

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

By Washington Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.26.16

Word Count **835**

Level **1030L**



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.

On June 28, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was shot and killed as he traveled by car through the streets of Sarajevo. The assassin, a young man named Gabriel Prinzip, was part of a group of Serbian political activists fighting for greater independence from Austria-Hungary.

Setting Off A War

By killing the archduke, Prinzip set in motion a war that now threatens to suck in all of Europe.

The assassination came after years of conflict between Austria-Hungary and the Serbian people. Some Serbians see Austria-Hungary as an oppressive foreign power and believe that Serbians deserve more political freedom. The Archduke was a symbol of Austrian-Hungarian power and an heir to the throne.

According to Austria-Hungary, however, the Serbian government was at least partly to blame for the sudden act of violence. Twenty-five days after the assassination, Austria-Hungary sent a note of demands to Serbia. The note criticized the government for allowing hatred of Austria-Hungary to spread among Serbians, and it accused Serbia of collaborating with the assassins, claiming that the murder had been planned in the Serbian capital.

A List Of Demands

The note also claimed that officers in the Serbian army helped Prinzip, a Serbian high school boy, to get a revolver and ammunition with which to perform the deed. Additionally, it accused Serbian government officials of having helped Prinzip reach Serajevo, where the killing took place.

Angry about the assassination, Austria-Hungary's leaders presented the Serbian government with several demands. First, they insisted that the government publicly come out against the anti-Austrian-Hungarian political movement. Second, they demanded that Serbia place limits on the freedom of press and the freedom of speech in Serbia in order to prohibit criticism of Austria-Hungary. Third, Austria-Hungary demanded changes to the Serbian education system to ensure that schools would not teach students to hate Austria-Hungary. Finally, Serbia was asked to fire certain army officials who, according to Austria-Hungary, supported the Serbian independence fighters.

Serbia was given just 48 hours to meet these demands. If Serbia was unwilling to meet the demands, Austria-Hungary would declare war.

Serbia To Russia: "Help!"

Such a war could draw in all of Europe due to the complicated alliances between European countries. Germany has pledged to defend Austria-Hungary, and Russia is an ally of Serbia. So, as Austria-Hungary and Serbia prepared to fight, so too did Germany and Russia. When Germany began gearing up for war, its rivals France and Great Britain did the same.

What started as a dispute over Serbian independence is now set to pull all of Europe into war. It is as if Europe had been resting on a battery of explosives, and Prinzip lit a match.

On the night of July 23, a few weeks after the assassination, statesmen in Russia received a cablegram from Serbia.

"Help!" it said.

Armies Ready To Fight

The Russian statesmen talked about the message for four hours. Russia was Serbia's ally, but taking their side in the conflict with Austria-Hungary meant risking war with Germany. The Russians reached a secret decision at 7 o'clock in the evening and dashed off in their automobiles to their various offices, each doing his part to prepare for what was coming.

Meanwhile, the armies of Europe were already getting ready to fight.

Serbia's 48 hours were up on July 26 at 6 in the evening. By that time, the Russian army was moving toward Germany, and the German army was moving toward Russia, and in a dozen other different directions.

Predicting The Worst War Ever

Prinzip's bullet set all that in motion. It ignited the explosives under Europe, and the fire about to break loose will probably kill a million men. This war may create more destruction than anything else that has ever happened to humanity.

Did Prinzip know what he was doing when he pulled the trigger? We cannot know for sure. According to the Serbian government, following the assassination, Prinzip 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."

A Long And Ancient Quarrel

What he said or thought matters little now, though. Europe is not fighting because Prinzip is a murderer. The real reasons for the war have to do with the long and ancient quarrel for "a place in the sun," a place for each nation to put its feet in the crowded land. This quarrel has suddenly been turned from a contest of words and into a war of nations.

Perhaps war was unavoidable. Some jolt would have set off the European explosion, at some time. It just happened that Prinzip's bullet did it.

Quiz

- 1 How does the author characterize Prinzip's involvement?
- (A) He may have acted alone, although Austria-Hungary thought he was helped along by the Serbian government.
 - (B) He acted alone and without help from the Serbian government because he was motivated by the pursuit of freedom.
 - (C) He was probably assisted by the Serbian government, which hoped that his actions would spark a world war and help Serbia gain independence.
 - (D) He was clearly assisted by the Serbian government, although he claimed when questioned that he acted alone and was inspired by anarchist readings.
- 2 Which of the following is the BEST way to explain how all of Europe became pulled into a dispute between two countries?
- (A) After a politically motivated assassination, several countries joined together to fight terrorism and restore peace and safety to Europe.
 - (B) After a politically motivated assassination, one country threatened another with war, which dragged in country after country to the conflict because of a series of alliances and general instability.
 - (C) One large country was oppressing a small country, which was making several neighboring countries nervous. When the small country decided to fight back by assassinating the large country's leader, the other countries jumped in the fight to restore balance to the region.
 - (D) The assassination divided the European continent into two camps: those who understood the reasons for the assassination and those who thought the assassination was wrong. The countries were pulled into the fight because of their strong beliefs about this issue.

- 3 Read the passage from the section "Setting Off A War".

The note criticized the government for allowing hatred of Austria-Hungary to spread among Serbians, and it accused Serbia of collaborating with the assassins, claiming that the murder had been planned in the Serbian capital.

Which word would BEST replace "collaborating"?

- (A) talking
 - (B) working
 - (C) training
 - (D) listening
- 4 Read the passage from the section "Serbia To Russia: Help!"

What started as a dispute over Serbian independence is now set to pull all of Europe into war. It is as if Europe had been resting on a battery of explosives, and Prinzip lit a match.

What is the meaning of "battery" in this context?

- (A) an energy cell
- (B) an electrical appliance
- (C) a series of several things
- (D) a crime of physical contact

Answer Key

- 1 How does the author characterize Prinzip's involvement?
- (A) **He may have acted alone, although Austria-Hungary thought he was helped along by the Serbian government.**
 - (B) He acted alone and without help from the Serbian government because he was motivated by the pursuit of freedom.
 - (C) He was probably assisted by the Serbian government, which hoped that his actions would spark a world war and help Serbia gain independence.
 - (D) He was clearly assisted by the Serbian government, although he claimed when questioned that he acted alone and was inspired by anarchist readings.
- 2 Which of the following is the BEST way to explain how all of Europe became pulled into a dispute between two countries?
- (A) After a politically motivated assassination, several countries joined together to fight terrorism and restore peace and safety to Europe.
 - (B) **After a politically motivated assassination, one country threatened another with war, which dragged in country after country to the conflict because of a series of alliances and general instability.**
 - (C) One large country was oppressing a small country, which was making several neighboring countries nervous. When the small country decided to fight back by assassinating the large country's leader, the other countries jumped in the fight to restore balance to the region.
 - (D) The assassination divided the European continent into two camps: those who understood the reasons for the assassination and those who thought the assassination was wrong. The countries were pulled into the fight because of their strong beliefs about this issue.

- 3 Read the passage from the section "Setting Off A War".

The note criticized the government for allowing hatred of Austria-Hungary to spread among Serbians, and it accused Serbia of collaborating with the assassins, claiming that the murder had been planned in the Serbian capital.

Which word would BEST replace "collaborating"?

- (A) talking
 - (B) working**
 - (C) training
 - (D) listening
- 4 Read the passage from the section "Serbia To Russia: Help!"

What started as a dispute over Serbian independence is now set to pull all of Europe into war. It is as if Europe had been resting on a battery of explosives, and Prinzlip lit a match.

What is the meaning of "battery" in this context?

- (A) an energy cell
- (B) an electrical appliance
- (C) a series of several things**
- (D) a crime of physical contact