

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 73

“For Serbia We Shall Do Everything”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

In January 1914 the Serbian Crown Prince Alexander and the Prime Minister, Nikola Pašić, visited St. Petersburg to discuss Serbia’s relationship with Russia.

Serbia was now Russia’s only ally in the Balkans. The Prime Minister emphasized to the Russians that after two exhausting Balkan Wars, Serbia needed money to rebuild. It was now the most powerful state in the region, but there were rumors that Austria and Germany were rearming Bulgaria. The Serbians asked for Russian arms.

The Russians renewed their pledges to support Serbia, although they regretfully explained that Russia’s own military buildup meant they had no weapons to spare right now. But Russia could also ask its ally France to help out. When the Serbians left, the Emperor told them, “Greet the King for me and tell him, ‘For Serbia we shall do everything.’”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 73. For Serbia We Shall Do Everything.

Back in episode 71, we looked at the Second Balkan War, which ended with the Ottoman Empire all but evicted from Europe, and a new Albanian nation. Also, an expanded Montenegro, an expanded Greece, and especially an expanded Serbia, and a bitter and sullen Bulgaria, which had also fought in the two wars but unlike its neighbors, has little to show for it.

Remember, too, that in Austria, the Crown Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was in 1913 named inspector general of the Austrian military, effectively the supreme commander. This was a position normally held by the Emperor, but the Austro-Hungarian Emperor is now 83 years old and is getting pretty doofy, so he handed over supervision of the Imperial military to the Crown Prince, only the second time in Austrian history that someone other than the Emperor controlled the military. The Archduke and the Austrian Chief of Staff, Franz Josef Conrad von Hötzendorf, you will also recall, agreed that the next year, 1914, the Army would schedule training exercises in Bosnia, close to the border with Austria’s increasingly brash neighbor, Serbia, as a way of reminding the Serbs that Austria was not to be trifled with.

Past experience had taught the Austrians that threats of force were the only diplomacy the Serbian government understood, so, hey, Serbia, understand this!

Now, I already mentioned that these maneuvers were scheduled to be close to June 28, which was the anniversary of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. It's hard for us who are not Serbs to understand how important the Battle of Kosovo is to the Serb people. It's more than an historical event; it is the foundational myth upon which rests the Serb national identity.

This sort of thing is sometimes hard to grasp for those of us who are history buffs. History is all about separating out the myth and examining the cold hard facts underneath, but this is a case where the myth is actually more important than the facts, so bear that in mind as we take a quick detour to examine the Battle of Kosovo.

Now, I'm trespassing into the domain of Robin Pearson and *The History of Byzantium* here, so let me tread quickly and lightly. In the 14th century, there was a substantial Serb kingdom in the western Balkans. It reached its zenith in 1346, following yet another Byzantine civil war. The Serb King Stefan intervened in the Byzantine civil war, grabbing about half of the territory of what was left of the Byzantine Empire, and declaring himself Emperor of the Serbs and the Romans, essentially claiming that his own kingdom was now the true Roman state. Although it did not control Constantinople, it did control what we know today as Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, and most of what we today call Greece, so that's pretty impressive, though it's interesting to note that the Serb empire of old did not include what we today call Bosnia or Croatia. This coronation not only crowned Stefan Emperor, it also elevated the Serbian archbishop to the rank of Patriarch, with the blessing of the Bulgarian Patriarch, who was also present at the proceedings, so, yeah, Serbia is now a big deal.

Unfortunately, Emperor Stefan died, as all emperors must. His successor was not able to hold his empire together, owing to internal opposition and to pressure from the Turks, who are by this time establishing themselves in the Balkans. The Ottoman Sultan Murad I made nearby Adrianople his capital in 1363, and some of the Serb princes chose to accept Ottoman rule rather than fight a hopeless battle against the Turk army.

One of the strongest of the Serb princes, Prince Lazar, chose to fight. He recruited support from other Serb nobles, including Vuk Branković and Vlatko Vuković, and no, these names will not be on the test, so don't worry about it. Anyway, they commanded together an army estimated at about 30,000, and took on an Ottoman force that was somewhat larger, perhaps 40,000. We don't have much reliable information about what happened during this battle. It appears the Serbs had the better of it at first, but the Ottomans came back strong and eventually routed the Serb forces, although casualties on both sides were high, and both Prince Lazar and the Ottoman Sultan were killed in the fighting.

This was a heavier blow on the Serbs than it was on the Turks, because the Turks could more easily replace their losses, although the death of their Sultan was certainly demoralizing. The

Serbs, by contrast, had lost their best fighters and most ardent patriots and had little hope of replacing them. Gradually, over the coming decades, the remaining Serb principalities would submit to Ottoman rule, which would be complete by 1459, six years after the fall of Constantinople.

That's the history. So the Serb downfall did not begin at the Battle of Kosovo and it was not completed at the Battle of Kosovo, although the battle is perhaps the last gasp of unified Serb resistance to Turkish rule.

And there, where the history ends, the myth begins. One legend tells of a Serbian knight named Miloš, who was accused by Prince Lazar of disloyalty prior to the battle. Miloš replied that on the day of the battle, "we shall see who is and who is not a traitor." Then, the night before the battle, says the legend, Miloš went to the Ottoman army, pretending to be a defector. When he was brought before the Sultan, he drew a dagger and killed the Sultan, and was then killed himself. Alas, the tale goes, the Turks managed to keep the death of the Sultan a secret until after the battle the next day, and Prince Lazar died never knowing the truth about Miloš. Another story says that Vuk Branković, who survived the battle with his own army more or less intact, had actually betrayed Prince Lazar by fleeing early, turning what might have been a victory into a defeat. And so we came to see who was and was not a traitor.

Regardless of the truth of any of these legends, and all this stuff is very much debatable, the point is, we've got here is a story with everything: Intrigue. Betrayal. Assassination. A trusted ally who deserts and someone under suspicion who proves a patriotic hero. Assassination. A heroic leader who falls in battle rather than submit to Turkish rule. And did I mention an assassination?

For five hundred years, the legend of Kosovo was told and retold. Prince Lazar was the man who gave his life rather than bow before the unbelievers, who traded a kingdom on this earth for the Kingdom of Heaven. And by setting an heroic example of resistance, he inspired the Serb people to retain their Serb identity and their Orthodox faith over the next five centuries of Turkish oppression. And did I mention that the Ottoman Sultan was assassinated?

These legends, by the way, are also the basis for the Serbian claim over the province of Kosovo, the site of the battle, which, as we've seen, is in the twentieth century majority Muslim and Albanian. But in the view of an ardent Serb nationalist, this is only because these local Muslim collaborators conspired with the Turks to drive Serbs out of their ancestral homeland, and Kosovo is properly viewed as Serb territory.

And did I mention this legend includes an assassination? The Sultan may have the larger army. He may have won the battle. He may oppress the Serb people for centuries. But not even the Imperial Majesty of the Turkish Sultan can escape the wrath of an aggrieved Serbia. That's part of the legend, too. And one of the many Serbs to whom these tales were told over the years that followed was named Gavrilo Princip. Cue dramatic music.

[sound effect: dramatic music]

You'll recall that Bosnia and Herzegovina were placed under Austrian control in 1878, although nominally they remained Ottoman territory. You will recall as well that rural Bosnia was mostly controlled by a few thousand Muslim landowners, on whose lands worked a hundred thousand or so Orthodox Serb peasants. When the Austrians took control of the province, they sought the support of these powerful Muslim landowners, for the sake of peace and stability in their new territory, and so they changed nothing in the way the province was run, which meant Orthodox Serbs remained a powerless and impoverished peasant class dominated by a Muslim elite. Even under the rule of a Catholic Austrian Emperor, little had changed from how it had been under a Muslim Turkish Sultan.

Among these hundred thousand impoverished Serb peasants in Bosnia were a couple named Petar and Marija Princip. The Princip's lived on and farmed a four-acre plot of land, owned by a Muslim landlord, who claimed as his rent one-third of whatever the Princip's could produce on the plot. This did not leave the Princip's enough to support themselves and their family, so Petar had to take whatever odd jobs were available to help keep the family fed.

On July 25, 1894, Marija Princip was working in the fields as usual, carrying bundles of hay on her back, in spite of being pregnant. As one does, if one is a Serb peasant in the 19th century. Later in the day, she washed the clothes, but then, after that, as she was milking the cow, she went into labor. Marija was well-acquainted with labor pains. She bore nine children altogether, although six of them would die in childhood.

It was the custom and the expectation at that time and in that place that a pregnant woman would not make a big deal out of her labor. Shouting and making a fuss and crying out for help, no, no, no, that was not done. She went quietly back to her house, lay down on the dirt floor, and bore a son, with her mother-in-law acting as midwife.

Petar was devoutly religious, even by the standards of nineteenth-century Bosnian Serb peasants, and the newborn child, a boy, was small and weak, and not expected to survive. So the parish priest suggested naming the infant after the archangel Gabriel. Surely the very archangel who announced the births of Jesus and John the Baptist would not turn away from aiding an innocent, struggling baby boy. That was good enough for Petar, and so Gabriel would be the child's name. Or, in Serbian, Gavriilo.

Perhaps the archangel was moved to intercede, for the child did survive and he grew, although he would always be small and skinny and sickly. He lacked his father's big bones and square jaw. Rather, he took after his mother, with a slender build, curly hair, and a pointed chin. He also took after her in that he was not so strictly religious, in the manner of his father. But he did embrace his Serb ethnic identity. He was a timid and sensitive boy who loved to read, and devoured the Serb legends of heroes and martyrs of the past. The adults would sometimes call upon him to recite these tales at public gatherings.

Because young Gavrilo seemed a natural student, Marija enrolled him in school when he was nine years old, over the objections of his father, who couldn't see why his son needed to know anything more than *he* already knew, but Gavrilo proved to be an outstanding student, as his mother had anticipated.

In 1907, after he had graduated from primary school, he was sent to Sarajevo, where his older brother Jovan already lived, with the idea that the 13-year old Gavrilo would enroll in an Austrian military school. The Austrian military was one of the few avenues of advancement open to a Serb peasant boy in Bosnia, not least because there you could learn German, the language of the middle and upper classes. But Jovan had second thoughts about seeing a Princip in an Austrian military uniform, and he sent his brother instead to a merchant school, where he might learn business. Gavrilo turned out not to have a head for business, and transferred to a gymnasium—think prep school. It was a more academic educational environment, and it was better suited to Gavrilo's talents. The family dreamed Gavrilo might one day make a doctor or a lawyer, some respectable middle-class profession.

[music: Four Romantic Pieces, No. 1]

In 1908, as you will recall, Austria-Hungary unilaterally annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, precipitating something of a crisis with Russia. By 1909, the crisis had simmered down, and the Austrian Emperor, Franz Josef, decreed that a constitution be drawn up for Bosnia, including an elected assembly, the Bosnian Diet, and providing that Bosnia would not be part of either Austria or Hungary, but would be subordinate to both within the structure of the Empire. The new constitution was in place by February 1910, and elections to the Diet were held in May.

There were many in Bosnia, not to mention neighboring Serbia, who opposed the annexation and regarded it as illegitimate. Some of these were members of secret organizations. This gets a little bewildering, as there were different organizations with different agendas and overlapping memberships. And bear in mind that these are all secret societies. Secret societies by definition don't leave behind membership rosters or minutes of meetings, so there isn't much for the modern historian to go on when trying to reconstruct these groups and their activities.

There were Bosnian nationalist groups like Young Bosnia. There were Serb nationalist groups, like National Defense, that wanted Bosnian Serbs to be part of Serbia. And there was the violent and extremist group, Unification or Death, known colloquially as the "Black Hand." They were the most extreme of them all. We'll get back to them.

But for now, just know that a 24-year old Bosnian Serb named Bogdan Žerajić, a law student and a radical Serb nationalist living in Zagreb and inspired by the legends of Kosovo, decided that he would be the modern Miloš, the knight-assassin. He would kill the Austrian Emperor, Franz Josef, on the eve of Bosnian Serb independence, just like that Serb knight of long ago, who slew the Sultan on the eve of the Battle of Kosovo.

Franz Josef was to visit the city of Mostar, the principal city in Herzegovina, on June 3, 1910, and Žerajić was determined to kill him during that visit. But he changed his plans—we don't know why exactly—and the elderly Emperor visited Mostar and returned to Vienna without incident.

Perhaps Žerajić had decided that to strike at the opening ceremony of the new Bosnian Diet would make a stronger statement about the illegitimacy of the annexation. And so instead, on June 15, 1910, in Sarajevo, Žerajić fired five shots at General Marijan Varešanin, the ethnic Croatian Austrian army officer who was the appointed Governor of Bosnia. All five shots missed. Žerajić used the last bullet in his pistol to take his own life.

The assassination attempt shocked people across the Austro-Hungarian Empire, even in Bosnia. Most of the press dismissed Žerajić as mentally disturbed. But to Gavrilo Princip, the fifteen-year old gymnasium student and lover of Serb legends, it made perfect sense. He saw Žerajić's point: strike at the Sultan on the eve of the battle. He visited the assassin's grave in Sarajevo, and swore to fulfill what Žerajić had attempted. A few months later, Gavrilo joined Young Bosnia.

In 1912, Gavrilo was expelled from the gymnasium for participating in an anti-Austrian demonstration. And when I say "participating," I mean, he was recruiting other boys in the school for the demonstration, by threatening to beat up anyone who didn't come along with him. His education now abruptly over, Gavrilo walked the 170 miles from Sarajevo to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, reputedly dropping to his knees and kissing the ground after he crossed the border. He was hoping to continue his education there, where being a Serb nationalist wouldn't be regarded as a liability, but the excitement of the Serb nation being reborn before his very eyes proved more attractive than books and classrooms.

Gavrilo volunteered to be one of the guerillas the Serbians were sending into Macedonia to oppose Turkish rule there. After the First Balkan War broke out, he volunteered to fight with the Serbian Army. Both times he was turned down. He was too small.

As a result, he experienced the two Balkan Wars, including the incorporation of the sacred ground of Kosovo into the Kingdom of Serbia, as a bystander. He would spend the next two years moving back and forth between Sarajevo, where his friends and family were, and Belgrade, which was free and Serbian and where the future was.

[music: Strauss medley]

Austria-Hungary supposedly is a constitutional monarchy. In 1867, when Hungary was given its rather breathtaking range of separate rights and privileges within the Empire, those rights and privileges were set down in some detail. But the Austrian half of the Empire operated under constitutional principles handed down by Imperial decrees from Franz Josef. One of these

constitutional provisions, Article 14, permitted the Emperor to suspend the elected parliament of Austria, the Reichsrat, during an emergency and rule by decree.

Well, as Austria became more liberal, and universal suffrage for men was fully imposed, the upside was that the Imperial Reichsrat ceased to be a debating club for German-speaking elites from various regions of the Empire, and instead began to look more like the real Austria. The downside was that the Reichsrat began to look more like the real Austria: a quarrelsome collection of multiple ethnic groups, each feeling its own rights were being flouted, or at least threatened, and suspicious of overtures from other groups. Getting a majority vote for anything was becoming next to impossible. You'll remember that in Bohemia, the Czechs were agitating for equal rights for the Czech language there. Bohemian Germans didn't like that idea very much and pressured the German-speaking elite in Vienna to deny Czech language rights. This situation had come to a head in 1913, when the Emperor, Franz Josef, having had enough of Czech demands, dismissed the Bohemian Diet.

But Czech nationalists retaliated, by using the seats they held in the national Reichsrat to gum up the works. Not that the works weren't already pretty Wrigley's, if you know what I mean, but in addition to all the other obstacles to getting the Reichsrat to agree to anything, you now had a solid block of "no" votes from Bohemia for absolutely *anything* the government wanted to do. By March 1914, the frustrated Austrian Prime Minister advised the Emperor to prorogue the Reichsrat and rule by decree per Article 14 of the constitution. Which the Emperor did.

So incredibly, when the coming July Crisis erupts, Austria-Hungary will be making weighty decisions about responses and ultimatums, war and peace, and the future of Europe without the benefit of input from the people's representatives. It will be the Emperor and a handful of ministers working alone, at least on the Austrian side of Austria-Hungary.

Sunday, April 19 was Orthodox Easter in the year 1914. That's April 19 in the Gregorian calendar, not in the Julian calendar used by the Orthodox, but here at *The History of the Twentieth Century*, we like to stick to the same calendar for all our historical reporting. Anyway, this particular Easter was the first Easter of the new, enlarged Serbia, the Serbia that now included the sacred soil of Kosovo, and it felt particularly significant. Newspaper editorials explicitly drew the parallel; like Jesus, Prince Lazar had sacrificed himself for his people, and like Christ, Serbia had risen from the grave.

There was less celebrating in Kosovo and the other new regions of Serbia. As I've already mentioned, the inhabitants of these regions are mostly not Serbs and all of this mythic imagery of the Serb state rising from the dead was leaving them cold. They were not being treated as citizens of Serbia. They were under military rule, and Serb paramilitaries were engaged in violent repression of the new citizens of Serbia who dared identify themselves as Albanian or Bulgarian or anything but Serb.

The Serbian Prime Minister, the now 68-year old Nikola Pašić, favored elections in the new territories, and full integration of the new citizens into the political life of the nation. But the army wasn't listening to him. The Serbian Army was riding high in the esteem of the nation, and why not, given that they had won two great victories in two Balkan Wars in the span of one year? But increasingly, the officer corps of the Serbian Army was under the influence of the radicals, including the notorious Black Hand. Among these soldiers were those who, as junior officers back in 1903, participated in the murder of the former King and Queen of Serbia, and the installation of the new royal family.

Now, in 1914, these former junior officers are senior officers. They had the loyalty of the Serbian King, Peter, who owed them his crown, and especially of the crown prince, Alexander, an ardent supporter.

As far as the extremists of the Black Hand were concerned, it was *they* who defeated the Turks and the Bulgarians and brought Kosovo back into the fold. It was *they* who had raised Serbia from the dead. It was *they* who were now determined to drive non-Serbs out of the newly conquered territories, and they weren't about to let the silly old men in Belgrade tell them what to do. And now, too, their eyes turned north, toward Bosnia and Croatia, the territories controlled by Austria-Hungary, but populated by Serbs. Also by Bosniaks and Croats, but, hey, Bosniaks and Croats are just Serbs who don't know it yet.

There were Serb nationalists in Bosnia, people who were willing to spy on the Austrian army and police, to study Austrian fortifications, and to pass all this information along to the Black Hand. And so it was that by this time, the leaders of the Black Hand were already aware of the planned Austrian military maneuvers in Bosnia in June, and also aware that the Austrian heir, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, would be coming to observe the maneuvers and pay a visit to Sarajevo.

In those early months of 1914, nationalist Serbs in Bosnia seem to have been in the early stages of plotting another assassination attempt on the Governor of Bosnia, an army general named Oskar Potiorek. Potiorek had succeeded Marijan Varešanin, the guy who was governor in 1910, and the target of that failed assassination attempt at the opening of the Bosnian Diet. Varešanin had had enough at that point and had resigned the position, and the Emperor had appointed Potiorek to succeed him.

But sometime in the spring of 1914, the leadership of the Black Hand appears to have made a change of plan. They would target the Archduke Franz Ferdinand instead, during his visit to Sarajevo, which would be on June 28, which coincided with the 525th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo.

Why did they decide to kill the crown prince? We can't say for certain, but members of the conspiracy, interrogated after the fact, gave a variety of reasons. One thing is clear: it wasn't because the Archduke had any particular animus against Serbs. Quite the contrary. It was an open secret that the Archduke dreamed of granting the South Slavs of the Empire—the Slovenes,

the Croats, the Bosniaks, the Serbs—the same special status that Hungary already enjoyed, making the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy into the Austro-Hungaro-Yugoslav Triple Monarchy, if you will. In fact, some of the conspirators would say later that the very fact the Archduke hoped to grant Serbs in the Empire greater autonomy was a motive to kill him, because his plan would make it harder to achieve Serb unity. Because extremists often hate and fear the moderate compromisers among their foes more passionately than they do the enemy extremists.

Besides that, assassinating the Archduke would surely create a bigger splash than assassinating a governor; that's pretty clear. With the reigning Emperor now 83 years old, killing his heir was arguably a weightier blow against the Empire than killing the old man would have been. And add to that the fact that some believed the coming Austrian military maneuvers in Bosnia were actually a cover for a surprise attack on Serbia. So killing the Archduke on the eve of war would be very much in the spirit of Miloš's assassination of the Sultan so long ago.

And so the Black Hand recruited three young men in Belgrade to be their assassination team. All three of these men were Bosnian Serb expatriates living in Belgrade. The three were already friends. All of them came from poverty, from unhappy homes with overbearing fathers. All three had been promising students who had turned away from scholarship and toward nationalist extremism. I won't trouble you with the names of the other two, but the third was named Gavrilo Princip.

None of these young men was in good health, perhaps not surprising given their deprived backgrounds. There is evidence that Gavrilo had already contracted tuberculosis by this time. It's not too great a stretch to think that these aimless and unhappy young men drew much inspiration from the Black Hand. For the first time in their young lives, someone had come to them and asked them to take part in something greater than themselves. For the first time, someone had told them that they were needed. That they were important.

Their contact was a worker in the Serbian state railway company and a veteran of the paramilitaries that had fought in Macedonia, first against the Turks, then against the non-Serb civilians. There was no discernible link between them and the Belgrade government, even as they were being supplied with pistols and ammunition from the Serbian Army arsenal. Gavrilo proved to be the best shot of the three.

On May 27th, the three were provided with their weapons: four revolvers, six small but powerful bombs, and envelopes of cyanide powder. They were ordered to use the bombs to kill the Archduke, and the pistols if needed, but to save one shot for themselves, as Žerajić had done, or, failing that, to swallow the poison. Because Miloš doesn't leave the Sultan's tent alive.

[music: Traditional Serb kaval music]

The Black Hand had sympathizers in the Serbian customs office, who smuggled the three young men across the border into Bosnia separately. The Black Hand also had extensive contacts among Serb nationalists in Bosnia and operated a sort of underground railway to smuggle militants from the border to Sarajevo. Recall that the Black Hand already had years of experience in smuggling weapons into Macedonia to fight the Turks. Now they were undertaking a similar operation against the Austrians. It went far beyond this one assassination team. There was a steady stream of weapons moving into Bosnia. And why not? It had worked against one Empire.

On the way, Gavrilo and one of the other young men were guided by a local schoolteacher to the home of a family of illiterate Serb peasant farmers to spend the night. The schoolteacher pulled out a bottle of brandy he had brought for the occasion, they all got drunk, and the school teacher began to boast to their hosts, "Do you know how important these young men are? They are going to Sarajevo to kill the Archduke." Gavrilo got into the spirit of the thing, and showed off his bomb and his pistol and his cyanide to his wide-eyed hosts. The following morning, the farmer rode them in his cart to Tuzla, where the third member of the group was waiting for the final leg of the journey to Sarajevo. For his part in this conspiracy, that farmer, Medjo Kerović, was eventually sentenced to death, although his sentence would later be commuted to twenty years in prison.

Meanwhile in Sarajevo, another Black Hand member, 23-year old Danilo Ilić, had recruited a second team of three teenage assassins. One of them, an 18-year old Bosniak Muslim, had already been part of a failed attempt to kill the governor, Oskar Potiorek, back in January. The others, aged 18 and 17, were ethnic Serb high school students living in Sarajevo with no discernible training or skills useful in an assassination, other than the passionate hatred of Austrian rule that they all shared. Although these three locally-recruited assassins were all part of the same conspiracy, they would not meet the three men smuggled in from Serbia until just before the assassination attempt. Ilić would be the go-between, and would take possession of the weapons Gavrilo and his two comrades had brought from Belgrade, which he hid under the sofa at his mother's house in Sarajevo.

It may strike you as strange that Ilić would recruit an already failed assassin and two high school kids into the plot. But it wasn't strange at all. It was an exceedingly cunning plan. The idea was that Ilić and the three assassins coming in from Belgrade could all be counted upon to kill themselves. These other three probably wouldn't, but when the Austrian authorities captured them, they would find themselves holding three local teenagers who knew nothing about Serbian complicity in the attack. And one of the three was even a Bosnian Muslim, which would make tracing the crime back to Serbia, or even to Serb nationalists, that much more difficult.

Meanwhile, back in Belgrade, the Serbian Prime Minister, Nikola Pašić, was already aware that an assassination attempt against the Archduke was in the works. How did he know? Well, remember that Serbian railway worker who recruited Gavrilo Princip into the plot? He was a double agent, working for the Black Hand, but also reporting on their activities to the Prime

Minister's office. Pašić reported the plot to his cabinet in late May. The Cabinet agreed that the officials at the border should be instructed to watch out for the assassins and to clamp down on this illegal movement across the border.

But this order would not be issued until June 10, by which time the assassins were already in Sarajevo. And as for the officials at the border, they received their orders to clamp down on illegal movement and tossed them into the circular file. Because by this time, the border is no longer under control of the government in Belgrade. It is under control of the Black Hand.

On June 16, the Serbian minister of war, noting that the government's instructions to the military officials in control of the border were being ignored, wrote directly to the Serbian military chief of staff, asking him to clarify just what the hell was going on at the border.

He received a reply from the Chief of Staff on June 23, which basically said that any weapons being smuggled across the border were for defensive use by Serbian agents in Bosnia, who were there to collect vital military intelligence, and the only risk that pertained to these operations was the risk of nosy government officials in Belgrade meddling in sensitive military matters.

The Prime Minister reacted with outrage on June 24, when he was shown this letter. He wrote back to the minister of war demanding an immediate investigation of the military's activities along the Austrian border, which, Pašić said, were close to treason:

“All our allies and friends of Serbia, if they knew what our officers and sergeants were doing, would not only abandon us, they would stand on the side of Austria-Hungary and allow her to punish her restless and disloyal neighbor, who prepares revolts and assassinations on her territory. The life interests of Serbia impose on her the obligation to be aware of everything that could provoke an armed conflict with Austria-Hungary at a time when peace is necessary for us to recuperate and prepare for the future.”

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that on this same day, June 24, the Serbian King Peter, now almost 70 years old, named his son, the crown prince Alexander, as his regent, which included supreme command of the army. Alexander was known to be more sympathetic to the Black Hand than his father was, so one wonders whether the Black Hand engineered this transfer of power to protect itself and the army against the nosy Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Back in Sarajevo, on Saturday, June 27, Ilić handed out the bombs, pistols, and cyanide packets to his six assassins. Gavrilo would make one final visit to the grave of Bogdan Žerajić to lay flowers and to swear vengeance. The flowers were stolen from another grave in the cemetery, as Gavrilo had no money to buy flowers on his own.

The Archduke and his entourage would visit Sarajevo the following morning, Sunday, June 28. They would be passing through the city along the Appel Quay, a street that follows along the edge of the river through the middle of the town. Early on the 28th, Ilić stationed the other six at various points along the motorcade route, which was well known and had been publicized in advance.

At ten o'clock, the Archduke's motorcade began its trip down the Appel Quay. The three assassins recruited in Sarajevo, the assassins who weren't really assassins, froze when the time came and were unable to act. But as the Archduke's car passed the first of the *real* assassins, he took action. He broke the detonator on his bomb. These bombs, by the way, are small devices, small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. Once you break the detonator, the bomb explodes in ten to twelve seconds. But breaking the detonator makes a pretty loud bang on its own. So when the assassin broke the detonator, that attracted attention. He threw the device, aiming his throw so it would land inside the open car containing the Archduke. But the driver had heard the bang and saw the throw. He stepped on the accelerator, speeding up the car, and the bomb hit the folded-down convertible roof on the back of the car instead, and bounced into the street.

The car behind the Archduke's car, containing aides and assistants, rolled over the bomb just as it went off. The explosion injured the occupants of the vehicle and several bystanders, and blew a hole in the pavement, but killed no one.

The motorcade stopped. There was panic and confusion. The man who had thrown the bomb took his cyanide and, for good measure, jumped over the railing and into the river. But the cyanide the assassins had been given was old and ineffective. It was enough to make you sick, but not enough to kill you. As for the river, it was only five inches deep at that time of year. Police were able to grab the assassin and take him into custody.

The other assassins appear to have panicked. No one took advantage of that moment of confusion when the motorcade was stopped in the middle of the street. Other people packed the scene, so it might have been too crowded to act. The 17-year old testified later that he got cold feet after seeing the Duchess and feeling sorry for her. His 18-year old classmate hid his bomb and ran away.

The only member of the group who kept his wits about him after the failed attempt was Gavrilo Princip. He saw the police dragging his friend away, and took that to mean the assassination was a success. He drew closer, intending to kill his friend and then himself, per their instructions.

But then he realized that the attempt had failed, and the Archduke was still alive. He switched targets then, and attempted to kill the Archduke. But by then it was too late. The motorcade started up again, and carried the Archduke away to the safety of the Sarajevo town hall.

But Gavrilo still wasn't ready to give up. He knew that the Archduke's motorcade was scheduled to be coming back along the Appel Quay after the visit to the town hall. So he returned to the

spot Ilić had stationed him, only moving to the other side of the street, since the Archduke's car would be returning from the opposite direction. He took up a position on a corner, at the intersection of Appel Quay and Franz Josef Street, in front of Moritz Schiller's delicatessen, and he waited.

He didn't have long to wait. Less than a half hour after he took up his position—although I imagine to Gavrilo it felt much longer—the Archduke's motorcade approached on its return trip. Owing to a miscommunication, the Archduke's car actually made the right turn onto Franz Josef street right in front of Gavrilo. Oskar Piotrek, in the car with the Archduke, ordered the driver to stop and back out onto the Appel Quay. The assassination plan had fallen apart into a series of errors and mishaps, but now, here, right in front of Gavrilo, sat his quarry in a stopped car, just a few paces away.

There wasn't going to be a better opportunity. Gavrilo made those few paces and fired two shots. One struck the Archduke; the other struck his wife.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue the story. Was the assassination successful? Will there be repercussions? Spoiler alert: yes, and yes. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. All seven of the assassins were eventually arrested and tried, six in Austria and one in Serbia. Under Austrian law, defendants under the age of twenty at the time the crime was committed were ineligible for the death penalty. So the only one of the seven to be executed for the crime was the 23-year old recruiter, Danilo Ilić. Gavrilo Princip received the maximum sentence, which was twenty years in prison. But he was already sickly and had tuberculosis and these conditions plus a combination of wartime hardships and mistreatment led to his death from that disease on April 28, 1918, at the age of 23. His corpse was buried in an unmarked grave, to prevent his last resting place from becoming a Serb nationalist shrine, but two years later, remains believed to be Princip's were recovered and were reburied in Sarajevo.

[music: Closing Theme]