

Princip, Gavrilo (1894 -1918) Born: Oblej. The Bosnian-Serb who shot and killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and set the wheels of world war in motion.

Gavrilo Princip was born the fourth of nine children (six died in infancy). His father worked as a postman. Gavrilo, never in robust health, attended high school in Sarajevo and Tuzla, but in 1912 traveled to Belgrade for a more Serb-nationalist education. There he became an active propagandist for the Greater Serbian cause.

He was admitted to Major Tankosic's Black Hand partisan academy in 1912, but his poor health rendered him unfit for active duty. Two years later, Tankosic recruited Princip and two others for a plot to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Because of his earlier partisan training, Princip was the best shot of the three and showed leadership qualities.

The assassination was ultimately successful. (See the [Sarajevo](#) article for a fuller account.) Police rescued Princip from the mob, many of whom wanted to kill him. Once in custody, Princip and Cabrinovic managed to confuse their amateurish interrogators, revealing nothing of the Black Hand organization and sponsorship of the plot. Danilo Ilic's confession nearly brought down their house of cards, but during the trial (in which all the defendants were present) Princip was quietly able to exercise his leadership. The code of silence held.

While some of the defendants expressed remorse over their crime, Princip maintained his silence about the Black Hand with a stoic detachment. His final statement in court was short.

" In trying to insinuate that someone else has instigated the assassination, one strays from the truth. The idea arose in our own minds, and we ourselves executed it. We have loved the people. I have nothing to say in my defense."

Princip was found guilty. Whether he would receive the death penalty or a prison term hinged on his exact birthday. One oaccount had him turn 20 days before the crime, another that he turned 20 a few days after . The court gave Princip the benefit of the doubt, and sentenced him to 20 years in prison. He died in the hospital of Theresienstadt prison on April of 1918, from tuberculosis of the bone.

Black Hand

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Black Hand, or **Crna Ruka**, officially **Ujedinjenje ili Smrt** ("Unification or Death"), a secret association founded in [Serbia](#) by pan-Serbian nationalists in May [1911](#) with the intention of uniting all of the territories containing Serb populations (notably [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#), annexed by [Austria-Hungary](#) in October [1908](#)). The society's implication in the June [1914 Sarajevo](#) assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria helped sparked off [World War I](#).

The group encompassed a range of ideological outlooks, from conspiratorially-minded army officers to idealistic youths, sometimes tending towards republicanism

despite the acquiescence of nationalistic royal circles in its activities (the movement's leader, Col. Dragutin Dimitrijevič or "Apis", had been instrumental in the June [1903](#) coup which had brought King Peter Karadjordjevič to the Serbian throne following 45 years of rule by the rival Obrenovič dynasty).

In May [1917](#) Dimitrijevič was tried on charges of plotting against the royal government, then based in Thessaloniki, Greece following Serbia's occupation by Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian forces in late [1915](#). His subsequent execution signalled the Black Hand's eclipse by the monarchist White Hand, which was to dominate the political outlook of military leaders in the inter-war [Yugoslav](#) kingdom.

Gavrilo Princip ([July 25, 1894](#) (or [1895](#)) - [April 28, 1918](#)) was a the [Bosnian Serb](#) nationalist whose [assassination](#) of [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria](#), heir to the [Austro-Hungarian](#) throne, and his wife Countess Sophie in [Sarajevo](#) on [June 28, 1914](#), prompted the [Austrian](#) action against [Serbia](#) that led to [World War I](#).

Born in [Obilježje](#), [Bosnia](#), Princip was a member of the pro-Serbian group "Young Bosnia" (*Mlada Bosna*), which advocated Bosnia's unification with Serbia. The group was equipped with pistols and bombs supplied by the [Black Hand](#), a [secret society](#) with links to Serbian military, government and royal circles. Austrian demands for power to investigate the conspiracy within Serbia led to the outbreak of war on [July 28, 1914](#). Having been too young at the time of the assassination to face the death penalty, Princip received the maximum sentence of twenty years in prison, where he was held in harsh conditions worsened by the war, and he died of [tuberculosis](#) of the bone on [April 28, 1918](#).

Gavrilo and his six cohorts were inexperienced with weapons, and it was only due to a freakish set of coincidences that they were successful. The first member of the group attempted a shooting from an upstairs window, but the range on his gun was insufficient. The second member threw a bomb (or a stick of [dynamite](#), according to some reports) at the car, but missed. The explosion destroyed the following car, killing its driver and wounding the passengers. The assassin tried to escape, but was beaten to death by the crowd. The next four never got a chance due to the heavy crowds, and it was beginning to look like the assassination would fail. However, Franz Ferdinand decided to visit the victims of the explosion in the hospital. Princip had gone to a nearby shop for a sandwich, apparently giving up, when Ferdinand's car drove past. Princip shot Sophie in the head, killing her instantly, and Ferdinand in the chest, but after that his gun locked and he was arrested. The wound sustained by Ferdinand normally wouldn't be fatal, but because he had his suit sewn shut (he was a very vain man, and couldn't stand the sight of a crease) he bled to death in the time it took to cut the suit open.

The gun used by Princip was a Browning M 1910 semi-automatic pistol in 7.65x17mm (.32 ACP) caliber.

World War I or the First World War, 1914 - 1918, was the first [war](#) that involved nations spanning more than half the globe, hence *world* war.

It was commonly called "**The Great War**" or sometimes "the war to end wars" until [World War II](#) started, although the name "First World War" was coined as early as 1920 by Lt-Col à Court Repington in *The First World War 1914-18*.

Diplomatic origins

Though triggered by the assassination ([June 28, 1914](#)) of the heir to the [Austro-Hungarian](#) throne, [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria](#) in [Sarajevo, Bosnia](#) at the hands of a pro-[Serbian](#) nationalist assassin (a Bosnian Serb student named [Gavrilo Princip](#)), the war's origins lie in the complex relations of the European powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The [Franco-Prussian War](#) of 1870-71 had brought not only the establishment of a powerful and dynamic [German Empire](#), but also a legacy of animosity between [France](#) and Germany following the latter's annexation of the formerly French territory of [Alsace-Lorraine](#). Under the political direction of her first Chancellor, [Otto von Bismarck](#), Germany secured her new position in Europe by an alliance with Austria-Hungary and a diplomatic understanding with [Russia](#).

The accession (1888) of Emperor [Wilhelm II](#) brought to the German throne a young ruler determined to direct policy himself, despite his rash diplomatic judgment. After the [1890](#) elections, in which the centre and left parties made major gains, and due in part to his disaffection at inheriting the Chancellor who had guided his grandfather for most of his career, Wilhelm engineered Bismarck's resignation.

Much of the fallen Chancellor's work was undone in the following decades, as Wilhelm failed to renew the arrangement with Russia, presenting republican France with the opportunity to conclude (1891-94) a full alliance with the Russian Empire. Worse was to follow, as Wilhelm undertook (1897-1900) the creation of a German navy capable of threatening [Britain's](#) century-old naval mastery, prompting the Anglo-French [Entente Cordiale](#) of [1904](#) and its expansion (1907) to include Russia.

Rivalry among the powers was exacerbated from the 1880s by the scramble for colonies which brought much of [Africa](#) and [Asia](#) under European rule in the following quarter-century. Even the once hesitantly imperialistic Bismarck became an advocate of overseas Empire, adding to Anglo-German tension as German acquisitions in Africa and the Pacific threatened to impinge upon British strategic and commercial interests. Wilhelm's support for [Moroccan](#) independence from France, Britain's new strategic partner, provoked the [Tangier Crisis](#) of [1905](#). During the Second Moroccan or [Agadir Crisis](#) ([1911](#)), a German naval presence in Morocco tested the Anglo-French coalition once again.

A key ingredient in the emerging diplomatic powder-keg was the growth of powerful nationalist aspirations among the [Balkan](#) states, which each looked to Germany, Austria-Hungary or Russia for support. The rise of anti-Austrian circles in Serbia following a 1903 palace coup contributed to a further crisis in [1908](#) over Austria's unilateral annexation of [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), German pressure forcing a

humiliating climbdown on the part of a Russia weakened (1905) by defeat at the hands of [Japan](#) and subsequent revolutionary disorder

Alarm at Russia's unexpectedly rapid recovery after 1909 fuelled feeling among German ruling circles in favour of a pre-emptive war to break alleged Entente "encirclement" before Russian rearmament could tip the strategic balance decisively against Germany and Austria-Hungary. By 1913 both France and Germany were planning to extend military service, while Britain had entered into a naval convention and military discussions with France during the previous year.

The outbreak

Austrian regional security concerns grew with the near-doubling of neighbouring Serbia's territory as a result of the [Balkan Wars](#) of [1912-1913](#). Franz Ferdinand's assassination in June 1914 provided the opportunity sought by some Austrian leaders for a reckoning with the smaller Slav kingdom. The Sarajevo conspirators were alleged by the Austro-Hungarian authorities to have been armed by the shadowy [Black Hand](#), a pan-Serb nationalist grouping with links to Serbian ruling circles.

With German backing, Austria-Hungary, acting primarily under the influence of Foreign Affairs Minister Leopold von Berchtold, sent an effectively unfulfillable 15-point ultimatum to Serbia ([July 23, 1914](#)), to be accepted within 48 hours. The Serbian government agreed to all but one of the demands. Austria-Hungary nonetheless broke off diplomatic relations ([July 25](#)) and declared war ([July 28](#)) through a telegram sent to the Serbian government.

The Russian government, which had pledged in 1909 to uphold Serbian independence in return for Serbia's acceptance of the Bosnia annexation, [mobilized](#) its military reserves on [July 30](#) following a breakdown in crucial telegram communications between Wilhelm and [Tsar Nicholas II](#), who was under pressure by his military staff to prepare for war. Germany demanded ([July 31](#)) that Russia stand down her forces, but the Russian government persisted, as [demobilization](#) would have made it impossible to re-activate its military schedule in the short term. Germany declared war against Russia on ([August 1](#)) and, two days later, against the latter's ally [France](#).

The outbreak of the conflict is often attributed to the alliances established over the previous decades - Germany-Austria-[Italy](#) vs. France-Russia; Britain and Serbia being aligned with the latter. In fact none of the alliances was activated in the initial outbreak, though Russian general mobilization and Germany's declaration of war against France were motivated by fear of the opposing alliance being brought into play.

Britain's declaration of war against Germany ([August 4](#)) was officially the result not of her understandings with France and Russia (Britain was technically allied to neither power), but of Germany's invasion of [Belgium](#), whose independence Britain had guaranteed to uphold ([1839](#)), and which stood astride the planned German route for invasion of Russia's ally France.

Who's Who: Gavrilo Princip

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Gavrilo Princip (1894-1918) was born in June or July 1894, the son of a postman. One of nine children, six of whom died in infancy, Princip's health was poor from an early age: his eventual death was caused by tuberculosis.

After attending schools in Sarajevo and Tuzla, Princip left for Belgrade in May 1912. While in Serbia Princip joined the secret Black Hand society, a nationalist movement favouring a union between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

Princip was one of three men sent by [Dragutin Dimitrijevic](#), the chief of the Intelligence Department in the Serbian Army and head of the Black Hand, to assassinate [Archduke Franz Ferdinand](#), the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, during his visit to Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. Ferdinand had accepted the invitation of General [Oskar Potiorek](#) to inspect army manoeuvres in his capacity of Inspector General of the army. The other men sent to assassinate Ferdinand were Nedjelko Cabrinovic, and Trifko Grabez.

The three men were instructed to commit suicide after killing the Archduke. To this end they were each given a phial of cyanide, along with a [revolver](#) and [grenades](#). Each of the men suffered from tuberculosis and consequently knew that they did not have long to live; meanwhile, Dimitrijevic did not wish any of the men to live to tell who was behind the assassination.

The prime minister of Serbia was given advance warning of the assassination plot, and whilst a sympathiser of the Black Hand's objectives - Bosnia-Herzegovina achieving independence from Austro-Hungary - he feared war with Austria-Hungary should an assassination attempt be successful. He therefore gave orders for the arrest of the three men as they left the country; his orders were not acted upon however.

Once in Bosnia-Herzegovina the three men met up with six fellow conspirators and travelled onwards to Sarajevo.

Franz Ferdinand arrived in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, a Sunday, and was met at the railway station by General Potiorek, to be taken on to the city hall for the reception and speeches.

Seven members of the Black Hand lined the route due to be taken by the Archduke's cavalcade along Appel Quay. One of the men, Nedjelko Cabrinovic, threw a grenade at the Archduke's car. The driver took evasive action and quickly sped from the scene. The grenade bounced off the back of the Archduke's car and rolled underneath the next car, exploding seconds later; two of its occupants were severely wounded.

Cabrinovic swallowed his cyanide capsule as instructed, and jumped into the River Miljacka. He did not die however, but was captured and arrested. It is speculated that the capsule contained nothing other than a harmless water-based solution.

Ferdinand attended the reception at the city hall and complained vociferously about his reception at the city.

"What is the good of your speeches? I come to Sarajevo on a visit, and I get bombs thrown at me. It is outrageous!"

Archduke Franz Ferdinand interrupting the Mayor's welcome speech at Sarajevo's city hall, 28 June 1914.





Following the reception the Archduke determined to visit those injured in the grenade explosion at the city hospital. General Potiorek decided that the motorcade should take an alternate route to the hospital, avoiding the city centre altogether. However the driver of Ferdinand's car, Franz Urban, was not informed of the change of plan and so took the original route.

Turning into Franz Joseph Street, General Potiorek, who was a passenger in Ferdinand's car, noticed that the altered route had not been taken. He remonstrated with the driver who in turn slowed the car and then began to reverse out of the street.

Gavrilo Princip, who happened to be in Franz Joseph Street at a cafe, seized his opportunity, and took aim at Ferdinand from a distance of five feet. His bullets struck the Archduke in the neck and his wife, Sophie, who was travelling with him, in the abdomen.

Urban drove the car to the governor's residence at Konak; the couple died soon afterwards.

After the shooting Princip made to turn his gun upon himself but was seized and restrained by a man nearby, aided by several policemen. He was arrested and taken to a police station.

In total eight men were charged with treason and Franz Ferdinand's murder. However under Austro-Hungarian law capital punishment could not be applied to anyone under the age of 20 when the crime was committed. Gavrilo Princip, whose precise date of birth could not be firmly established at his trial, was therefore imprisoned for the maximum duration, twenty years. He died however of tuberculosis on 28 April 1918.