AWESOME stories

Gavrilo Princip

Gavrilo Princip, one of nine children, was born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in July, 1894. His parents saw six of their children die in infancy.

Even though Gavrilo did not die soon after birth, he was sick most of his life. Tuberculosis (also known as "Consumption" at the time) plagued him, as it did so many others.

The son of a postman, Gavrilo went to school in Sarajevo and Tuzla (a town located northeast of Sarajevo). In May of 1912, he left Bosnia for Belgrade (capital city of today's Serbia) where he wanted to continue his education.

In Serbia, Princip joined a secret society known as the "Black Hand." Nationalists, its members wanted Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia to form a union. They also wanted their country to be rid of submission to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

When the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, decided to visit Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia during June of 1914, members of the Black Hand decided it was time to make their point in a graphic way. What if they were able to assassinate the Austro-Hungarian heir?

Chief of Intelligence for the Serbian Army, a man called Dragutin Dimitrijevic, was also head of the Black Hand. He sent Gavrilo Princip, Nedjelko Cabrinovic and and Trifko Grabez to Sarajevo. Their assignment was to assassinate Franz Ferdinand.

Leaving for Sarajevo, each man had a revolver, two bombs and a small vial of cyanide. To give nothing away, they would each commit suicide after the Archduke was dead.

All three of the would-be assassins were suffering from Tuberculosis. Knowing they would not live long anyway, they each believed their lives would have a purpose if they could contribute to Bosnia-Herzegovina's independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Somehow, word of the plot reached the Prime Minister of Serbia (Nikola Pasic) who ordered the arrest of the three men if they attempted to leave the country. His order was never carried-out.

When they reached their target place, the plotters joined forces with other conspirators (Muhamed Mehmedbasic, Danilo Ilic, Vaso Cubrilovic, Cvijetko Popovic, Misko Jovanovic and Veljko Cubrilovic).

June 28, 1914 was a Sunday. The Archduke and his wife, Sophie von Chotkovato, arrived in Sarajevo by train. Their journey, to Sarajevo's City Hall, was by car.

Seven members of the Black Hand Society were spread-out along the car's route of travel as Franz Ferdinand and Sophie drove to City Hall. One of the seven, Nedjelko Cabrinovic, hurled a bomb at the car.

The driver, who saw the bomb coming toward him, accelerated his car. The bomb missed Franz Ferdinand, exploding under the wheel of the next car. The Archduke and his wife were unhurt.

After the royal reception at City Hall, the plotters had another chance to attack.

The person responsible for security that day was General Oskar Potiorek. Because of the prior assassination attempt, the General decided it would be safer for the Archduke's car to take a different route. He failed, however, to coordinate his plans with the Archduke's driver.

Instead of following a direct route, along a street known as Appel Quay, the driver made a right turn on Franz Joseph Street. Gavrilo Princip happened to be standing at the corner of Appel Quay and Franz Joseph Street.

Not knowing a would-be assassin was nearby, and realizing the driver had made a wrong turn, Oskar Potiorek shouted:

> *What is this? This is the wrong way! We're supposed to take the Appel Quay!*

Braking the car, the driver backed up. This put the Archduke and Sophie in danger as they slowly moved in front of Princip. Stepping forward, he drew his revolver and fired into the car several times. He was about five feet away.

One of Princip’s bullets hit the Archduke in the neck, piercing his jugular vein. Bleeding profusely, the dying heir pleaded with his wife:

Sophie dear! Sophie dear! Don't die! Stay alive for our children!

Fatally injured herself, from a bullet in her abdomen, Sophie could not survive. Both died from their wounds.

Princip, meanwhile, had tried to kill himself. A bystander thwarted that effort by grabbing Princip’s right arm. Police officers finished-off Gavrilo’s attempt to commit suicide, arresting him at the scene.

Giving-up the names of his co-conspirators, Princip himself was too young to receive a death sentence after he was found guilty of the murders. Instead he received a 20-year sentence.

Thirty-seven days after the assassination, World War I erupted. The conflict caused the death of millions of people.

Tuberculosis ultimately took Princip's life. He had served four of his twenty years when he died on April 28, 1918.

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