

The Spark

The incident that sparked World War I occurred on June 28, 1914, in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. On that date, Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, were assassinated by a young Serbian terrorist named Gavrilo Princip. The Archduke had been heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. The Austrian government blamed Serbia for the murders and declared war.

Francis Ferdinand had gone to Bosnia to check on the Austro-Hungarian troops stationed there. The trip was ill-advised and dangerous. Bosnia was an Austrian province with a large Serb population. Many Serbs in that province as well as in neighboring Serbia (later part of Yugoslavia) believed that Bosnia should be part of Serbia. Members of a secret organization called the Black Hand thought this could best be accomplished through such terrorist acts as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand.

When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, the previously formed alliances came into play. Russia had vowed to protect Serbia in the event of war, and Germany had promised to fight on the side of Austria-Hungary. Because of its treaty with Russia, France was forced to prepare for war with Germany. Great Britain later came to the aid of France and Russia when Germany started action by invading neutral Belgium, a nation the British had agreed to protect. Eventually the two opposing sides took shape, and the first world war began.

Circle the letter of each correct answer.

1. Austria-Hungary blamed the assassination of Francis Ferdinand on
 - a. Russia
 - b. Serbia
 - c. France
2. The country obligated by treaty to protect Serbia was
 - a. Russia
 - b. Great Britain
 - c. Germany
3. France was drawn into the conflict because of its treaty with
 - a. Russia
 - b. Great Britain
 - c. Austria-Hungary
4. Great Britain entered the war when Germany invaded
 - a. Serbia
 - b. France
 - c. Belgium
5. Serbia later became part of the nation of
 - a. Czechoslovakia
 - b. Russia
 - c. Yugoslavia
6. After Archduke Ferdinand's assassination, Austria-Hungary sent Serbia, its long-time enemy, a list of demands. This list included the requirement that Serbia permit Austrian officials to suppress all anti-Austrian activity within the borders of Serbia. Serbia's compliance with this demand would have virtually meant the end of its independence. Why do you think Austria-Hungary issued such a stern demand, knowing that Serbia was not likely to submit to it?