War Planning 1914

The major European powers drafted war plans before 1914 and executed them in August 1914; none brought the expected victory by Christmas. Why? This tightly focused collection of essays by international experts in military history reassesses the war plans of 1914 in a broad diplomatic, military, and political setting for the first time in three decades. The book analyzes the war plans of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia on the basis of the latest research and explores their demise in the opening months of World War I. Collectively and comparatively, these essays place contingency war planning before 1914 in the different contexts and challenges each state faced as well as into a broad European paradigm. This is the first such undertaking since Paul Kennedy’s groundbreaking War Plans of the Great Powers (1979), and the end result is breathtaking in both scope and depth of analysis.

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Acknowledgments

This book began with a brainstorming conference at The Ohio State University in 2005. We are deeply indebted to Richard Herrmann, Director of the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, for making that possible, and to the Center’s able staff, most especially to Beth Russell, for their continued generous support of the project.

The Austro-Hungarians and the Germans annually updated their war plans for about a decade; France went through seventeen and Russia through nineteen major iterations of their war plans before 1914. Thus, not surprisingly, we also experienced changes and alterations in our own “war planning,” most notably through academic moves, child birth, family illness, and the vicissitudes of archival availability. We are especially grateful to Annika Mombauer for coming to our rescue in the chapter dealing with the German Plans for War and to Bruce Menning for kindly sharing some of his unique war plans maps with us. We thank all the contributors for their patience in graciously replying to our editorial queries and suggestions, and especially the original conference participants for kindly updating their bibliographies and notes.

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