



How close did the world come to peace in 1914?

Assassination in Sarajevo

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Video transcript

On 28 June, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was in Sarajevo to inspect the Austro-Hungarian imperial armed forces. A show of strength for the local population whose country had recently been made part of the empire.

For nationalists, the 28 June was a day of great significance, the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 – a symbol of Serbian national resistance.

The worst possible day for a visit by an Austrian overlord.

In an open-top car Franz Ferdinand travelled along the Appel Quay, Sarajevo's main road, towards the City Hall.

Seven nationalist assassins were able to place themselves along the route.

One of them hurled a bomb at the car. It bounced off and exploded under a car in the Archduke's motorcade, wounding an officer and several bystanders.

The Archduke and his entourage carried on to the City Hall.

Franz Ferdinand wanted to visit an officer wounded in the earlier attack. So, General Potiorek, Governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, decided they should travel along the now empty and safer Appel Quay.

At 10:45 am they left the city hall. But it seems that perhaps the new route had not been given to the driver.

What happened next changed history forever. One of the Serbian terrorists, Gavrilo Princip, was on the corner of Appel Quay and Franz Josef Street.

As the driver momentarily struggled to find the reverse gear, Princip seized his opportunity. He was able to get so close that the two shots he fired killed both the Archduke and his wife.

It was an extraordinary sequence of events.

Why wasn't the day's schedule cancelled after the first, unsuccessful, attack? Was the driver told of the change of route? What if Princip had gone somewhere else?

It's tantalising to think how easily the assassination might have been avoided.

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