

AMERICAN HERITAGE HISTORY OF

WORLD WAR I

S.L.A. MARSHALL



AMERICAN HERITAGE • NEW WORD CITY



AMERICAN HERITAGE HISTORY OF

WORLD WAR I

S.L.A. MARSHALL

AMERICAN HERITAGE • NEW WORD CITY



CHAPTER 1
**WHEN THE LIGHTS
WENT OUT**

In the Bosnian town of Sarajevo on the morning of June 28, 1914, a chauffeur misunderstood his instructions, made the wrong turn, tried too late to correct his blunder, and in so doing, delivered his passengers to a point where a waiting assassin did not have to take aim to gun them down.

Two rounds from one pistol and the world rocked. The crime was the small stone that loosened brings the avalanche. There followed four years of universal violence. Millions met untimely death. Many mistaken instructions, wrong turns, and belated tries to redress errors entered into the making of [World War I](#). The ambushing of an Austrian couple was the precipitating incident.

This book is about the crime of fifty years ago and what came from it. It tells why the killers killed and how it happened that the tragedy did not end there. The players and the performance at Sarajevo are the beginning of the tale to be unfolded. Intrigue, violence, and death color the scene. They also mark the larger story to the finish. But for the murder at Sarajevo, there might never have been a war. People can speculate to the contrary; they cannot know.

So to begin. Seven young Serbian nationalists formed the murder mob. They were a carpenter, a printer, teacher, and four students. Five were under twenty; the elder of the other two was twenty-seven. This undertaking was their first and only crime together. Their arrangements were so haphazard, their skill with weapons so minimal, that the plot should have failed. The men armed themselves with Belgian pistols, crude hand bombs, and cyanide capsules, the last for suicide. Under a burning sun in midmorning, they parted, walked through flag-bedecked streets and holiday crowds, and took up separate positions along a street called the Appel Quay, flanking the Miljačka River. It was a gala morning, for Sarajevo was celebrating the [Feast of Saint Vitus](#), the symbol of Serbian resurrection and victory over the Turks. To the seven young conspirators, it was the right day for a good deed.

So they awaited their target, the Archduke [Franz Ferdinand](#). Their motives in seeking the death of the heir apparent of [Austria-Hungary](#) were as bizarre, contradictory, and rooted in personal emotion as his reasons for affording them the oppor-

tunity. The archduke was not personally an oppressor of his people, the southern Slavs, and had tried to be their friend. The [Serbs](#) and [Croats](#) in Austria's southern provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina were not abused or maltreated under the empire. By the standards of the day, they lived well.

The seven assassins were not bent on bringing down Austria-Hungary's Dual Monarchy, which, with its many faults, still afforded Central Europe a better life than its various peoples had ever known separately. They went gunning for the archduke because they wanted a bigger place in the sun for Serbia, and he kept the rendezvous because he wanted a bigger place in the sun for his wife.

June 28 was the archduke's fourteenth wedding anniversary. His wife had been Countess [Sophie Chotek](#), child of a noble, obscure Czech family, lady in waiting to the archduke's cousin, Isabella. Old Emperor [Franz Joseph](#) was so offended by his nephew's choice of a mate beneath his station that the two wrangled about the marriage for a year. When at last the emperor consented, Franz Ferdinand got only half of what he wanted. He was compelled to renounce the rights of succession and rank for his children, taking Sophie as a [morganatic](#) wife. The marriage proved to be a great love affair, blessed by three children, but the humiliation and bitterness lasted, more so because the court in Vienna snubbed Sophie and did what it could to slight her. She could not ride in the royal carriage with her husband or sit in the royal box at the theater. At court balls, where he led the procession, she was placed behind the last princess of royal blood.

Gradually, the old emperor softened toward Sophie, but Franz Ferdinand could never forgive the court; such sentiment was not in him. Swollen with pride, dangerously thin-skinned, a misanthrope, a religious bigot, and a miser, he was the loneliest man in Vienna, loved only by his wife and children. There was no moderation in him; his humors and rages were those of a spoiled child. No worthwhile subordinate could abide him for long. His career was littered with broken friendships, ruined by his temper and spitefulness. Not attracted to small vices, he showed his love of excess in more lordly ways.