
Opening Extract from...

Catastrophe

Europe Goes to War 1914

Written by Max Hastings

Published by William Collins

MAX HASTINGS

CATASTROPHE

EUROPE GOES TO WAR 1914

WILLIAM
COLLINS

William Collins
An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
77–85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB
www.harpercollins.co.uk

Published by William Collins in 2013

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Max Hastings asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

HB ISBN 978-0-00-739857-7
TPB ISBN 978-0-00-746764-8

Endpapers: (front) 'Punting on the Thames, Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire, 1897' by Burton Holmes (Burton Holmes Historical Collection); (back) Corpses of German soldiers after the Battle of the Marne (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)

Typeset in Minion by G&M Designs Limited,
Raunds, Northamptonshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

For

PENNY

who does the real work

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Illustrations

Images of the campaigns of 1914 are rare. Those professing to portray combat are often posed or faked, and many contemporary captions are wilfully or accidentally inaccurate. The pictures in this book have been chosen with these realities in mind, to give the most vivid possible impression of what the battlefields looked like, while recognising that few can be appropriately placed and dated, while some predate the war.

Kaiser Wilhelm II (Popperfoto/Getty Images)
Poincaré and the Tsar, St Petersburg, July 1914 (© Interfoto/Alamy)
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Potiorek (Getty Images)
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Austrian troops conduct a mass execution of Serbian civilians (© Robert Hunt Library/Mary Evans)

An Austrian siege piece (Photo12/Ann Ronan Picture Library)
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Bülow (© INTERFOTO/Alamy)
French troops, before the deluge (© Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)
Belgians in action (Underwood Archives/Getty Images)
The legendary French *soixante-quinzes* (Roger-Viollet/Rex Features)
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Frenchmen display offensive spirit (Mirrorpix)
Austro-Hungarian cavalry in Galicia (© Robert Hunt Library/Mary Evans)
The British deploy on their first battlefield (© IWM (Q 53319))
British troops await the enemy
Samsonov (DeAgostini/GettyImages)
Russians under attack
Russian prisoners after Tannenberg (© Robert Hunt Library/Mary Evans)
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Fortunino Matania's painting of L Battery's action at Néry (© David Cohen Fine Art/Mary Evans Picture Library)
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A Suffolk girl at the handle of a Lowestoft tram (© IWM (Q 31032)
Russian soldiers in bivouac (David King Collection)
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The Western Front, winter 1914 (© SZ Photo/Scherl/The Bridgeman Art Library)
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A family flees a battlefield (Mirrorpix)

British soldiers in Belgium, winter 1914 (K.W. Brewster/The Liddle Collection/Leeds University Library. Photograph LC GS 0195)

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Maps

Author's note: The movements of the vast armies in 1914 were so complex that it is impossible to depict them cartographically in detail. In these maps I have striven for clarity for non-specialist readers, for instance by omitting divisional numbers except where essential. They are generally based upon the maps in Arthur Banks's *A Military Atlas of the First World War* (Heinemann, 1975).

As commandant of the British Army's staff college in 1910, Brigadier-General Henry Wilson asserted the likelihood of a European war, and argued that Britain's only prudent option was to ally itself with France against the Germans. A student ventured to argue, saying that only 'inconceivable stupidity on the part of statesmen' could precipitate a general conflagration. This provoked Wilson's derision: 'Haw! Haw! Haw!!! Inconceivable stupidity is just what you're going to get.'

'We are readying ourselves to enter a long tunnel full of blood and darkness' ANDRÉ GIDE, 28 July 1914

A bantering Russian foreign ministry official said to the British military attaché on 16 August: 'You soldiers ought to be very pleased that we have arranged such a nice war for you.' The officer answered: 'We must wait and see whether it will be such a nice war after all.'

Introduction

Winston Churchill wrote afterwards: 'No part of the Great War compares in interest with its opening. The measured, silent drawing together of gigantic forces, the uncertainty of their movements and positions, the number of unknown and unknowable facts made the first collision a drama never surpassed. Nor was there any other period in the War when the general battle was waged on so great a scale, when the slaughter was so swift or the stakes so high. Moreover, in the beginning our faculties of wonder, horror and excitement had not been cauterized and deadened by the furnace fires of years.' All this was so, though few of Churchill's fellow participants in those vast events embraced them with such eager appetite.

In our own twenty-first century, the popular vision of the war is dominated by images of trenches, mud, wire and poets. It is widely supposed that the first day of the 1916 Battle of the Somme was the bloodiest of the entire conflict. This is not so. In August 1914 the French army, advancing under brilliant sunshine across a virgin pastoral landscape, in dense masses clad in blue overcoats and red trousers, led by officers riding chargers, with colours flying and bands playing, fought battles utterly unlike those that came later, and at even more terrible daily cost. Though French losses are disputed, the best estimates suggest that they suffered well over a million casualties* in 1914's five months of war, including 329,000 dead. One soldier whose company entered its first battle with eighty-two men had just three left alive and unwounded by the end of August.

The Germans suffered 800,000 casualties in the same period, including three times as many dead as during the entire Franco-Prussian War. This also represented a higher rate of loss than at any later period of the war. The British in August fought two actions, at Mons and Le Cateau, which entered their national legend. In October their small force was plunged into the

* The term 'casualties' signifies soldiers killed, missing, wounded or captured.

three-week nightmare of the First Battle of Ypres. The line was narrowly held, with a larger French and Belgian contribution than chauvinists acknowledge, but much of the old British Army reposes forever in the region's cemeteries: four times as many soldiers of the King perished in 1914 as during the three years of the Boer War. Meanwhile in the East, within weeks of abandoning their harvest fields, shops and lathes, newly mobilised Russian, Austrian and German soldiers met in huge clashes; tiny Serbia inflicted a succession of defeats on the Austrians which left the Hapsburg Empire reeling, having by Christmas suffered 1.27 million casualties at Serb and Russian hands, amounting to one in three of its soldiers mobilised.

Many books about 1914 confine themselves either to describing the political and diplomatic maelstrom from which the armies flooded forth in August, or to providing a military narrative. I have attempted to draw together these strands, to offer readers some answers, at least, to the enormous question: 'What happened to Europe in 1914?' Early chapters describe how the war began. Thereafter, I have traced what followed on the battlefields and behind them until, as winter closed in, the struggle lapsed into stalemate, and attained the military character that it retained, in large measure, until the last phase in 1918. Christmas 1914 is an arbitrary point of closure, but I would cite Winston Churchill's remarks above, arguing that the opening phase of the conflict had a unique character which justifies examining it in isolation. My concluding chapter offers some wider reflections.

The outbreak has been justly described as the most complex series of happenings in history, much more difficult to comprehend and explain than the Russian Revolution, the onset of World War II or the Cuban missile crisis. This part of the story is inevitably that of the statesmen and generals who willed it, of the rival manoeuvres of the Triple Alliance – Germany and Austria-Hungary with Italy as a non-playing member – against the Triple Entente of Russia, France and Britain.

In today's Britain, there is a widespread belief that the war was so horrendous that the merits of the rival belligerents' causes scarcely matter – the *Blackadder* take on history, if you like. This seems mistaken, even if one does not entirely share Cicero's view that the causes of events are more important than the events themselves. That wise historian Kenneth O. Morgan, neither a conservative nor a revisionist, delivered a 1996 lecture about the cultural legacy of the twentieth century's two global disasters, in which he argued that 'the history of the First World War was hijacked in the 1920s by the critics'. Foremost among these was Maynard Keynes, an

impassioned German sympathiser who castigated the supposed injustice and folly of the 1919 Versailles Treaty, without offering a moment's speculation about what sort of peace Europe would have had if a victorious *Kaiserreich* and its allies had been making it. The contrast is striking, and wildly overdone, between the revulsion of the British people following World War I, and their triumphalism after 1945. I am among those who reject the notion that the conflict of 1914–18 belonged to a different moral order from that of 1939–45. If Britain had stood aside while the Central Powers prevailed on the continent, its interests would have been directly threatened by a Germany whose appetite for dominance would assuredly have been enlarged by victory.

The seventeenth-century diarist John Aubrey wrote: 'About 1647, I went to see Parson Stump out of curiosity to see his Manuscripts, whereof I had seen some in my childhood; but by that time they were lost and disperst; his sons were gunners and souldiers, and scoured their gunnes with them.' All historians face such disappointments, but the contrary phenomenon also afflicts students of 1914: there is an embarrassment of material in many languages, and much of it is suspect or downright corrupt. Almost all the leading actors in varying degree falsified the record about their own roles; much archival material was destroyed, not merely by carelessness but often because it was deemed injurious to the reputations of nations or individuals. From 1919 onwards Germany's leaders, in pursuit of political advantage, strove to shape a record that might exonerate their country from war guilt, systematically eliminating embarrassing evidence. Some Serbs, Russians and Frenchmen did likewise.

Moreover, because so many statesmen and soldiers changed their minds several times during the years preceding 1914, their public and private words can be deployed to support a wide range of alternative judgements about their convictions and intentions. An academic once described oceanography as 'a creative activity undertaken by individuals who are … gratifying their own curiosity. They are trying to find meaningful patterns in the research data, their own as well as other people's, and far more frequently than one might suppose, the interpretation is frankly speculative.' The same is true about the study of history in general, and that of 1914 in particular.

Scholarly argument about responsibility for the war has raged through decades and several distinct phases. A view gained acceptance in the 1920s and thereafter, influenced by a widespread belief that the 1919 Versailles Treaty imposed unduly harsh terms upon Germany, that all the European

powers shared blame. Then Luigi Albertini's seminal work *The Origins of the War of 1914* appeared in Italy in 1942 and in Britain in 1953, laying the foundations for many subsequent studies, especially in its emphasis on German responsibility. In 1961 Fritz Fischer published another groundbreaking book, *Germany's War Aims in the First World War*, arguing that the *Kaiserreich* must bear the burden of guilt, because documentary evidence showed the country's leadership bent upon launching a European war before Russia's accelerating development and armament precipitated a seismic shift in strategic advantage.

At first, Fischer's compatriots responded with outrage. They were members of the generation which reluctantly accepted a necessity to shoulder responsibility for the Second World War; now, here was Fischer insisting that his own nation should also bear the guilt for the First. It was too much, and his academic brethren fell upon him. The bitterness of Germany's 'Fischer controversy' has never been matched by any comparable historical debate in Britain or the United States. When the dust settled, however, a remarkable consensus emerged that, with nuanced reservations, Fischer was right.

But in the past three decades, different aspects of his thesis have been energetically challenged by writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Among the most impressive contributions was that of Georges-Henri Soutou, in his 1989 work *L'Or et le sang*. Soutou did not address the causes of the conflict, but instead the rival war aims of the allies and the Central Powers, convincingly showing that rather than entering the conflict with a coherent plan for world domination, the Germans made up their objectives as they went along. Some other historians have ploughed more contentious furrows. Sean McMeekin wrote in 2011: 'The war of 1914 was Russia's war even more than it was Germany's.' Samuel Williamson told a March 2012 seminar at Washington's Wilson Center that the theory of explicit German guilt is no longer tenable. Niall Ferguson places a heavy responsibility on British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey. Christopher Clark argues that Austria was entitled to exact military retribution for the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand upon Serbia, which was effectively a rogue state. Meanwhile John Rohl, magisterial historian of the Kaiser and his court, remains unwavering in his view that there was 'crucial evidence of intentionality on Germany's part'.

No matter – for the moment – which of these theses seems convincing or otherwise: suffice it to say there is no danger that controversy about 1914 will ever be stilled. Many alternative interpretations are possible, and

all are speculative. The early twenty-first century has produced a plethora of fresh theories and imaginative reassessments of the July crisis, but remarkably little relevant and persuasive new documentary material. There is not and never will be a 'definitive' interpretation of the coming of war: each writer can only offer a personal view. While I make plain my own conclusions, I have done my best to rehearse contrary evidence, to assist readers in making up their own minds.

Contemporary witnesses were as awed as are their twenty-first-century descendants by the immensity of what befell Europe in August 1914 and through the months and years that followed. Lt. Edward Louis Spears, British liaison officer with the French Fifth Army, reflected long afterwards: 'When an ocean liner goes down, all on board, great and small alike, struggle with equal futility and for about the same time, against elements so overwhelming that any difference there may be in the strength or ability of the swimmers is insignificant compared to the forces against which they are pitted, and which will engulf them all within a few minutes of each other.'

Once the nations became locked in strife I have emphasised the testimony of humble folk – soldiers, sailors, civilians – who became its victims. Although famous men and familiar events are depicted here, any book written a century on should aspire to introduce some new guests to the party, which helps to explain my focus on the Serbian and Galician fronts, little known to Western readers.

One difficulty in describing vast events that unfolded simultaneously on battlefields many hundreds of miles apart is to decide how to present them. I have chosen to address theatres in succession, accepting some injury to chronology. This means readers need to recall – for instance – that Tannenberg was fought even as the French and British armies were falling back to the Marne. But coherence seems best served by avoiding precipitate dashes from one front to another. As in some of my earlier books, I have striven to omit military detail, divisional and regimental numbers and suchlike. Human experience is what most readily engages the imagination of a twenty-first-century readership. But to understand the evolution of the early campaigns of World War I, it is essential to know that every commander dreaded 'having his flank turned', because the outer edges and rear of an army are its most vulnerable aspects. Much that happened to soldiers in the autumn of 1914, alike in France, Belgium, Galicia, East Prussia and Serbia, derived from the efforts of generals either to attack an open flank, or to escape becoming the victim of such a manoeuvre.

Hew Strachan, in the first volume of his masterly history of World War I, addressed events in Africa and the Pacific, to remind us that this became indeed a global struggle. I decided that a similar canvas would burst through the frame of my own work. This is therefore a portrait of Europe's tragedy, which heaven knows was vast and terrible enough. In the interests of clarity, I have imposed some arbitrary stylistic forms. St Petersburg changed its name to Petrograd on 19 August 1914, but I have retained throughout the old – and modern – name. Serbia was commonly spelt 'Servia' in contemporary newspapers and documents, but I have used the former, even in quotations. Hapsburg citizens and soldiers are here often described as Austrians rather than properly as Austro-Hungarians, save in a political context. After the first mention of an individual whose full name is 'von', as in von Kluck, the honorific is omitted. Place-names are standardised so that, for instance, Mulhouse loses its German designation as Mülhausen.

Though I have written many books about warfare, and especially about the Second World War, this is my first full-length work about its forerunner. My own engagement with the period began in 1963, when as a callow school-leaver in my 'gap year', I was employed as an assistant researcher on BBC TV's epic twenty-six part series *The Great War* at a salary of £10 a week, at least £9 more than I was worth. Programme writers included John Terraine, Correlli Barnett and Alistair Horne. I interviewed and corresponded with many veterans of the conflict, then merely entering old age, and explored both the published literature and archive documents. I embraced that youthful experience as one of the happiest and most rewarding of my life, and some of the fruits of my 1963–64 labours have proved useful for this book.

My generation of students eagerly devoured Barbara Tuchman's 1962 best-seller *August 1914*. It came as a shock, a few years later, to hear an academic historian dismiss her book as 'hopelessly unscholarly'. It remains nonetheless a dazzling essay in narrative history, which retains the unembarrassed affection of many admirers, including myself, in whom it contributed significantly to stimulating a passion for the past. Those days will exercise an undying fascination for mankind: they witnessed the last fatal flourishes of the old crowned and cockaded Europe, followed by the birth of a terrible new world in arms.

MAX HASTINGS
Chilton Foliat, Berkshire
June 2013

1914 Chronology

28 June	Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo
23 July	Austria-Hungary's ultimatum delivered to Serbia
28 July	Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia
29 July	Austrians bombard Belgrade
31 July	Russia mobilises,* German ultimatums dispatched to Paris and St Petersburg
1 August	Germany and France mobilise
3 August	Germany declares war on France
4 August	Germany invades Belgium, Britain declares war on Germany
8 August	French briefly occupy Mulhouse in Alsace
13 August	Austrians invade Serbia, French launch major thrusts into Alsace and Lorraine
15 August	First Russo-Austrian clashes in Galicia
16 August	Last fort of Liège falls to the Germans
20 August	Serbs inflict defeat on Austrians at Mount Cer
20 August	Brussels falls
20 August	French repulsed at Morhange
20 August	Germans defeated at Gumbinnen in East Prussia
22 August	France loses 27,000 men killed in one day of the abortive 'Battles of the Frontiers'
21–23 August	Battle of Charleroi
23 August	British Expeditionary Force fights first action at Mons
24–29 August	Battle of Tannenberg

* Mobilisation dates are confusing, because in all cases preliminary military measures had been adopted earlier, and in most cases heads of state signed the formal decrees after troops began to move.

26 August	BEF fights at Le Cateau
28 August	Battle of Heligoland Bight
29 August	Battle of Guise
2 September	Austrian fortress of Lemberg falls to the Russians
6 September	France launches Marne counter-offensive
7 September	Austrians renew invasion of Serbia
9 September	Germans begin retreat to the Aisne
9 September	Battle of the Masurian Lakes
23 September	Japan declares war on Germany
9 October	Antwerp falls
10 October	Austrian fortress of Przemyśl falls to the Russians
12 October	Flanders campaign begins, climaxing in three-week First Battle of Ypres
29 October	Ottoman Empire enters the war on the side of the Central Powers
18–24 November	Battle of Łódź, ending in German withdrawal
2 December	Belgrade falls
15 December	Austrian army in Galicia driven back to the Carpathians
17 December	Austrians once more expelled from Serbia

The Organisation of Armies in 1914

The structure of each belligerent's forces and the size of their sub-units varied, but it may be helpful to offer readers a very rough crib:

An ARMY might be composed of anything from two to five CORPS (each usually commanded by a lieutenant-general). A corps comprised two or three infantry DIVISIONS (commanded by major-generals), each with an establishment of 15–20,000 men – cavalry divisions averaged about one-third of that strength – together with support, engineer and logistics units, and usually some heavy artillery. A British division might consist of three BRIGADES (commanded by brigadier-generals), all with their own guns – so-called field artillery – ideally in the proportion of at least one battery for each infantry battalion. Some continental armies placed regiments of two or three battalions directly under divisional command. A British infantry brigade, meanwhile, usually consisted of four BATTALIONS, initially about 1,000 strong apiece, commanded by lieutenant-colonels. A battalion had four rifle COMPANIES of two hundred men, each led by a major or captain, together with a support echelon – machine-guns, transport, supply and suchlike. A company had four rifle PLATOONS commanded by lieutenants, with forty men apiece. Cavalry regiments, each of four to six hundred men, were instead divided into squadrons and troops. All these 'establishment' strengths diminished fast under the stress of battle.

Prologue

SARAJEVO

The quirky little melodrama that unfolded in Bosnia on 28 June 1914 played the same role in the history of the world as might a wasp sting on a chronically ailing man who is maddened into abandoning a sickbed to devote his waning days to destroying the nest. Rather than providing an authentic 'cause' for the First World War, the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was exploited to justify unleashing forces already in play. It is merely a trifling irony of history that a teenage terrorist killed a man who, alone among the leaders of the Hapsburg Empire, would probably have used his influence to try to prevent a cataclysm. But the events of that torrid day in Sarajevo exercise a fascination for posterity which must be indulged by any chronicler of 1914.

Franz Ferdinand was not much loved by anyone save his wife. A corpulent fifty-year-old, one of the Hapsburg Empire's seventy archdukes, he became heir to the throne after his cousin Crown Prince Rudolf shot himself and his mistress at Mayerling in 1889. The Emperor Franz Joseph resented his nephew; others considered him an arrogant and opinionated martinet. Franz Ferdinand's ruling passion was shooting: he accounted for some 250,000 wild creatures to his own gun, before ending his days in Gavrilo Princip's threadbare little gamebag.

In 1900 the Archduke conferred his affections on a Bohemian aristocrat, Sophie Chotek. She was intelligent and assertive: at army manoeuvres she once scolded the presiding officers for the imprecision of their men's marching. But lack of royal blood rendered her in the eyes of the imperial court ineligible to become empress. The monarch insisted that their marriage, when he grudgingly consented to it, should be morganatic. This placed them beyond the social pale of most of Austria's haughty aristocracy. Though Franz Ferdinand and Sophie were blissfully happy with

each other, their lives were marred by the petty humiliations heaped upon her, as an unroyal royal appendage. Franz Ferdinand named a favourite walk at his Bohemian castle of Konopiště '*Oberer Kreuzweg*' – 'the upper Stations of the Cross'. At court functions, he followed the Emperor in precedence – but without his wife; he nursed a loathing for the lord chamberlain, Alfred Prince Montenuovo, who orchestrated such insults.

Franz Ferdinand's status as heir apparent nonetheless ensured that he and his wife entertained generals, politicians and foreign grandees. On 13 June 1914, Germany's Kaiser visited them at Konopiště, accompanied by Grand-Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, a rose-fancier who was keen to see the castle's famous borders. Wilhelm II was prone to social mishaps: on this occasion his dachshunds, Wadl and Hexl, disgraced themselves by killing one of Franz Ferdinand's exotic pheasants. The Kaiser and the Archduke appear to have discussed trivia, rather than European or Balkan politics.

Next day, Sunday the 14th, Austria's foreign minister and most important politician, Count Leopold Berchtold, visited Konopiště with his wife. The Berchtolds were fabulously rich, and lived the smart life to the full. They were enthusiastic racehorse-owners, and that spring one of their yearling fillies had won the prized Con Amore handicap at Freudenau. Nandine, the Countess, was a childhood friend of Sophie Hohenburg. The visitors arrived at the castle for breakfast, spent the day looking at the garden and paintings, of which the Count was considered a connoisseur, then caught an evening train back to Vienna, never to meet their hosts again.

The Archduke's political and social views were conservative and vigorously expressed. After attending Edward VII's 1910 funeral in London, he wrote home deploring the boorishness of most of his fellow sovereigns, and the alleged impertinence of some politicians present, notable among them ex-US president Theodore Roosevelt. It is sometimes suggested that Franz Ferdinand was an intelligent man. Even if this was so, like so many royal personages into modern times, he was corrupted by position, which empowered him to express opinions unenlightened even by contemporary standards.

He loathed Hungarians, telling the Kaiser: 'the so-called noble, gentlemanly Magyar is a most infamous, anti-dynastic, lying, unreliable fellow'. He regarded southern Slavs as sub-humans, referring to the Serbians as 'those pigs'. He hankered after recovering Lombardy and Venetia, lost to Italy in his lifetime, for the Hapsburg Empire. Visiting Russia in 1891, Franz Ferdinand declared that its autocracy offered 'an admirable model'.

Tsar Nicholas II recoiled from Franz Ferdinand's intemperance, especially on racial matters. Both the Archduke and his wife were strongly Catholic, favouring Jesuits and professing hostility towards Freemasons, Jews and liberals. Such was Sophie's religious fervour that in 1901 she led two hundred fashionable women on a Catholic march through Vienna.

The Archduke nonetheless cherished one prudent conviction: while many Austrians, notably including army chief of staff Gen. Conrad von Hötzendorf, detested Russia and welcomed the prospect of a battlefield showdown with the Tsar, Franz Ferdinand dissented. He was determined, he said repeatedly, to avoid a clash of arms. Desiring a 'concord of emperors', he wrote: 'I shall never lead a war against Russia. I shall make sacrifices to avoid it. A war between Austria and Russia would end either with the overthrow of the Romanovs or with the overthrow of the Habsburgs – or perhaps the overthrow of both.' He once wrote to Berchtold: 'Excellency! Don't let yourself be influenced by Conrad – ever! Not an iota of support for any of his yappings at the Emperor! Naturally he wants every possible war, every kind of hooray! rashness that will conquer Serbia and God knows what else … Through war he wants to make up for the mess that's his responsibility at least in part. Therefore: let's not play Balkan warriors ourselves. Let's not stoop to this hooliganism. Let's stay aloof and watch the scum bash in each other's skulls. It'd be unforgivable, insane, to start something that would pit us against Russia.'

Franz Ferdinand, although as prone as Kaiser Wilhelm to outbursts of violent rhetoric, was a less reckless actor. Had the Archduke been alive when the decisive confrontation with Russia came, it is likely that his influence would have been wielded to avert war. As it was he was dead, because he insisted upon making an official visit to one of the most turbulent and perilous regions his uncle ruled. Every European monarchy shared a belief that ownership of large territories – empire – was a critical measure of virility and grandeur. While the colonies of Britain and France lay far away across oceans, those of the Hapsburgs and Romanovs were next door. Hungarian coins bore an abbreviation of the inscription 'Francis Joseph by the Grace of God Emperor of Austria and Hungary, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Apostolic King'. In 1908 Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, rousing Russian fury. The twin provinces, former Ottoman possessions with mingled Serb and Muslim populations, had been Austrian-occupied since 1878, under a mandate conceded by the Congress of Berlin, but most Bosnians bitterly resented their subjection.

In 1913, a foreign diplomat exclaimed despairingly of the Austro-Hungarians: 'Never have I seen people so determined to work against their own interests!' It was an extraordinary folly, for an empire already groaning under the weight of its own contradictions and the frustrations of its oppressed minorities, wilfully to seize Bosnia-Herzegovina. But Franz Joseph still smarted beneath the humiliations of losing his northern Italian dominions soon after he inherited the throne, and of suffering military defeat by Prussia in 1866. The acquisition of new colonies in the Balkans seemed to offer a measure of compensation, as well as frustrating Serbia's ambitions to incorporate them in a pan-Slav state.

Given the febrile mood in the provinces, it was rash to advertise the schedule for Franz Ferdinand's visit to Bosnia as early as March. This prompted one of many groups of violent dissidents, the Young Bosnians, a secret society for students of peasant origins, to seize the opportunity to kill him. They reached this resolution perhaps on their own initiative, or perhaps at the behest of puppet-masters in Belgrade: in the absence of concrete evidence, either view is tenable. One of their number was nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip. Like many figures who have played such a role in history, Princip spent his short life striving to induce people to overcome their instinct to dismiss him because of his slight stature and colourless personality. In 1912, he volunteered to fight for Serbia in the First Balkan War, only to be rejected as too small. At his first interrogation after achieving notoriety in June 1914, he explained himself by saying, 'Wherever I went, people took me for a weakling.'

In May, Princip and two fellow conspirators travelled to Belgrade. The city was capital of a young and volatile country, fully independent from the Ottoman Empire only since 1879, a constitutional monarchy that was heart and soul of the pan-Slav movement. Princip knew Serbia well, having lived there for two years. The 'Young Bosnians' were provided with four Browning automatic pistols and six bombs by Maj. Vojin Tankosić of *Ujedinjenje ili Smrt*, a terrorist movement nicknamed 'the Black Hand', derived from German and Italian secret societies.

The group was led by the thirty-six-year-old head of military intelligence Col. Dragutin Dimitrijević, familiarly known as 'Apis', after the Egyptian bull god. He was the principal personality in one of three factions engaged in a struggle for Serbian domestic mastery. The other two elements were led respectively by Alexander, the Prince Regent – who hated the colonel because he refused to defer to the royal family – and

Nikola Pašić, the prime minister. Apis looked the part of a revolutionary fanatic: pale, bald, heavy, enigmatic – like 'a giant Mongolian', in the words of a diplomat. He never married, devoting his life to the movement which boasted a hooded initiation ritual and a seal engraved with a skull-and-crossbones flag, a dagger, a bomb and poison. Murder was his business: he had been prominent among a group of young army officers who conducted the 1903 butchery of King Alexander of Serbia and Queen Draga in their own palace bedroom.

The Black Hand's influence pervaded many Serbian institutions, notably including its army. Pašić, a sixty-nine-year-old of venerable appearance with his white hair and beard, was an inveterate enemy of Apis, some of whose associates in 1913 discussed murdering him. The prime minister and many of his colleagues regarded the colonel as a threat to his country's stability and even existence; internal affairs minister Milan Protić spoke of the Black Hand to a visitor on 14 June as 'a menace to democracy'. But in a society riven by competing interests, the civilian government lacked authority to remove or imprison Apis, who was protected by the patronage of the army chief of staff.

Beyond guns, bombs and cyanide suicide capsules, there is no hard evidence about what further support or direction Princip and his comrades received in Belgrade. The assassins went to their graves denying Serbia's official complicity. It seems overwhelmingly probable that the Black Hand incited and instructed the Young Bosnians for the archducal murder; but all that is certain is that its agents provided them with means to commit terrorist acts in Hapsburg territory. Princip conducted pistol practice in a Belgrade park, then on 27 May enjoyed a farewell dinner with his two co-conspirators, Trifko Grabež and Nedeljko Čabrinović, before starting what became an eight-day journey to Sarajevo. Part of Princip's and Grabež's route was covered on foot across open country, assisted by a frontier officer instructed by the Black Hand. Yet if Apis was wholly committed to the assassination plot, it is puzzling that the embryo assassin had to pawn his overcoat for a few dinars shortly before leaving Belgrade, to pay his expenses.

Who else knew what? Russia's ambassador in Belgrade was a fanatical pan-Slavist and friend of the Black Hand, Nikolai Hartwig; it is possible that he was party to the plot. But claims that St Petersburg had prior knowledge of the assassination are unsupported by a shred of evidence, and are hard to credit. The Russian government was strongly hostile to Austria-Hungary because of its persecution of its Slav minorities, but the

Tsar and his ministers had no plausible reason to want Franz Ferdinand dead.

The Bosnian peasant who guided Princip and Grabež back into Hapsburg territory – their other partner, Čabrinović, travelled independently – was a Serbian government informer, who passed word about their movements, and about the bombs and pistols in their luggage, to the Interior Ministry in Belgrade. His report, which the prime minister read and summarised in his own hand, made no mention of a plot against Franz Ferdinand. Pašić commissioned an investigation, and gave orders that the movement of weapons from Serbia into Bosnia should be stopped; but he went no further. A Serbian minister later claimed that Pašić told the cabinet at the end of May or the beginning of June that some assassins were on their way to Sarajevo to kill Franz Ferdinand. Whether or not this is true – no minutes were taken of cabinet meetings – Pašić appears to have instructed Serbia's envoy in Vienna to pass on to the Austrian authorities only a vague general warning, perhaps because he was unwilling to provide the Hapsburgs with a fresh and extremely serious grievance against his country.

Serbians played something of the same violent role on the margin of the Hapsburg Empire as did Irish factions in the affairs of Britain at several periods of the twentieth century, though the latter proved more resilient. Chronic Serb brutality towards their own minorities, especially Muslims, was a poor advertisement for the state. Some historians believe that its rulers were so intimately involved in terrorism, and explicitly in the conspiracy against Franz Ferdinand, that the country should be considered a rogue state. This view, once again, relies upon circumstantial evidence and speculation. Given the hostility between Apis and Pašić, it seems unlikely that they would have forged a common front to encompass the death of the Archduke.

Even without forewarning from Belgrade, the Austrian authorities had the strongest reasons to anticipate violent protest or some murderous attempt against Franz Ferdinand, who himself fully recognised the danger. Leaving his estate at Chlumetz on 23 June, he and his wife were obliged to begin their trip to Bosnia in a first-class compartment of the Vienna express, because the axles of his automobile were overheating. He said crossly: 'Our journey starts with an extremely promising omen. Here our car burns, and down there they will throw bombs at us.' The pre-1914 era was characterised by endemic acts of terrorism, especially in the Balkans, which were the butt of condescending British humour: a *Punch* joke had

one anarchist asking another: 'What time is it by your bomb?' Saki penned a black-comic short story about an outrage – 'The Easter Egg'. Both Joseph Conrad and Henry James wrote novels about terrorists.

For the Hapsburgs, such matters were commonplaces. Franz Joseph's semi-estranged wife, the Empress Elisabeth, had been stabbed to death by an Italian anarchist while boarding a steamer at Geneva in 1898. Ten years later in Lemberg, a twenty-year-old Ukrainian student assassinated the governor of Galicia, Count Potocki, crying out, 'This is your punishment for our sufferings.' The judge at the trial of a Croat who shot at another Hapsburg grandee asked the terrorist, who had been born in Wisconsin, if he thought killing people was justified. The man replied: 'In this case it is. It is the general opinion in America, and behind me are 500,000 American Croats. I am not the last among them … These actions against the lives of dignitaries are our only weapon.' On 3 June 1908 Bogdan Žerajić, a young Bosnian, intended to shoot the Emperor in Mostar, but relented at the last moment. Instead he travelled to Sarajevo, fired several times at Gen. Marijan Varešanin, then – wrongly supposing that he had killed him – shot himself with his last bullet. It was later alleged, though never proven, that the Black Hand had provided the revolver. The Austrian police sawed off the terrorist's head for preservation in their black museum.

In June 1912 a schoolboy shot at the governor of Croatia in Zagreb, missing his target but wounding a member of the imperial administration. In March 1914 the vicar-general of Transylvania was killed by a time-bomb sent through the post by Romanians. Yet Franz Ferdinand was capable of seeing the funny side of the threat: while watching military manoeuvres one day, his staff succumbed to panic when a dishevelled figure suddenly sprang from a bush clutching a large black object. The Archduke laughed heartily: 'Oh, let him shoot me. That's his job – he's a court photographer. Let him make a living!'

There was nothing comic, however, about the obvious threat in Bosnia. The Austrian police had detected and frustrated several previous conspiracies. Gavrilo Princip was known to be associated with 'anti-state activities'. Yet when he registered himself in Sarajevo as a new visitor, nothing was done to monitor his activities. Gen. Oskar Potiorek, governor of Bosnia, was responsible for security for the royal visit. The chief of his political department warned about the threat from the Young Bosnians, but Potiorek mocked the man 'for having a fear of children'. Officials were later said to have devoted more energy to discussing dinner menus, and

the correct temperature at which to serve the wines, than to the guest of honour's safety. Official negligence alone gave Princip and his friends their chance.

On the evening of 27 June, though Franz Ferdinand and Sophie were not scheduled to enter Sarajevo until next day, on an impulse they drove into the town, an exotic half-oriental community of some 42,000 people, to visit craft shops, including a carpet stall, watched by a crowd that included Princip. The couple thoroughly enjoyed themselves. In the spa town of Ilidže later that evening Dr Josip Sunarić, a prominent member of the Bosnian parliament who had urged cancelling the visit, was presented to the Duchess. She reproached him, saying, 'My dear Dr Sunarić, you are wrong after all. Things do not always turn out the way you say they will. Wherever we have been everyone, down to the last Serb, has greeted us with such great friendliness, politeness and true warmth, that we are very happy with our visit.' Sunarić answered, 'Your Highness, I pray to God that when I have the honour of meeting you again tomorrow night, you can repeat those words. A great burden will be lifted from me.'

That night a banquet was held for the Archduke at Ilidže's Hotel Bosna: guests were served *potage régence*, *soufflés délicieux*, *blanquette de truite à la gelée*, chicken, lamb, beef, *crème aux ananas en surprise*, cheese, ice cream and bon-bons. They drank Madeira, Tokay and Bosnian Žilavka. Next morning before leaving for Sarajevo, Franz Ferdinand sent a telegram to his elder son Max, congratulating the boy on his exam results at Schotten Academy. He and Sophie adored their children: he was never happier than when sharing their toys in the playroom at Konopiště. This was the couple's fourteenth wedding anniversary, and also a date pregnant with painful significance for Serbs – the anniversary of their 1389 defeat by the Ottomans at Kosovo.

The Archduke set forth in the dress uniform of a cavalry general – sky-blue tunic, gold collar with three silver stars, black trousers with a red stripe, surmounted by a helmet with green peacock feathers. Sophie, a buxom, stately figure, wore a white picture hat with a veil, a long white silk dress with red and white fabric roses tucked into a red sash, an ermine stole on her shoulders. Late on the morning of the 28th, in accordance with the published schedule, the archducal motorcade left Sarajevo station. Seven Young Bosnian killers had deployed themselves to cover each of three river bridges, one of which Franz Ferdinand was sure to cross.

The royal automobiles passed through what the Catholic archbishop later described as 'a regular avenue of assassins'. Shortly before reaching its

first scheduled stop, a bomb thrown by Nedeljko Čabrinović, a printer, struck Franz Ferdinand's car, but bounced off the folded hood before it exploded, wounding two of the archducal suite. Čabrinović was seized and led away after making a half-hearted attempt to kill himself. He declared proudly, 'I am a Serbian hero.' Most of the other conspirators failed to use their weapons, later making assorted excuses for loss of nerve. The Archduke drove on to the town hall, where he displayed understandable exasperation when obliged to listen patiently to a pre-scripted speech of welcome. As the party re-entered their vehicles, he said he wished to visit the officers injured by Čabrinović's bomb. At the entry to Franz Joseph Street Gen. Potiorek, in the front seat of the archducal motor, expostulated: the driver was going the wrong way. The car stopped. It had no reverse gear, and thus had to be pushed backwards onto the Appel Quay, immediately alongside the spot where Princip stood.

The young man drew and raised his pistol, then fired twice. Another conspirator, Mihajlo Pucará, kicked a detective who saw what was happening and sought to intervene. Sophie and Franz Ferdinand were both hit from a range of a few feet. She immediately slumped in death, while he muttered, 'Sophie, Sophie, don't die – stay alive for our children.' Those were his last words: he expired soon after 11 a.m. Princip was seized by the crowd. Pucará, a strikingly handsome young man who had rejected an offered role at Belgrade's National Theatre in favour of a career in terrorism, grappled with an officer who tried to attack Princip with his sabre. Another young man, Ferdinand Behr, also did his best to save the assassin from retribution.

The plot to kill the Archduke was absurdly amateurish, and succeeded only because of the failure of the Austrian authorities to adopt elementary precautions in a hostile environment. This in turn raises the question: did the killing really represent the best effort of Apis, the arch-conspirator, or merely an almost casual, anarchic sideswipe at Hapsburg rule? No conclusive answer is possible, but the investigating judge at Sarajevo District Court, Leo Pfeffer, thought on his first glimpse of Princip that 'it was difficult to imagine that so frail-looking an individual could have committed so serious a deed'. The young assassin was at pains to explain that he had not intended to kill the Duchess as well as the Archduke: 'a bullet does not go precisely where one wishes'. Indeed, it is astonishing that even at close range Princip's pistol killed two people with two shots – handgun wounds are frequently non-fatal.

In the first forty-eight hours after the killings, more than two hundred leading Serbs in Bosnia were arrested and taken to join Princip and

Čabrinović in the military prison. Several peasants were hanged out of hand. Within days all the conspirators were in custody except a Muslim carpenter, Mehmed Mehmedbašić, who escaped to Montenegro. By the end of July 5,000 Serbs had been jailed, of whom about 150 were hanged when hostilities subsequently began. Auxiliaries of the Austrian Schutzkorps militia exacted summary vengeance from many more Muslims and Croats. At the trial which began in October, Princip, Čabrinović and Grabež were sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment – as minors, they escaped capital punishment. Three others received jail terms, while five were hanged on 3 February 1915, and four more accessories received terms from three years to life. Nine of the accused were freed, including some peasants whom Princip said he had forced to help him.

Word of the deaths of the Archduke and his wife swept across the Empire that day, and thereafter across Europe. At Vienna's Aspern airfield, the band was playing a new tune, 'The Airmen's March', in the midst of a flying display when at 3 p.m. the proceedings were abruptly terminated on receiving the tidings from Sarajevo. The Emperor Franz Joseph was at Ischl when his adjutant-general Graf von Paar brought him news of the murders. He received it with no visible emotion, but decided to eat his dinner alone.

The Kaiser was attending Kiel Regatta. A launch approached the royal yacht, which Wilhelm attempted to wave away. Instead it closed in, carrying Georg von Müller, chief of the Kaiser's naval cabinet. The admiral placed a note in his cigarette case and threw it up to the *Hohenzollern*'s deck, where a sailor caught it and carried it to the Emperor. Wilhelm took the case, read its message, turned pale and murmured: 'Everything has to start again!' The Kaiser was among the few men in Europe who personally liked Franz Ferdinand; he had lavished emotional capital on their relationship, and was genuinely grieved by his passing. He gave orders to abandon the regatta. Rear-Admiral Albert Hopman, chief of the German Navy Department's central staff, was also at Kiel, just leaving a lunch at which the British ambassador had been a fellow guest, when he heard a report that Franz Ferdinand had 'died suddenly'. At nightfall, having learned the exact circumstances, he wrote of 'a dreadful act of which the political consequences are incalculable'.

But most of Europe received the news with equanimity, because acts of terrorism were so familiar. In St Petersburg, British correspondent Arthur Ransome's Russian friends dismissed the assassinations as 'a characteristic bit of Balkan savagery', as did most people in London. In Paris another

journalist, Raymond Recouly of *Le Figaro*, recorded a general view that 'the crisis in progress would soon recede into the category of Balkan squabbles, such as recurred every fifteen or twenty years, and were sorted out among the Balkan peoples themselves, without any of the great powers needing to become entangled'. President Raymond Poincaré was at Longchamps races, where reports of the shots in Sarajevo did not impede his enjoyment of the running of the Grand Prix. Two days later in a Prussian school, twelve-year-old Elfriede Kuhr and her classmates peered at newspaper photographs of the assassin and his victim. 'Princip is better-looking than that fat pig Franz Ferdinand,' she observed mischievously, though her classmates deplored her flippancy.

The Archduke's funeral service, in the stifling heat of the Hofburgpfarrkirch, lasted just fifteen minutes, following which Franz Joseph resumed his cure at Ischl. The old Emperor made little pretence of sorrow about his nephew's death, though he was full of rage about its manner. Most of his subjects shared his sentiments, or lack of them. On 29 June in Vienna, Professor Josef Redlich noted in his diary: 'there is no sense of grief in the town. Music has been playing everywhere.' The London *Times* reported the funeral on 1 July in terms measured to the point of somnolence. Its Vienna correspondent asserted that 'so far as the press is concerned, there is a remarkable absence of any inclination that revenge should be taken upon the Serbs of the Monarchy as a whole for the misdeeds of what is believed to be a small minority … With regard to Serbia also the utterances of the press are on the whole remarkably restrained.'

Foreign observers expressed surprise that Viennese mourning for the heir to the imperial throne was perfunctory and patently insincere. It was thus ironic that the Hapsburg government scarcely hesitated before taking a decision to exploit the assassinations as a justification for invading Serbia, even at the cost of provoking an armed collision with Russia. And Princip had killed the one man in the Empire committed to avert this.