTMUNC I and the ideals of an open and inclusive environment will be subject to disciplinary action from the staff of VTMUNC I; disciplinary action may include a warning or being disqualified from receiving awards. Promoting an environment that is open to all by being safe, equitable, and exhilarating is our utmost priority. In order to ensure this, the following are prohibited:

1. Any pre-writing or working on committee content outside of VTMUNC I committee sessions (as described by the Schedule of Program).
2. Any speeches, directives, crisis arcs, or actions in committee that intend to create violence or promote a violent environment to a specific group of people, including mentions of sexual violence, graphic violence, and other behavior that is beyond committee guidelines.
3. Any hate speech, written documents, or behavior that uses language that is discriminatory and disrespectful, including but not limited to any language that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, or language harmful to any specific group.
4. Any actions that are deliberate, both knowingly and intentionally, to bully, harass, or otherwise harmful behavior that may or has hurt other delegates' physical and or mental health.

## Overview of Specialized Committees

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The beginning of World War I is the story of many things. It is a story of imperial rivalry, the collapse of the balance of power system, and of powerful alliances. For the sake of our committee, we will be focusing on how these factors informed the decisions made by an interconnected web of elites through combatant nations. This will include family rivalries, personal vendettas, and quixotic characters representing the best and (primarily) the worst of humanity. While it is possible to trace the genesis of WWI in a linear fashion, it does a disservice to the maelstrom and chaos which characterized the early precessions. For this committee it is my hope to provide the conditions for this avalanche of events to unfold and to create a dynamic and fun environment for engaging debate and imaginative backroom arcs.

## Letter From the Chair

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to VTMUNCII! I am pleased to welcome you all to Blacksburg for the second annual inaugural Model United Nations conference! My name is Matthew Quinn, and I will be

serving as your Chair for the Guns of August Committee. I have always had a fascination for history and am so excited to see you debate about the start of World War I!

A little about me, I am a senior from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania studying International Relations and this is my first time being a crisis director. I am also a co-vice president of Model UN at Virginia Tech and was the director general of Birdmunc I. I have been a member of Model UN at Virginia Tech since my freshman year and I am excited to be in the back room for a college conference for once. Outside of school and model UN, I love watching sports with my roommates and watching movies with my twin brother, Thomas. Thomas is the chair of this committee. One of my favorite activities is scrolling Letterboxd after I have watched a movie. I am also a huge fan of trivia and reading, mainly the A Song of Ice and Fire series.

For the purposes of this committee, I encourage you all to be familiar with the tensions surrounding Europe in the lead up to World War I.

Best,

Matthew Quinn

Head Chair

Guns of August, the Prelude to War, 1914

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## Letter From the Crisis Director

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Hi everyone, I am super excited to share this committee with you all. I will be serving as the Crisis Director for this committee. My name is Matthew Castro, and I am a junior studying international relations here at Virginia Tech. I have been involved in MUN at VT for about 2 years at this point and I have had a lot of fun with it. It is my pleasure to share with you a committee that I feel so strongly about. I am very much a history nerd, and this topic has been an obsession of mine for quite some time. Hopefully the focus of this committee does not bore you to death, but if it does, I have a few surprises to keep it interesting. Without further ado I hope to see you all soon!

Best,

Matthew Castro

Crisis Director

Guns of August, the Prelude to War, 1914

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# Background Information

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**Disclaimer:** For obvious reasons, World War 1 and the status of European nations as empires can have problematic implications. Without stifling any fun that might come from raucous debate and outrageous backroom arcs, I hope that you all will be able to approach topics like War and Imperialism with candor and sensitivity.

In addition to this, many of the historical figures you will be representing range from generally harmless to comedically bigoted. It goes without saying this will not be tolerated. On the flipside, many of these historical figures have massive personalities and I would look favorably upon some level of impersonation if you as long as you treat the other delegates with respect. Also, collaboration is encouraged, and I dare say it is necessary for this committee to function. JPDs with other delegates will only make the committee more chaotic and in turn more fun for both you all and the staff.

As early as the 1900, the tensions between the preeminent British empire and the emergent German state seemed to spell a course towards war. At the time, the King of Britain was the Francophile King Edward VII whose admiration for France and French culture helped to turn Britain's foreign policy closer towards France and culminated in an Anglo-French *Rapprochement* in 1904. Germany could have had their own *entente* with England if their representatives did not strike down proposed negotiations with the British over fears of the Brits' true intentions. Further complicating the situation for both Britain and Germany were France's preexisting alliance with czarist Russia. For Germany, the threat of Britain, France, and Russia allied together gave leaders nightmares of a potential war on two fronts. For Britain, any relationship they would have with Russia would be strenuous. In almost every way possible Britain and Russia were polar opposites: Britain was the biggest sea empire while Russia was the biggest land empire, Britain held a parliamentary style of government while Russia was still under an archaic absolutist monarchy, Britain boasted the highest level of Industrialization while Russia languished in a barely post-serfdom society. Complicating things further, Britain's alliance with world stage newcomers Japan supplied Russians with contempt and wariness of British intentions stemming from the aftermath of Russo-Japanese war. Even with all these obstacles and Czar Nicolas II's personal disdain for the British, they were able to come together with the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907. Further difference in outlook could be seen internally within Britain and Germany. For starters, as the only hegemon, Britain was secure in the world order that they helped to create while Germany took on the personality of its Kaiser: insecure. No matter how ascendant German economic and military power become since unification, Germany was never seen as a seat of incredible political or cultural power. Kaiser Wilhelm was often hurt by the lack of recognition that Berlin received as a truly cosmopolitan city as compared to its counterparts, Paris and Vienna for example. This insecurity has helped to

inform Germany's military elite, clarified by the publication of *Germany and the Next War* by General von Bernhardi. Its thesis centered around a simple question, world power or downfall? It is obvious that Germany could have been an important international power without having to engage other powers in direct combat but the insecurity that characterized German foreign policy shifted focus towards external impediments. On the other hand, England was more confident in their success and the stability of the world order they helped to shape. Around the same time that *Germany and the Next War* was published, an English author, Norman Angell, published *the Great Illusion* which pointed to economic interdependence as the bulwark against war. With massive interdependence between economies in Europe, war was impossible, right?

Unfortunately, these differing opinions only helped to re-establish both nations' current situation. Germany's quest for world power status would necessitate war and Britain's continued preeminence as the world's economic power could only propagate with peace in Europe and continued colonial conquests. Something would give; peace wouldn't last.

Ever forward thinking, German military leadership had already drafted plans to invade France and cut England off from their continental allies. This plan was called the Schlieffen plan and was created by the Chief of Staff of the same name, Count Alfred von Schlieffen. Unfortunately for the count, he never lived to see his plan come to be. Though the architect was deceased by the time the plan was implemented, it would have a lasting influence on the outbreak of the war and the tactics used. A core tenet of the plan was to invade France via Belgium in a sweeping motion to encircle Paris and cut off French military and political leadership from the sea where British reinforcements would land. Belgium neutrality would thus be disregarded. Although a conflict between France and Germany could induce the British to intervene on the side of the French, any incursion into Belgium would all but ensure British intervention. As one of the legal guarantors of Belgian neutrality and close allies, Britain would likely go to war on their behalf. Yet Schlieffen's bet was an educated one. He reasoned that a future war between the allied powers (Britain, France, and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) would result in a war on 2 fronts for Germany. To win, Germany would have to quickly smash one of their continental rivals and then refocus their efforts on the second only after the first was defeated. An observant historian, Schlieffen learned the lesson of Napoleon and believed that quick victory was impossible in the East against Russia. Its vast expanse of land and men vanquished the most capable armies and generals. No quick victory could occur in the east. France was another story. During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the Prussians were able to win decisively within half a year and the improvements in transportation made Schlieffen confident that France could be defeated quickly. For France to be overwhelmed, most of Germany's military forces would have to focus on France while only a few divisions could protect Germany from Russia. The plan boiled down to this, defeat France quickly and hold off Russia until German troops could be redeployed out east. To make this plan viable Germany had to rely on a secret weapon, railroads. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany had developed one of the largest and most efficient railroad systems in the world which allowed for quick transportation of raw material and goods from the industrial heartlands to ports



and vice versa. This also allowed Germany to quickly mobilize its army and redeploy them faster than any other nation. While this was an advantage enjoyed against all combatant nations, it was particularly important on the eastern front where Russia's underdeveloped railroad system meant that Russia could not fully mobilize their army for the better part of a month and a half.

Essentially, Schlieffen bet that the German army could defeat France within a month and a half using the massive sweeping maneuver through Belgium and down the French flatlands to block British reinforcements from the coast while a small force of the German army held off the Russians until France was defeated and the majority of the German army could be redeployed to the East. Got it?

Germany was not the only continental power whose military elite preferred decisive offensive attacks. France had their own doctrine of *élan* whose origins were baked into French military history and culture. As a result, the French paid little attention to defensive plans on the Belgian border and instead focused on an offensive in the disputed Alsace-Lorraine region into the Rhineland of Germany. Like the Germans, the French were great historians of war, unlike the Germans, the French put too great an emphasis on metaphysical concept of human will. To summarize, it was "the idea that morale itself can win," p.39. From this point French military doctrine was detached from the physical element of war and this philosophy deeply engrained itself into all ranks of the French military. Attempts to change French military philosophy to a more defensive approach were far too few and uninfluential to have a real impact. French stubbornness in military affairs also extended to military equipment. Traditional French uniforms included red trousers which were easily identifiable on a battle. Attempts to change French uniforms to a more muted and camouflaged colors were rejected by military high command citing pride in tradition. In addition, the French military looked down upon the use of heavy artillery, instead relying on lighter cannons. In essence, French philosophy on War with its stubborn insistence on the role of spirit and morale hampered necessary reforms that would increase French military effectiveness. In response to the mounting tension between France and Germany, France created their own offensive plan. Called plan 17, it was almost the complete opposite of the Schlieffen plan. If the Schlieffen plan can be characterized as detailed yet rigid, plan 17 was directionless yet flexible. While the Schlieffen plan had deadlines, intermediate and long-term goals, and set troop movements, Plan 17 left greater initiative to individual generals. While the Schlieffen plan attacked through Belgium, Plan 17 aimed to advance right through the French German frontier. On the eve of war, the prevailing attitude amongst the French high command was overconfidence both in their plan 17 and military training, a mistake that might shape the outcome of the war.

Per usual, the British were weary of any military action on the continent opting for continued colonial expansion and dominance of global trade. Nevertheless, Britain had a responsibility to guarantee the neutrality of one critical country: Belgium. Moreover, in the event of a German invasion of Belgium it was unclear if Britain would act independently or in concord with the French to deter any attack. And if Britain did work with France, many prominent British military

officials, such as Admiral Sir John Fisher, did not want to commit British to France owing to the lack of confidence the British had in French military capability. And if British troops weren't stationed in France, it was unclear whether Britain would simply stick to naval engagements or attempt a sea-borne assault against Germany. Without a clear direction, General Sir Henry Wilson took it upon himself to lobby for a greater integration of a British expeditionary force and the French army to cover the area of tactics, logistics, and communication. By spring 1914 he had successfully convinced British officials behind closed doors to plan for a joint defense of France. While still publicly assuring non-involvement, Britain had promised in the Defense of France against foreign aggression, yet Britain had the easy way out of crossing back over the English Channel if things weren't going their way.

Russia represented the biggest conundrum. Possessing by far the largest army yet, it was the least technically advanced. If Russia was properly aroused, its sheer size could not be overcome by any nations, however, discontent had spread through all levels of society. Even though Serfdom had been abolished in 1861, much of the peasantry had little improvement in condition. Well to do Russians also felt the effects of Russian backwardness and they expressed their grievances through novels, epics, and short stories. The Military were also not immune from low morale and lack of belief in the Czar. After the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 where Russia suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of an emergent Japan. Throughout the Russo-Japanese war, discontent amongst Russian soldiers and sailors led to mutinies which further proved Russia's lack of cohesion. Yet, any war between Germany and France would be decided by whether Russia chose to respect its alliance with France. French leadership knew that their plan to attack straight into the Rhineland would only succeed if the Russian army commanded enough attention from the Germans. Fighting a war on two fronts and having any amount of success was virtually impossible, France and England needed Russia to keep the Eastern front going to ensure victory against Germany. What was unknown was whether the Russian army could operate in an effective manner and/or if public opinion within Russia would stay behind the Czar during a war.

On June 28, 1914, Serbian nationalists assassinated the presumptive heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Throughout the month of July, half-hearted attempts at peace were followed by the eventual: War. On July 28 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, the following day Austria-Hungary bombarded Belgrade. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July Austria-Hungary mobilized their army. Feeling a sense of responsibility towards their Slavic brethren, Russia mobilized their army on the same day. In response, both France and Germany mobilized their armies on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. The Guns of August were ready, the question was who would fire the first shot.

## Questions to Consider

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# Character Dossier

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## **Kaiser Wilhelm II**

Pig-headed, ambitious, jealous, the Kaiser was very unlikeable outside of the German speaking world. As the most opportunist statesman of his time, the Kaiser was always trying to gain influence and wanted Germany to become the ultimate great power. What was never in question was his intelligence. As one of the first Germans to realize that the key to international power was a great navy, the Kaiser supported admiral Tirpitz's call for increased production of naval vessels to rival the British navy. Additionally, Wilhelm II wanted Germany to increase its influence around the world through increased colonization. The Kaiser enjoyed far-reaching influence on the government of Germany, but he was not an absolute leader. At the onset of the War, Germany was a constitutional monarchy with an elected legislative branch that somewhat limited the Kaiser power. Yet almost all of the military is completely loyal to the Kaiser and his stewardship is the key to German victory. Will his ambition prove attractive to new allies, or will his opportunism undermine Germany's war effort?

## **Czar Nicolas II**

In the words of Kaiser Wilhelm, the Czar was "only fit to live in a country house and grow turnips," p.9. While certainly a degrading remark levied against the Czar's lack of intellect and education, it is not far-fetched to believe that Czar Nicolas would agree. He was completely uninterested in international politics and ruling a nation. While the Czar ruled the empire, he was ruled by the Czarina whose strong will made her more suited for absolute control. Often characterized as a bumbling idiot, this reputation helped to distract from his brutality as an autocrat. Alongside this brutality, the Czar held multiple prejudices, including against the British. Already somewhat unpopular amongst the Russian people, the tradition of absolutist rule within Russia was the only bulwark against revolution. Incompetent, unlikeable, and apathetic, the Czar was the least prepared ruler for the outbreak of the war. And yet controlled the biggest army and had the advantage of Russia's geography and climate on his side. Will the war bring out a different side of the Czar, one that includes tact and passion, or will his fervent absolutism and incompetence lead to the downfall of him and the empire? Or will he become his best self as a turnip farmer?

## **Czarina Alix**

While definitively more strong-willed than her Husband, the Czarina was no more intelligent. For this reason, she was susceptible to fanatics and lunatic charlatans who soon assumed positions within the Russian court. Just like the Czar, the Czarina was also unpopular amongst the public due to her German origins and cold disposition. Seen as a potential traitor to the Russian people due to her German origins, however, the Czarina was actually a genuine Russian patriot and abhorred the Kaiser. While this fact was discounted by the public, behind the scenes she had a huge influence on the Czar. With such a huge influence over imperial affairs, could the Czarina and her council of mystics help lead Russia to victory, or will her callousness enrage the Russian people to revolt.

### **King Albert 1**

As the successor to the villainous King Leopold II, King Albert I was cut from a different cloth. A shy and incredibly capable individual, he ruled Belgium and its colonies as more of a benevolent king than a tyrant. He took interest in the working classes of Belgium and the development of Belgian Congo. Even if he did not go as far to grant the Congo its independence, Albert was far more caring than his genocidal predecessor. His intellectual abilities and industry made him a beloved statesman, one that controlled the confidence of his people. His plaudits were more similar to the great politicians of his time like Theodore Roosevelt and Georges Clemenceau. If any European Monarch had broad respect internationally and domestically, it was King Albert I. Will King Albert use his good image to influence people abroad and domestically, or will Belgium's lack of size and manpower be swept aside without a thought?

### **Chief of Staff Moelke (Germany)**

A sober, if not indecisive and self-doubting man, Moelke did not buy into the Dogma of the decisive victory. Contrary to German military theorists like Clausewitz and Generals like Schlieffen, Moelke believed that national wars were not decided by a single or string of decisive battles, but rather by a "long wearisome struggle... that will not be overcome until its whole national force is broken," p.27. In other words, a war of attrition. He feared that any national war in Europe would devolve into a war of attrition, one which Germany could not win. Prone to melancholy, Moelke lacked the boldness of his predecessor Schlieffen, which any quick victory was dependent on. Though he had his reservations, Moelke became a reluctant disciple of Schlieffen and would be the man charged with implementing Schlieffen's plan. What Moelke lacked in boldness he possessed in attention to detail. No contingency wasn't planned for and if there ever was a man to follow a plan perfectly, it was Moelke. Unfortunately, owing to his lack of extended war experience, the jury was still out on whether he was flexible enough to deviate from script when the conditions on the ground changed. Can he find the conviction and adaptability to defeat France in time, or will the bright lights prove too much for his contemplative nature?

## **General Messimy**

As the French war minister, General Messimy enjoyed wide ranging responsibility including choosing the French chief of staff. As one of his first acts in this position, Messimy decided to ditch the former chief of staff, General Michel, in favor of General Joffre. Exuberant and energetic, Messimy was an old-school general that could not help but join his soldiers on the battlefield on horseback. Although Messimy holds a powerful post within the French government, the complex and often iconoclast dysfunction of French politics pose a roadblock for independent action unless dealt with by a deft political operator. Will Messimy be hamstrung by politics, or will he play his cards right and control his country's destiny?

## **General Joffre**

Described as "a cool and methodical worker with a lucid and precise mind," Joffre was not the first pick to lead the French army. Despite this, Joffre had all the important qualities to lead the defense of France. In addition, Joffre had friends in high places and had the trust of France's government to command. He was a man of impenetrable calm with unmatched skill in logistics. Although other generals were more flexible in tactics, few could plan massive troop movements which proved a great advantage in the first handful of weeks in August. But will his ability to plan troop movements prove decisive or will his judgement let him down?

## **Emperor Franz Josef**

As one of the only remaining absolute monarchs, Franz Josef is a relic of the past. Aged 83 by 1914, nobody believed Franz Josef had any more to give as a statesman. An imperial hardliner, Josef did not approve of liberalizing relations with ethnic minorities within the Austro-Hungarian empire. It was these same ethnic and nationalistic tensions that led to the assassination of Franz Josef's heir, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Bent on revenge, Franz Josef has taken the international spotlight by declaring war on Serbia, precipitating the expansion of the conflict to a world war. Although the Austro-Hungarian empire closely resembled its ruler, ancient and in desperate need of reform, it still has a major role to play if the emperor's leadership proves not to be geriatric. Will Franz Josef get his revenge, or will father time finally catch up to the emperor?

## **Admiral Sir John Fisher**

Audacious and direct, Admiral Fisher commanded respect amongst allies and adversaries alike. Initially, Fisher did not support putting British soldiers on continental European let alone under French command, instead he called for a navy-lead assault on the German mainland itself. As the admiral of the navy, Admiral Fisher commands the most powerful military force in the world, yet since the incoming war was going to be fought mostly on land, his personal military fiefdom would be relegated to imposing a blockage, chaperoning merchant ships, and attempting to lure the German Navy out of port. Ever the Maverick, will Admiral Fisher become a team player, or will he create his own luck by going rogue?

### **General Sir John French**

As the command-in-chief of the British Expeditionary army, General French was not the experienced tactician but a fiery and indignant man. Defiant to the core, his protestations were constant, and almost always correct. For this reason, the French's relationship with the *French*, ironic, was tenuous. This relationship would be important to victory if both sides could communicate and find consensus in equal measure. Will French's outspokenness ruin cohesion, or will his independent spirit win the minds of the *French* and the war?

### **General Ludendorff**

A dogmatic student of Schlieffen, no German general was more capable to execute the Schlieffen plan. Unfortunately, Ludendorff was neither well-liked nor well-connected enough to gain the position of Chief of Staff. Though Ludendorff kept himself deliberately shut-in, he was a man of good character that possessed indefatigable work ethic and some important friends including the retired general Hindenburg. While not the overall commander on the Western front, maybe a promotion could be in his future?