



Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, set out in their motorcade in Sarajevo on the morning of the assassination, June 28, 1914.

## MURDER IN SARAJEVO

It was a perfect day for a parade. Crowds lined the parade route, waiting to catch a glimpse of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the imperial throne of Austria-Hungary, seat of the thousand-year-old Hapsburg Empire. Smiling expansively and nodding to the crowd, the archduke was riding in an open car through the streets of Sarajevo on the fateful Sunday morning of June 28, 1914. Sophie, his wife, sat beside him, wearing a broad-brimmed hat to shield her cheerful, plump face from the summer sun.

Franz Ferdinand had brushed aside warnings that his visit was unwelcome and that his presence in Sarajevo might in fact be dangerous. Sarajevo was the capital of Bosnia, a rebellious province recently annexed by Austria-Hungary, usually referred to simply as Austria. The people of Bosnia included a large number of Serbs, who

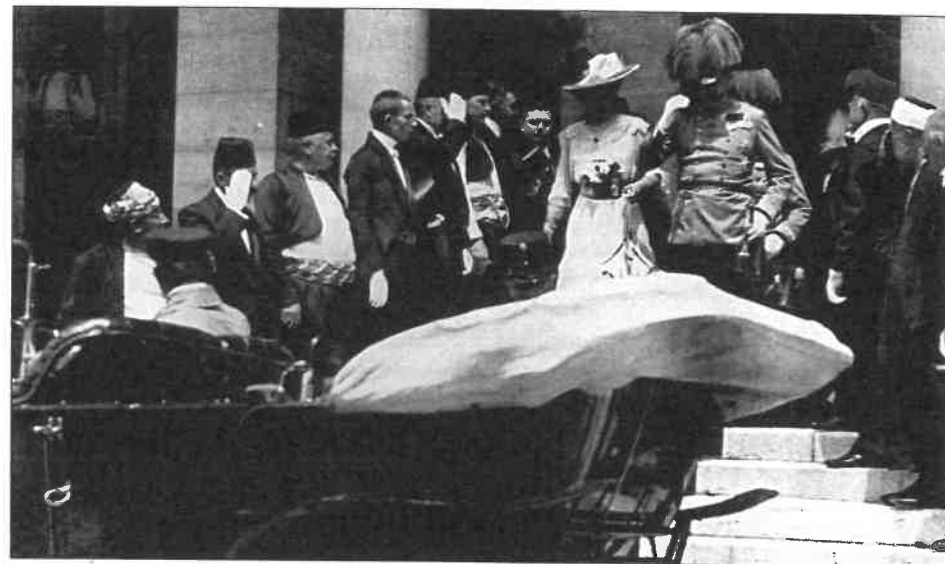
resented being ruled by foreigners. They wanted to free Bosnia from Austrian domination and make the province part of the independent Kingdom of Serbia, their own national state.

Scattered among the crowds that morning were six young terrorists. Five of them were teenagers, university students of Serbian descent who had been born and raised in Bosnia. All were members of a revolutionary organization called Young Bosnia. They had been recruited, trained, and armed by the Black Hand, a secret group dedicated to the expansion of the Kingdom of Serbia and the liberation of all Serbs living under foreign rule. Their mission was to strike a blow against Austria and the Hapsburg monarchy by assassinating Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Their battle cry was "Death to the tyrant!"

As the terrorists waited in the crowd, events were spinning crazily out of control. The leader of the Black Hand, known by the code name Apis, had masterminded the assassination plot. Now he was having second thoughts. An assassination, he feared, might lead to war between little Serbia and its powerful neighbor Austria. Apis dispatched a message to the terrorists, ordering them to abandon their plan. But it was too late. The assassins were dead set on moving forward. One of them would later tell an interviewer that in going to Sarajevo "he only wanted to die for his ideals."

And while the terrorists did not know it, the man they intended to kill was actually sympathetic to their cause. Franz Ferdinand was to eventually inherit the Hapsburg crown from his eighty-three-year-old uncle, Emperor Franz Joseph, and he planned to give the Bosnian Serbs a greater voice in the Austro-Hungarian government.

As the imperial motorcade drove toward Sarajevo City Hall, one of the terrorists hurled a small bomb at Franz Ferdinand's passing car. The bomb landed in the street and exploded against the next



car in the procession, spraying shrapnel and injuring two officers on the archduke's staff. After the would-be assassin was captured and the injured men were taken to a hospital, Franz Ferdinand insisted on continuing to City Hall, where he was greeted by the mayor. "So you welcome your guests here with bombs?" the archduke remarked with some anger.

At the formal welcoming ceremony, the mayor delivered his prepared speech as though nothing unusual had happened. Franz Ferdinand then asked to be driven to the hospital so he could visit the two wounded officers. He wanted his wife to stay safely behind, but Sophie insisted on accompanying him. The governor of Bosnia had assured the royal couple that the police were fully in

After being greeted by the mayor, Franz Ferdinand and Sophie descend the steps of Sarajevo City Hall to their waiting motorcar, a few minutes before they are shot.

control. There would be no further trouble, he promised. The terrorists would not dare to strike twice in one day.

And so the imperial motorcade set forth again. On the way to the hospital, the archduke's driver took a wrong turn. Realizing his mistake, he stopped the car, shifted gears, and prepared to turn around. By chance, the leader of the terrorist gang, nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip, happened to be standing on the pavement a few feet away. Princip had melted unnoticed into the crowd after his accomplice had thrown the bomb. Now he saw his chance. He stepped forward, pulled out his revolver, pointed it at the archduke's car, and fired twice.

At first it appeared that no one had been hurt, Franz Ferdinand and Sophie remained calm and upright in their seats. But as their car sped away, blood began to spurt out of Franz Ferdinand's mouth.

"For heaven's sake!" Sophie cried. "What's happened to you?" Then she slumped forward, her head falling into her husband's lap.

"Sophie, dear. Sophie, dear, don't die!" Franz Ferdinand pleaded. "Stay alive for our children!" Members of his staff crowded frantically around him, pulling open his coat, trying to see where he had been shot. "It's nothing," he gasped. "It's nothing."

Sophie died almost instantly. The bullet that killed her had passed through the door of the car, striking her in the groin and severing an artery. The archduke, shot in the neck, bled to death within a few minutes.

Gavrilo Princip, the teenage assassin, tried to shoot himself in the head but was overwhelmed by members of the crowd. As he struggled, he managed to swallow a vial of cyanide, a deadly poison that each member of the gang was carrying. But the cyanide was old and only made him vomit. He was arrested on the spot. Later, in prison, he expressed his regret at Sophie's death. He had not meant to shoot her.



Above: The assassin, at right, is hauled away by the police.

Right: Nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip. He died of tuberculosis in his prison cell four years after the assassination.

Two of Princip's accomplices had also been captured. They confessed that they had been armed in Serbia and smuggled across the Austrian border with the help of Serbian border guards.

Austria had long regarded the Serbian kingdom on its borders as a threat. The Serbs had won their independence in 1878, after centuries of resistance to Turkish rule. They had greatly expanded their territory and population during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. The Serbian government was dedicated to the idea of a "Greater Serbia" and to the liberation of all Serbs living under foreign rule.

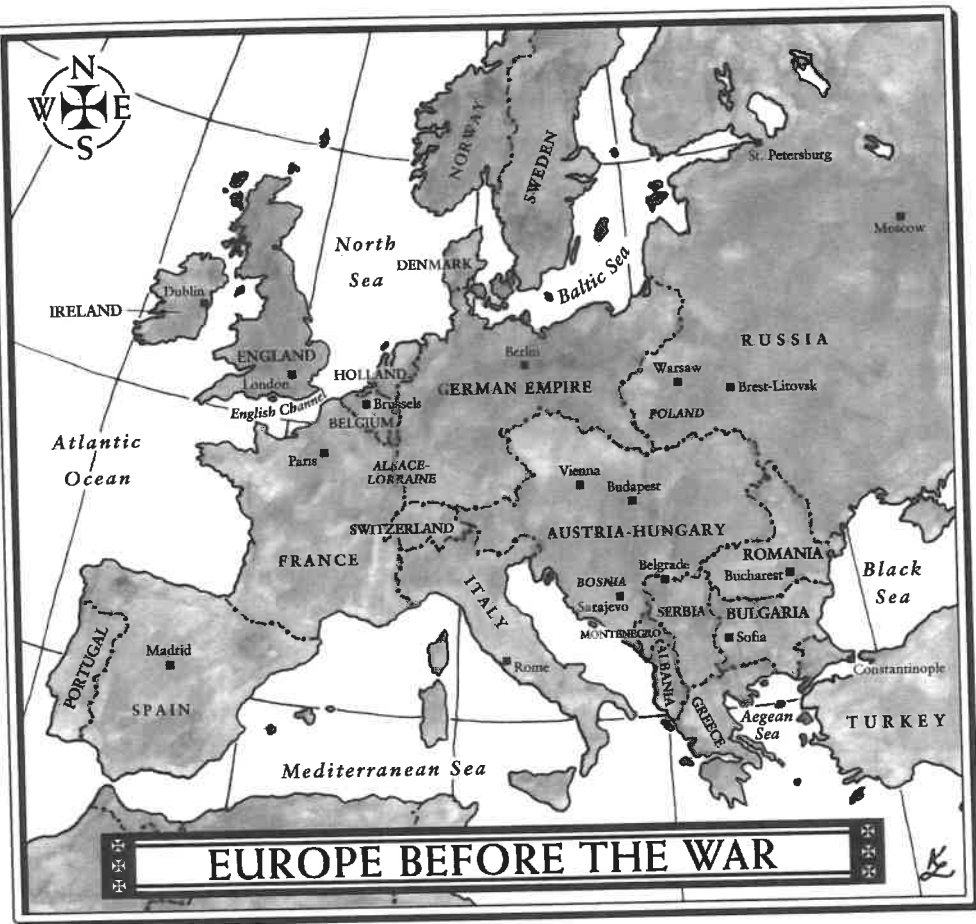
The assassination of Franz Ferdinand convinced high-ranking Austrian officials that a war was necessary to curb Serbia's



ambitions. Serbia "must be eliminated as a power factor in the Balkans," warned Count Leopold von Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister. Berchtold predicted a swift Austrian victory over Serbia, with no wider repercussions.

"The Serbs must be disposed of, and that right soon!" declared Kaiser Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany, Austria's closest ally. Other European leaders were not so sure. They feared that an Austrian war against Serbia might set off a deadly chain reaction, pulling in other nations, such as Serbia's ally, Russia.

Europe's Great Powers, as they called themselves, considered their options and began to eye one another warily. Several crises in the recent past had been resolved peacefully by diplomacy. A peaceful resolution was the hope of Sir Arthur Nicholson of the British Foreign Office. "The tragedy which has just taken place in Sarajevo," he wrote, "will not, I trust, lead to further complications."



## ARMED TO THE TEETH

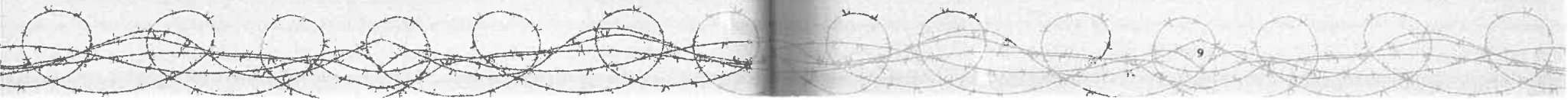
European powers had been fighting one another for centuries, but as the summer of 1914 began, Europe was at peace. Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite and founder of the Nobel Peace Prize, had predicted that his powerful explosives might very well put an end to all war. Rather than annihilate one another, the nations of Europe would have to settle future disputes through negotiation and compromise.

Close economic ties among European countries also made a major war seem unlikely. Prosperity depended on international trade and cooperation.

In addition, there were blood ties linking Europe's royal houses. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and King George V of Great Britain, grandsons of Britain's Queen Victoria, were cousins. Czar Nicholas II of Russia was a cousin by marriage: His wife, Alexandra, was one of Victoria's granddaughters. Another granddaughter, Ena,



The crowned heads of Europe—some of whom would soon be at war—were assembled in 1910 for the funeral of British king Edward VII. Edward's son and successor, George V, is seated at center. Standing behind him is his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. Albert, king of the Belgians, stands next to the kaiser, on his right.



was queen of Spain. Except for France and Switzerland, every nation in Europe was a monarchy, and almost every European head of state was related to every other.

Most Europeans looked forward to a peaceful future. "The world is moving away from military ideals," declared the influential British journal *Review of Reviews*, "and a period of peace, industry, and world-wide friendship is dawning." It was easy enough to ignore the rivalries and suspicions among Europe's great powers that spelled trouble ahead.

Germany was an ambitious young nation. The German states had become a united country only in 1871, as a result of victorious wars against Austria and France. By 1914, the German Empire, with its dynamic economy and industrial might, had emerged as the most powerful nation on the continent of Europe. Germany was competing with its neighbors for trade, influence, and colonies overseas.

Great Britain and France, the leading colonial powers, ruled much of the world beyond Europe's shores. They each possessed a far-flung network of overseas colonies, a source of immense wealth and national pride. Germany, a latecomer to the race for overseas possessions, had only a few colonies in Africa and the Pacific. Striving to be recognized as a world power as well as a European power, Germany sought to extend its influence in the few remaining areas of the world that were not under European rule.

The Germans already had a big army, equipped with the latest weapons. To compete for colonies, Germany's leaders decided that they also needed a modern oceangoing navy that could challenge Britain's centuries-old command of the seas. German shipyards



rushed to build a fleet powerful enough to engage Britain's Royal Navy in battle.

Britain relied on its navy to safeguard the trade routes that brought riches to the small, densely populated British Isles and helped feed the British people. Germany's ambitions were seen as a threat to Britain's naval dominance. British leaders responded by launching an ambitious shipbuilding program of their own. So along with a rivalry to grab overseas colonies, Britain and Germany engaged in a costly competition to build bigger and better battleships.

If Britain felt challenged by Germany's aggressive push to become a world power, Germany felt threatened by France and Russia, its neighbors to the west and east. The French had suffered a humiliating defeat in their war with Germany in 1870-71, when France was forced to surrender the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, a loss that France could neither forgive nor forget. Fear and resentment of Germany had drawn France into a military

German battleships steam into the North Sea. Germany's race to build a powerful navy was seen as a threat to Britain's command of the seas.

Russian troops parade in honor of French president Raymond Poincaré during his state visit to Russia, July 1914.

alliance with Russia, which also looked upon the newly powerful German Empire on its border as a threat.

Germany's chief ally was Austria-Hungary, an unwieldy empire of several major religions and numerous languages and nationalities, including large numbers of Serbs who wanted to break away from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and declare their independence. The Serbs, like the Russians, were among the Slavic-speaking peoples of eastern Europe. They looked to Russia for protection and support. Austria-Hungary, determined to hold its rickety empire together, suspected Russia of deliberately encouraging unrest.

Rivalries among Europe's Great Powers had led to an elaborate network of military alliances, in which one nation pledged to support another in the event of war. Germany and Austria-Hungary had joined with Italy in what was called the Triple Alliance. France and Russia had an alliance of their own. And Britain, while avoiding formal alliances, had signed ententes (understandings) with both France and Russia, forming what was known as the Triple Entente.

As the European nations chose up sides, they were busily arming themselves. Military leaders warned that it was essential to be

strong and prepared, as a warning to any aggressor. So along with the naval armaments race between Britain and Germany, European nations were competing in an arms race on land. Seeking security in military superiority, they recruited ever larger armies and navies, piled up more and more of the latest new weapons, and built wider and stronger fortifications along their national borders.

This arms buildup alarmed some observers. Czar Nicholas II warned that "the accelerating arms race" was "transforming the armed peace into a crushing burden that weighs on all nations and, if prolonged, will lead to the very cataclysm it seeks to avert."

On June 28, 1914, the day that Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, the major European powers all had large standing armies. And they were all armed to the teeth.

The assassination triggered a diplomatic crisis. Austria blamed the government of Serbia for the royal murders and for constantly stirring up trouble. Austrian foreign minister Berchtold called for a "final and fundamental reckoning with Serbia."

Austria issued an ultimatum—a list of demands—that, if accepted, would compromise Serbia's independence. The Austrians knew that an attack on Serbia might draw in Russia, Serbia's champion. So before delivering the ultimatum, Austria obtained a pledge of support from its ally, Germany, in the event of a war.

The Austrian ultimatum was delivered to the Serb capital, Belgrade, on July 23, 1914. When the Serbs refused to meet the Austrian demands, Austria declared war, confident of German support if the war spread.

On July 28, Austrian guns fired across the Danube River, at that time the boundary between the two countries, lobbing shells into nearby Belgrade and hitting a hospital. "Windows were shattered to smithereens," reported a Serbian doctor, "and broken glass



Kaiser Wilhelm directing the German army's 1906 maneuvers. He took great pride in his role as All Highest War Lord.



covered many floors. Patients started screaming. Some got out of their beds, pale and bewildered. Then there was another explosion, and another one, and then silence again. So, it was true! The war had started.”

Austria now began to mobilize its armed forces, calling up hundreds of thousands of reserve troops and moving men into combat positions. Mobilization in any country was a lengthy process that could take weeks. Once the Austrians had assembled their troops, they planned to march into Serbia and settle the score by means of a swift offensive. Meanwhile, diplomats hurried back and forth between European capitals, exchanging notes, hoping to contain any fighting and avoid a wider conflict.

The Russians were not eager to intervene, but they could not simply abandon their fellow Slavs of Serbia. Russian generals persuaded Czar Nicholas to order a partial mobilization, in response to Austria’s full-scale preparation for war. If Russia reacted quickly and forcefully, perhaps Austria would take note and hold back. The German ambassador to Russia warned that Russian mobilization would compel Germany to gather its troops in turn, “and that then a European war could scarcely be prevented.”

Alarmed at the prospect of war, Czar Nicholas appealed directly to his cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm. “To try and avoid such a calamity as a European war,” the czar telegraphed, “I beg you in the name of our old friendship to do what you can to stop your allies from going too far.” The telegram was signed “Nicky.”

Before he received the czar’s telegram, the kaiser had sent the czar a telegram of his own, signed “Your very sincere and devoted friend and cousin, Willy.” “I am exerting my utmost influence,” he wrote, “to induce the Austrians to deal straightly to arrive [at] a satisfactory understanding with you.”

But Austria was determined to punish Serbia. And by now, Germany had responded to Russia’s move by ordering a partial

mobilization of its own. When word of the German action reached the Russian capital, Czar Nicholas, after much hesitation, ordered the full mobilization of Russia’s armed forces. “Think of the responsibility which you are asking me to take!” the czar told his foreign minister. “Think of the thousands and thousands of men who will be sent to their death!”

Austria’s threats of war had set off an escalating chain reaction. As one country’s mobilization led to another, the rush of events overwhelmed the ability of diplomats to resolve the crisis. From then on, military calculations rather than diplomacy guided decisions in every European capital. Europe’s leaders began to act as though war were inevitable.

Mobilizing a nation’s armed forces has been compared to drawing a gun. Theoretically, the nation that has its forces ready first gains a huge military advantage. An army that fails to take the offensive in time might be destroyed before it can complete its preparations.

With Russia preparing for war on its eastern border, Germany decided that it must order a full mobilization too—unless Russia halted its plans. The Germans now dispatched ultimatums to both Russia and its ally France, warning that “[German] mobilization will follow unless Russia suspends war measures against ourselves and Austria-Hungary.” The ultimatum to France declared, “Mobilization inevitably means war,” and demanded a guarantee of French neutrality.

On August 1, Britain’s King George V telegraphed his cousin Czar Nicholas: “I cannot help thinking that some misunderstanding has produced this deadlock. I am most anxious not to miss any possibility of avoiding the terrible calamity which at present threatens the whole world.”

But the king’s message arrived too late. Earlier that evening, the German ambassador to Russia, Count Friedrich von Pourtales,



Czar Nicholas II and his future wife, Alexandra, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. This was their official engagement photo.



requested a meeting with Russian foreign minister Sergei Sazonov. The two diplomats were old friends. Pourtales, visibly upset, asked Sazonov if Russia was prepared to answer the German ultimatum. Sazonov, as he recalled the meeting years later, replied that it was not possible to stop the Russian mobilization that was now under way. Even so, Russia wanted to continue negotiations and hoped to avoid a war.

"In that case, sir, I am instructed by my government to hand you this note," Pourtales said. He pulled a paper from his pocket and handed Sazonov a declaration stating that because of Russia's continued mobilization, a state of war now existed between Russia and Germany.

At this point, the German ambassador burst into tears, and Sazonov began to weep too. The men embraced, then pulled apart.

"This is a criminal act of yours," Sazonov told the German ambassador. "The curses of the nations will be upon you."

"We are defending our honor," the ambassador replied.

"Your honor was not involved," Sazonoff said. "You could have prevented the war by one word; you didn't want to."

Then Sazonov escorted the tearful German ambassador to the door. The two friends never saw each other again.

France, like Russia, rejected the German ultimatum and declared a general mobilization. On August 3, convinced that French forces were about to attack its western border, Germany declared war on France.

Germany had a secret military plan that would go into effect if the Germans faced a two-front war against France and Russia. German troops would immediately sweep through France, occupy Paris, and knock France out of action in the west before Russia had enough time to fully mobilize. Germany could then shift its forces to the east, avoiding a lengthy war on two fronts. The intricate German war plan called for the deployment of a million troops transported by 11,000 trains according to a precise

timetable. Once set in motion, the plan could not be stopped without putting Germany at a crippling disadvantage.

The Germans had demanded free passage through neutral Belgium in order to attack France. When the Belgians refused, Germany declared war on Belgium. On August 4, 1914, German troops marched across the Belgian border. Britain had been watching events from across the English Channel, its critical sea route to

Cheered and saluted by a patriotic crowd, a German cavalry regiment parades through Berlin as it leaves for the war front, August 1914. Their traditional spiked headgear will soon be replaced by more practical steel helmets.





A woman marches alongside French troops as they leave for the front, August 1914.

the outside world, and now felt threatened. Britain declared war on Germany, joining France and Russia. During the next few days, Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia, while France and Britain declared war on Austria-Hungary.

And so Europe was caught up in a war that few had expected

and almost no one wanted. Even today, historians continue to debate the tangled and confusing causes of the conflict, the series of accidents, blunders, and misunderstandings that swept the nations of Europe toward war in the summer of 1914, whether war might have been avoided, and which persons or nations were most responsible. Wars in the past had often been caused by countries seeking more land or natural resources, or acting out of suspicion and fear of their rivals. And once a country is fully armed and poised to attack, war, it seems, is hard to avoid.

The events that unfolded as Europe careened toward catastrophe appeared to defy logic and common sense. Austria had wanted to punish Serbia, and then, one by one, other nations were drawn into the quarrel. To support Austria in its conflict with Russia over Serbia, Germany had attacked France by invading Belgium. And Britain had declared a state of war throughout the vast British Empire. In the rush of events, the Kingdom of Serbia, supposedly the cause of the war, had almost been forgotten.

Each nation believed that it was fighting a defensive war forced upon it by someone else. And each army was convinced that it could defeat its enemies within a few months and that the troops would be home by Christmas.