

Time Machine (1914): Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand starts WWI

By Washington Times on 04.26.16

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Level **MAX**



Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife, Sophie, emerge from the Sarajevo Town Hall to board their car, a few minutes before the assassination that sparked World War I. Photo: Karl Tröstl

Newsela Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Sept. 23, 1914, edition of The Washington Times. Its tone of voice and style of multiple dispatches are typical of the newspapers of the time. The article used Servia and Servian for Serbia and Serbian.

The bullet fired by Gabriel Prinzip into the brain of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, came almost straight from the Servian government itself, insisted the Austro-Hungarians. Twenty-five days after the assassination, Austria-Hungary sent a note of demands to Servia. Servia had countenanced criticism of Austria-Hungary, the note declared. It had permitted its newspapers and its people to carry on movements in behalf of Slavs in Austro-Hungarian dependencies. It said that the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand had been planned at the Servian capital. Officers in the Servian army had helped Gabriel Prinzip, the Servian high school boy, to get a revolver and ammunition with which to perform the deed. Servian government officials along the border had helped Prinzip to cross into Bosnia on his journey to Serajevo. Austria-Hungary demanded that Servia, within forty-eight hours, must print in the official Servian paper these exact words:

"The royal government of Serbia condemns the propaganda against Austria-Hungary, which has the aim of separating Austria-Hungary from some of her dependencies."

Opposed Servian Free Press

The note also demanded that Serbia must curb its free press and its speech in order to stop criticism of Austria-Hungary and it must change its system of education so that in the schools nothing should be taught the children that would cause them to hate Austria-Hungary. Serbia must also discharge from its army certain officers whom the Austro-Hungarians would name and who had spoken too freely in regard to the crime of June 29.

Serbia was given forty-eight hours in which to comply with all of these demands.

Prinzip's bullet has been flying twenty-six days, directly toward its target. It will soon cut the string which holds European civilization hanging over the precipice of war. It will soon reach the powder magazine over which Europe has been resting these many years. It will soon reach the heart of peace and kill her.

That same night, the night of July 23, the statesmen of Russia, in distant St. Petersburg, received a cablegram from Serbia.

"Help!" it said.

The Russian statesmen talked for four hours about it in the country home of M. I. Goremykin. They reached some decision, secretly. At 7 o'clock in the evening they dashed off in their automobiles to their various offices, each then to do his own work in connection with what was at hand.

By this time the armies of Europe were mobilizing.

Serbia's 48 hours were up on July 26 at six in the evening. But before that time the Russian army was moving toward Germany, and the German army was moving toward Russia and in a dozen other different directions.

Prinzip's bullet had reached its target.

It had struck the mine under Europe and this mine will probably kill a million men and create more havoc and anything else that has ever happened to humanity.

What Prinzip really said or thought after he committed the assassination is not publicly known. The Servian government, in a note, said that he said:

"I was not influenced by any other person or persons. The reading of anarchist literature made me believe that there could be nothing finer in the world than to be an assassin. When in Belgrade I read that the archduke was going to Serajevo, and so I bought a revolver and went there."

But what he said or thought matters little now. Europe is not fighting because Prinzip is a murderer, but because the long and ancient quarrel for "a place in the sun," a place for each nation to put its feet in the crowded land has suddenly been turned from a contest of words and diplomacy into combat on the battlefields.

Some jolt would have set off the European mine, some time.

It just happened that Prinzip's bullet did it.

Quiz

- 1 According to the article, each of the following contributed to the beginning of World War I EXCEPT:
- (A) the assassination of the archduke
 - (B) the long-standing desire for power and land
 - (C) the uneasy relationships between different European countries
 - (D) Austria-Hungary's quest for domination over the European continent
- 2 Which sentence best summarizes how the assassination affected Austria-Hungary?
- (A) Austria-Hungary was sure that Serbian government was behind it and demanded the country submit to its authority or else it would declare war.
 - (B) Austria-Hungary recognized that the gunman was probably a lone anarchist, but still threatened the Serbian government in order to assert its power.
 - (C) Austria-Hungary tried to talk with Serbian leaders in private to solve the problem but when Serbia would not talk, Austria-Hungary declared war.
 - (D) Austria-Hungary conducted a thorough investigation of the assassination and tried to change its policies toward the Serbs, but it was too late: war was on its way.
- 3 Read the following paragraph from the article.

Prinzip's bullet has been flying twenty-six days, directly toward its target. It will soon cut the string which holds European civilization hanging over the precipice of war. It will soon reach the powder magazine over which Europe has been resting these many years. It will soon leach the heart of peace and kill her.

Which words or phrases MOST help to show that these countries have been on the brink of war for some time?

- (A) bullet has been flying; directly toward its target
- (B) cut the string; hanging over the precipice; powder magazine
- (C) holds European civilization; Europe has been resting
- (D) these many years; leach the heart of peace

- 4 Read the following sentences from the article.

Prinzip's bullet had reached its target.

It had struck the mine under Europe and this mine will probably kill a million men and create more havoc and anything else that has ever happened to humanity.

What does the author mean by "target"?

- (A) the archbishop
- (B) Austria-Hungary and its empire
- (C) the tensions upon which Europe existed
- (D) the false set of alliances that would prove untrustworthy

Answer Key

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