



## August 1914

*Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn , H.T. Willetts (Translator)*

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**August 1914** Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn , H.T. Willetts (Translator)

In his monumental narrative of the outbreak of the First World War and the ill-fated Russian offensive into East Prussia, Solzhenitsyn has written what Nina Krushcheva, in *The Nation*, calls "a dramatically new interpretation of Russian history." The assassination of tsarist prime minister Pyotr Stolypin, a crucial event in the years leading up to the Revolution of 1917, is reconstructed from the alienating viewpoints of historical witnesses. The sole voice of reason among the advisers to Tsar Nikolai II, Stolypin died at the hands of the anarchist Mordko Bogrov, and with him perished Russia's last hope for reform. Translated by H.T. Willetts.

*August 1914* is the first volume of Solzhenitsyn's epic, *The Red Wheel*; the second is *November 1916*. Each of the subsequent volumes will concentrate on another critical moment or "knot," in the history of the Revolution. Translated by H.T. Willetts.

## August 1914 Details

Date : Published May 15th 2000 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (first published 1971)

ISBN : 9780374519995

Author : Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn , H.T. Willetts (Translator)

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## From Reader Review August 1914 for online ebook

### Emma says

This is probably my favorite book of all time. Alexander Solzhenitsyn was brilliant. If you don't like WWI history, this book is not for you, but it was excellent. It was fiction, but centred around the campaign in Tannenberg, Prussia. There wasn't much of a plot other than the campaign, though the characters made up for it, and is the first in a series of four, the last of which has not been translated into English as yet. It was 622 pages, but well worth reading.

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### Bettie? says

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04fyd8h>

Description: *A new adaptation for radio of Nobel Prize-winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's epic story of the first battle of the Eastern Front in 1914 - which was a disaster for Russia. Solzhenitsyn's book was published in the West one year after he won the prize - with sections about Lenin omitted. It was only after his expulsion from the USSR that the complete book was available. This new production is narrated by Fiona Shaw.*

*In August 1914, Colonel Vorotyntsev advances into East Prussia in search of the elusive front line. As he encounters the truth about the German war-machine his military ideals rapidly tarnish and he must decide whether to volunteer his men for certain death or retreat. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian advance met with catastrophic results. Bungled orders, poor and insufficient supplies, out-dated equipment and tactics, and deliberate misinformation resulted in chaos and the near-annihilation of the army at the hands of the Germans. Three years later the tsarist regime fell as Lenin led the October Revolution.*

Your average Russian 'Boris' is still being fed daily doses of misinformation, and hazard to guess that should a war footing be declared, they would fare no better next time around. For that very reason, this book is still relevant today. Current misinformation comes no fouler than out of the mouth of a certain Vladimir Medinsky:

**Medinsky is so keen to demonstrate Russia's superiority to other nations that he has even said that Russia's perseverance in the face of all twentieth-century catastrophes, indicates that "our people have an extra chromosome.".**Source

I cannot believe that the Russian population is blanket Down's Syndrome

Take a moment to think about those who have lost their lives so senselessly.

Narrator Fiona Shaw  
Vorotyntsev Alex Waldmann  
Samsonov Michael Bertenshaw  
Arseni Sion Pritchard  
Sasha Lenartovich Mark Edel-Hunt  
Yaroslav Kharitonov Will Howard  
Lenin Clive Hayward  
Grokholets Robert Pugh  
Filimonov Sam Dale  
Krymov Simon Armstrong  
Ofrosimov Matthew Watson  
Artamonov David Cann  
Tanya Melangell Dolma  
Kramchatkin Chris Gordon  
Luntsov Sion Ifan  
Agafon Alex Hope

5\* The First Circle

3\* One Day

The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: Left unrated for a reason

3\* Cancer Ward

3\* August 1914

4\* We Never Make Mistakes: Two Short Novels

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## **Huw Evans says**

Ironically, I am writing this review on the 11th November. I have categorised it as fiction but there is a strong factual element - can I call it military fiction? After Ivan Denisovich, the size of this book came as a surprise and the writing expands to fill the space between the covers, without lapse or hiatus. We remember our own war dead, but seem to have forgotten that the Russians lost twice as many men as did the UK. The appalling carnage at the beginning of the war is well described where men without uniforms or weapons were thrown at the opposition. In that fact alone lies much of the origin of the Russian revolution.

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## **Katia N says**

2.5/5

On a purely literary merit it is a big and tiresome slog. It is designed to be 10 volumes' chronicles devoted to the events which have led to the Revolution of 1917. So the parts about the fictional characters are alternated by the parts about real historic figures and events. The construction is complex and really awkward. Initially the fictional parts were relatively lively with an interesting set of characters and several story lines. But the gaps between dropping a particular line and coming back to it are too big to emphasise with the characters. So I stopped caring about the fictional parts.

The historical chronicle is meticulously detailed and relatively slow moving. His method is to pick a

historical event or a figure and drill so deep that it becomes overwhelming after a while. This book is devoted to two main themes: the beginning of the First World War from the perspective of the Russian front; the personality and the achievements of Piotr Stolypin, the Russian Prime Minister and strong leader, who was assassinated in the Kiev Opera in 1911 by a terrorist (at the same time the informer of the police), Merdco Bogrov. Those two historical figures are juxtaposed to each other for obvious reasons. But if Stolypin's life seems to be based on numerous sources, Bogrov's life and his motivation seems to be presented in more fictional way - it is unclear how Solzhenitsyn has compiled it. Solzhenitsyn presents him as a lonely, evil revolutionary who wanted to outsmart everyone (including the Okhrana) and succeeded. While for me, with the hindsight of another century, it seems more likely that he was the hand of the state secret service.

There is a little episode about Lenin travelling to Zurich and this one is more readable. That is the only reason why I would try to read the second instalment of these chronicles.

However, if one even manage to ignore monarchist, nationalist ideology (Russia is unique country in which democracy should be very different from the Western one - sounds familiar isn't it?) which is streaming from every page, it is still not very well written book.

I've never read Solzhenitsyn before, so my view is based only upon this book. I've started the second part already (November 1916) and it is going a bit easier so far. I do not think i plan to finish all 10 volumes. I will finish the second book and then probably dip into the rest. I read in original Russian.

PS

About the war - that the part i was not particularly interested, so I might misinterpreted some details, but the general story is relatively traditionally told - courageous soldiers, especially from the peasant backgrounds, treacherous, cowardly and incompetent HQ. Lies at the papers. I think the readers who are interested in the detailed description of the war from the Russian point of view and possess the initial knowledge on the subject, might find it more interesting than i did.

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## **Timons Esaias says**

I read the original version of this soon after it came out in English, at the beginning of the '70s, along with Lenin in Zurich. I liked it a lot, and it led me to much further reading on the subject of the Russian Front of WWI. I admired the novel in its original form, with its many memorable scenes, and desperate situations. I've owned the "Red Wheel" version since it came out, and finally got around to reading it.

Solzhenitsyn's additions and revisions turned it into a shapeless mess, to be quite honest. Where it had been an actual novel with characters (both fictional and historical) and scenes, it is now a novel with a 300+-page non-fiction flashback crammed into it. The intruded section is, at best, like the utterly interior narration of the Lenin chapters -- but carried on endlessly, almost without dialogue. At worst, it's an overblown monarchist rant. Neither one belongs in a novel, and most certainly they have no place in this novel.

[The technique of writing entirely interior monologue, without exterior scenes, made sense in the Lenin chapters, because the guy was portrayed as living entirely in his own head. He was essentially the only remaining member of the Bolshevik party, in his view. So there was an artistic excuse for the choice. And when one read Lenin in Zurich you were aware that it wasn't intended to be a book in itself, but a series of outtake chapters. But here we get Stolypin, and Bogrov, and Kurlov and the Tsar all presented the same way; with even less pretense at fiction, most of the time, because it's not "thoughts in time" but just mental

recapitulation. The other problem, which I didn't see as much in the Lenin chapters, is that each character's section is given in a relentless monotone. Stolypin energetic, Bogrov evasive, Nicholas endlessly indecisive yet whiney. That is not a good formula for a novel. To be frank, it's just not good.]

The whole design of *The Red Wheel* was that he would write extended novels on snapshot months from the First World War. August (which goes into September, given the use of the Russian Orthodox Julian Calendar) of 1914 was to be the first snapshot, which A.S. called a 'knot.' But in the revised version he suddenly stops to throw in a bundle of "other knots" from the past. This consists of a panegyric to Stolypin (presented as Russia's last, best hope), intercut with a biography of his assassin, intercut with reflections by the bureaucrats who did nothing to stop the assassination, and then a mental flashback of Nicholas II from when his dad got ill until the outbreak of the War. Solzhenitsyn pretty clearly shoved this in with a bad conscience, because he puts much of it (especially the Stolypin bio) in a smaller font, and tells the reader they can skip it if they choose. His excuse is "The author would not permit himself such a crude distortion of the novel form if Russia's whole history, her very memory, had not been so distorted in the past, and her historians silenced." Well then, say I, write a history, for crying out loud.

As I implied above, all the added material should have been in a book of its own. The problem, I'm sure, is that it's neither fiction nor history, neither fish nor fowl, and not interesting enough to sell. Which probably tells us all we need to know about why the third and fourth volumes of *The Red Wheel* have never been translated and published in English, and likely never will be. The bad idea seems to have gotten worse as it went along. (I'm still planning to read November 1916 in the coming months, but I see from the Table of Contents that he pulled the same stunts there.)

Enough complaining. The majority of the text is the original snuck-out-of-the-USSR novel about the beginning of the war and the loss of the Second Army (under General Samsonov) in the Battle of Tannenberg. It follows many different characters, civilian and military, giving us a very wide perspective of Russian life in the period, and the social and political disarray of the times. There's a student visiting Tolstoy, a landowner buying his no-good son out of the draft, politically active college girls, young officers, and so on. Big canvas, interesting events. Then we jump to a concentration on the Second Army, and all its problems. Second Army was sent to invade East Prussia (being the left hook of a two-army assault) weeks ahead of the planned schedule (meaning it was a little better than 1/3 strength). Like all such armies, it was dependent on railroads for supplies, and it got supplies from the rail line to the troops almost entirely by horse-drawn wagons and oxcarts. The German Army also had many wagons, but they also had trucks, which enabled them to supply the flanks further from the railroad. This meant, simply, that the Germans would almost automatically outflank the Russians; which they did, which meant Samsonov got completely surrounded and crushed. Later the First Army met almost the same fate, but that happens after the novel. The book doesn't explain the logistical mismatch in detail, but it has one haunting line in which an officer wonders if the fate of the campaign isn't being decided by those horsecarts, before the first shot is fired. (Yep, it was.) The book describes the chaos very well, which is one of its strengths.

One of the brilliant conceits of the novel is that there's a colonel from GHQ who got himself sent to Second Army to "find out what is really going on" and who is on a mission to be at the crucial point in the battle and help make everything go right. This means he's rushing around from unit to unit, trying to make sense of everything, and trying to get the generals to do sensible things. The reader benefits from such a character, of course, as he gives logical coherence to the disparate threads; and is essential to the final scene.

There was a great book here, written by a Nobel laureate, based on research that couldn't be done in the West during the Cold War. Now that novel is concreted into a messy conglomerate that still has some historical interest, if you don't mind the bizarre monarchist bias that overwhelms it. Ah, well.

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## Jan-Maat says

It is important to bear in mind that with the end of the Cold War the funding to translate Solzhenitsyn dried up. There is after all plenty of nationalistic Russian writing from the nineteenth century available in English. The only advantage that Solzhenitsyn had over Tolstoy and Dostoevsky was that he happened to be anti-communist, but after 1991 that wasn't of so much interest any more either. Although I did read in the news that there is now a project to translate the whole of the *Red Wheel* cycle into English, I wonder what the inspiration is or who might be funding it.

*The centre of the novel, told from many points of view with a mixture of historical and fictional characters, the Russian defeat at Tannenberg at the beginning of the First World War. It is the first volume of an uncompleted cycle of books called The Red Wheel that was meant to take in WWI and the civil war in Russia.*

*There's not much to recommend about this book apart from the relative novelty of the subject matter to an English speaking audience. But even as a first world war novel it comes across as unusually heavy handed. On the whole I'd recommend Dr Zhivago or Red Cavalry in preference.*

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## Jim says

The First World War was so wasteful of human life on all sides. This shows the Russian high command to be as inept as the British High Command and the victims are the poor proletariat fighting in the trenches...it is not surprising the Russians revolted shortly after.

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## Guy Portman says

3.5 Stars

Set in the years leading up to The Revolution, this monumental book is Solzhenitsyn's interpretation of a turbulent period in his country's history, beginning with the outbreak of World War I. We follow Russia's invasion of East Prussia, a hapless campaign, culminating in the near destruction of the Second Army at the Battle of Tannenburg, and the suicide of its commanding general, the blundering Alexander Samsonov.

Subsequent sections encompass the life of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, and his assassin, the privileged socialist Dmitri Bogrov, who is implicated as an informer for the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana. Another segment is devoted to Tsar Nicholas II, Russia's last monarch.

Blending fact and fiction, August 1914 is a history novel that sees the author deviate from his familiar theme of Communist oppression, staged in gulag and cancer ward. Its eight hundred plus pages, dense prose, excruciating detail and challenging vicarious approach will deter many.

This is a presumptuous text with a didactic tone that leaves its ever-controversial creator open to accusations of hubris. Whilst August 1914 appealed to this reader, a Solzhenitsyn devotee, he would argue that the

author's consummate ability to develop character is eroded somewhat by the relentless detail and historical discourse.

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### **Capsguy says**

Ever wanted to smack someone in the face because of their insistent incompetency and blatant disregard for others just because of their own self-interests? Then you're going to have a lot of sympathy for the Russian soldiers who lost their lives in Russia's opening campaign in World War I.

As always, typical Russian/Solzhenitsyn epic, wide array of characters caught up in something bigger than them with each having different opinions on religion, politics, and society. Not as 'great' as Cancer Ward or In The First Circle, but definitely a text of great value if not for its historical referencing alone.

As others have noted, if you're not a big buff for World War I history, this may not be for you, as this was not written solely for a pretty little story for the reader to be able to fully appreciate without any background knowledge or willingness to look things up while reading the book.

If you're going to check this out, please check out some of the other works Solzhenitsyn has on offer, as his writing style is unique and some may not be so familiar with his ability of wittily critiquing some of the most serious topics, or the almost consistent debating of aforementioned topics throughout a nearly 900 page novel. The book itself is big (not speaking in terms of page numbers), with the text being relatively small, but as usual, the majority of readers will just read the abridged version and be under the delusion that they've read the same book.

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### **Eadweard says**

4.5

Just short of 5/5 because some bits I found really hard to get through and I say this as a fan of russian literature and history.

I wouldn't recommend this to someone who's just getting into russian literature. If you have no knowledge of the Battle of Tannenberg nor late 19th / early 20th century russian history and politics, you might as well do some reading first or else you won't enjoy the first 300 pages nor the rest of the book for that matter.

There's a long chapter in which he treats us to a history lesson about the Duma which reads like a really dry (but fun) history book, I can see why some people might dislike it (it was me and by the end of it I was getting tired).

Really engaging, fascinating events, dry at times, interesting cast of characters (but don't read it for them). I hope to read the next volume next year.

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## **Michael Perkins says**

the rest of the series to be rolled out in English....

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/201...>

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## **L Fleisig says**

Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn's ("A.S.") *August 1914: The Red Wheel* paints a marvelous portrait of Russia at the crossroads of the 20th century. By way of background, I read David Remnick's *Resurrection* about Russia's post-USSR struggles. Remnick writes a beautiful chapter on A.S., his life, his exile, Western Europe and the U.S. intelligentsia's dismissive treatment of him, and his return to Russia. Remnick's extraordinary discourse on A.S. is the perfect prelude to this work because it allows the reader to view the work with a greater respect for the man and his vision.

The work itself is compelling in its own right. Some have suggested that it would be helpful to have some background knowledge of the events leading up to W.W. I, the revolutionary ferment enveloping Russia between 1901 and 1917, and the "players" involved in that process. Fair enough comment, but not essential. The reader should not be scared off from this work merely because he/she does not consider themselves particularly knowledgeable about Russia. A.S.'s descriptions of the Battle of Tannenburg, the life and times of Stolypin and Bogrov, his assassin, make for both beautiful writing and a deeper understanding of the events that made the October revolution a foregone conclusion.

Finally, A.S.'s focus on the disastrous Battle of Tannenburg sheds great light on a critical battle that has not been more than cursorily examined by eminent historians such as Martin Gilbert or even Winston Churchill in his classic *World Crisis*. My sole disappointment was with A.S.'s use of what may be called the 'camera-eye' or multi-media type inserts. It seemed stale compared to its breathtaking freshness when used by Dos Passos in his *U.S.A.* trilogy. It also seemed to detract from the beauty and flow of the writing itself. (Looking back, Dos Passos didn't suffer from the distraction.) The reader with any interest in Russia, world history, military history, or just plain good literature should seriously consider reading this work.

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## **Sue says**

question whether I read this back in the day when I was reading Solzhenitsyn.

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## **Mimi says**

I correctly anticipated how appropriate it would feel to read this in August 2014 - exactly 100 years after the events in this novel. I did not anticipate how eager I would be to return each time to this amazing novel, discovering well drawn characters, a scathing indictment of Russian military culture at the beginning of the Great War, and a humbling and breathtaking faith. Definitely one to re-read.

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## **Carol says**

This is a must read book for anyone who is interested in almost any aspect of European literature and/or Russian history and literature. Solzhenitsyn has a way of writing that immediately involves the reader in the scene, the characters, the situation he creates. He develops characters that stay with one, and makes one want to read more and more about their lives. After this, I read *Cancer Ward* and *First Circle* and he creates worlds within worlds in these books as well.

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## **Ray says**

Bought secondhand and devoured in a single overnight reading. Back in the day when I could do an overnight read - my rock and roll years.

Re-read and enjoyed a couple of times since.

An excellent read.

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## **Walter says**

In this novel, Soviet Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitzyn takes on the theme of the Russian Army in the opening months of the First World War. This novel was exceptionally well written, and it is surprising to me that more enthusiasts of the First World War are not talking about it. Perhaps it's because the novel was written in the late 1960s, long after the heyday of Great War literature in the 1930s. Perhaps it's because the novel is about the Russian army and not one of the Western armies as the other great WWI novels are. Whatever the reason, this novel deserves more attention.

This novel centers around the great battle of Tannenburg in which the German army stopped and reversed the Russian advance into East Prussia. The novel is enthusiastically narrated and, in grand Russian tradition, takes on the viewpoints of a host of characters, including the great Russian and German commanders of the period as well as fictional soldiers and civilians of various backgrounds. Solzhenitzyn's goal was to express the incredible incompetence of the Russian generals. It was interesting to read about how the Russian armies in the first two weeks entered Germany practically unopposed and, if they had simply had military competence, they may have been able to do in 1914 what the Russian Armies did in 1812 and what the Soviet Armies did in 1943, which was to turn aside a great military machine and win a seemingly unwinnable war. Solzhenitsyn details the horrible leadership of the Russian aristocracy and points out how that, rather than the spirit of the Russian people, lost the war.

For fans of Russian literature, this novel is a gem. Certainly Solzhenitzyn had some ideological drums to beat in this novel, his novel is very realistic and quite appropriate given the horrible nature of the war. I would highly recommend this for fans of WWI military novels, Russian literature in general and Solzhenitsyn in specific.

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## Aaron Crofut says

I leave this book wondering why the Battle of Tannenberg isn't more widely studied by military history buffs. The Germans, initially caught off guard by the rapid speed of Russia's invasion of East Prussia, manage to defeat an enemy twice their size due to their better command structure, logistics, and by the incredible blunders made by their enemy, not least of which includes sending plans through telegraph wires without encoding them first. Though a work of fiction, the battle itself is presented accurately in its main points. It vividly illustrates von Clausewitz's notions of "fog of war"; Solzhenitsyn does an incredible job showing the confusion that reigns for an army commander even before contact is made with the enemy, as poor Samsanov does not even know where his own corps are, while higher command keeps sending contradictory orders that only reach the general days later. The notion of "friction" is keenly displayed as well. It is one thing to push a flag on a map, but it is quite enough for the thousands of hungry and tired soldiers that flag represents to push their way through forests and lakes without roads. An understanding of terrain is key in any battle, but it is one the Russian high command failed to grasp from their headquarters hundreds of miles to the rear. It also tends to help when the army commanders have even a basic respect for one another, rather than feuds going back decades, and when officers are appointed by seniority rather than skill one has to accept the consequences.

A very instructive work on command gone wrong. It's applications are by no means limited to the sphere of the military. As a literary work, it could have used some revisions (I skimmed chapters 61 and 62 out of a 64 chapter book), but in the main it was an enjoyable read. Characters like Samsanov and the fictional Voroyntsev are imminently likeable despite their flaws. Voroyntsev in particular keeps the story moving, the only staff officer from General Headquarters who "gets it" and spends time at the front.

Overall, the book was worth the time put into reading it. Solzhenitsyn always is.

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## Kim says

*"August 1914"* is a novel by Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about Imperial Russia's defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg in East Prussia. The novel was completed in 1970, first published in 1971, and an English translation was first published in 1972. The novel is an unusual blend of fiction narrative and historiography, and has given rise to extensive and often bitter controversy, both from the literary as well as from the historical point of view.

Now that first paragraph is directly from Wikipedia word for word. If I had written it I wouldn't have used the word "historiography" since I didn't know there was such a word and now have to go look it up, and that is exactly how I felt about this entire book. I was almost always confused about one thing or another and always having to go look something up, either paging back through the book when a character just seemed to pop up and I would have no idea who it was anymore so I'd have to go back and find him or her. Sometimes I never did find them. A lot of the time I just sat puzzling over why in the world the people in charge of the Russian armies would make the horrible decisions that they made. I was baffled over what these Generals seemed to be doing most of the time. Chapter 22 just disappeared altogether with a note at the end of Chapter 21 saying:

*"Chapter 22 is omitted at the author's request."*

I suppose I could look at the bright side and say that at least I was spared trying to figure out who was who for one chapter. There were lots and lots of people in this book. Some of them I would get interested in, then they would disappear never to be seen again. Near the beginning of the book we are introduced to a family by the name of Tomchak, I think. I got interested in these people, all with long, unsayable names; the father Zakhar Ferapontych, his wife Evdokia Ilinichna; their son, Roman and his wife, Irina (I forget their long names and I'm not looking them up again) and their daughter Xenya. Then they all just disappeared from the story and until even one of them ever entered it again - and only one did - 600 pages later I had forgotten who it was.

That's how this book was for me. The longest section of the book is military history with lots of fictional characters, outlining in every detail I can imagine several days of the disastrous Russian offensive against the Germans at the very beginning of the war. This was like reading an encyclopedia of military science to me. Now I have no idea how military science really should work, but if it works the way it did in *"August 1914"* I am amazed that anyone ever wins any war unless they just fight until everyone is dead and whoever has anyone left standing is the winner, or they all get sick of fighting and just agree to stop. Because if orders like the Russian armies were given daily happen in every army, no one can win. Early in the book some regiments of XIII Corps march through a forest and spend the night in Omuleffoffen wherever that is. The next morning they are ordered to march northward which they do for a while before being ordered westward, through the same forest they had marched the day before. All day they march until the sun is setting they finally stop to rest when:

*"Worried-looking officers on horseback gallop back and forth for an hour, though neither troops nor the junior officers were told anything. Finally, the regimental commander called for the senior officers, and once again with much creaking, shouting, confusion, and lashing of the horses in the gun teams, the entire divisional column turned around and marched back to where it had come from."*

I stopped reading here to try to figure out why the officers would have the men leave the town and then turn around and go back, but unable to solve the mystery I went back to the book and kept reading hoping it would soon be cleared up, it wasn't:

*"The peasants in uniform grew sullen and began muttering that their senior officers were all Germans and were purposely driving the troops to exhaustion and despair before they had even started fighting.....They did not stop at twilight but obediently retraced their steps, and the stars were out when they returned to the village of Omuleffoffen and lit their field kitchens in the same places as the day before."*

Solzhenitsyn can tell you better than I can how this first battle went:

*"Kabanov had been given no artillery support. His ammunition wagons had been unable to get through to his position, and as a result only one out of four of his machine guns could operate. Before long, there would be no rifle ammunition either. So in the fourteenth year of the twentieth century the only weapon against German artillery was the Russian bayonet. Evidently, the regiment was doomed to perish; but though the death sentence which he had to pronounce on every single man lay on his conscience, this did not affect the clarity with which he took the necessary decisions: where to draw his boundary lines, where to position strong points so that bayonet attacks could be made across the shortest possible stretches of ground, how to sell their lives most dearly, and how to gain as much time as possible. One such boundary Kabanov chose at Dereuten, where the high ground was favorable; one of his flanks was secured by a large lake, the other by a chain of smaller lakes. There the Dorogobuzh regiment stood and*

*held its ground throughout the bright, sunny afternoon and the evening. There they exhausted their ammunition; there they counter-attacked three times with the bayonet; there, at the age of fifty-three Colonel Kabanov was killed, and of every company fewer than one in twenty were left alive."*

Then there is this:

*"The column of men on foot is led into a cage for people, fenced in with barbed wire, so makeshift as to be little more than symbolic, on temporary poles stuck into the ground. Here the prisoners are strewn about on the bare earth, lying, sitting, clasping their heads, standing, walking, exhausted, some with their arms in slings, some bandaged, some unbandaged, some bruised, some with open wounds, and others, for some reason, in nothing but their underwear; some are barefoot and none of them, of course, has been fed. Mournful, forsaken, they look at us through the barbed wire.*

*A novel problem - how to hold so many people in an open field and prevent them from running away? Where are they to be put?*

*The novel solution - a concentration camp!*

*The fate of men for decades to come.*

*The herald of the twentieth century."*

This is all making my headache once again and giving me that "why can't everybody just leave everybody else alone" feeling. So I am done talking about *"August 1914"*. I should go and find something fun to read but believe it or not *"First Circle"* by the same author is next on the shelf and I doubt that it is fun to read. I know that if I read *"August 1914"* over again I would be less confused the second time, I would begin to know who all these people are and maybe even understand why they were doing the things they were doing, if I read it enough perhaps I would understand everything about it, I'm just not sure I have the energy for it. One last puzzling thing to me:

At this point the Germans are on one side of the "woods and hills" the Russians on the other. The both sides hold their ground, occasionally firing at each other, or rather in the direction of each other, dig fox holes, all that type of thing, the whole day goes by then as the sun sets there is this:

*"The sun set behind the lake, whence there soon rose a delicate new moon. The Russians who observed it saw it over their left shoulders, the Germans over their right."*

I used to sit and ponder how the sun set over the Russians shoulders and the Germans shoulders at the same time if they were facing each other, and if they weren't facing each other why are they holding their ground on the same side, and why would the Russians see it over one shoulder and the Germans over the other? I used to ponder it but I don't anymore, too many other confusing things came between us and I gave up. Ok, I'm going to look up the word historiography and then decide if I have the energy to tackle *"The First Circle"*. Perhaps I'll watch the sunset.

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## **Laura says**

*From BBC Radio 3 - Drama on 3:*

*A new adaptation for radio of Nobel Prize-winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's epic story of the first battle of the Eastern Front in 1914 - which was a disaster for Russia. Solzhenitsyn's book was published in the West one year after he won the prize - with sections about Lenin omitted. It was only after his expulsion from the USSR that the complete book was available. This new production is narrated by Fiona Shaw.*

*In August 1914, Colonel Vorotyntsev advances into East Prussia in search of the elusive front line. As he encounters the truth about the German war-machine his military ideals rapidly tarnish and he must decide whether to volunteer his men for certain death or retreat. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian advance met with catastrophic results. Bungled orders, poor and insufficient supplies, out-dated equipment and tactics, and deliberate misinformation resulted in chaos and the near-annihilation of the army at the hands of the Germans. Three years later the tsarist regime fell as Lenin led the October Revolution.*

*Dramatised by Robin Brooks from the translation by H.T.Willett*

*Sound Nigel Lewis & Catherine Robinson*

*BBC Cymru Wales production.*

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