Assassination of the Archduke

The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 caused World War I to begin. The following excerpt describes the plot to kill the archduke. The writer is Borijove Jevtic, a member of the group of Serbian nationalists that planned and carried out the killing. Jevtic was imprisoned after the assassination. However, he was released because no evidence linked him to the actual murder.

As you read, think about answers to the questions listed below. When you have completed the reading, answer these questions on the next page.

1. How many people were part of the plot to kill the Archduke?
2. Why was the Archduke trying to leave Sarajevo?
3. What sentence was given to Princip for killing the Archduke?
4. Why did Princip want to be killed?

The fateful morning dawned. Two hours before Francis Ferdinand arrived in Sarajevo all the twenty-two conspirators were in their allotted positions, armed and ready. They were distributed 500 yards apart over the whole route along which the Archduke must travel from the railroad station to the town hall.

When Francis Ferdinand and his retinue [assistants] drove from the station they were allowed to pass the first two conspirators. The motor cars were driving too fast to make an attempt feasible [possible] and in the crowd were many Serbians; throwing a grenade would have killed many innocent people.

When the car passed Gabrionic [one of the conspirators], . . . he threw his grenade. It hit the side of the car, but Francis Ferdinand with presence of mind threw himself back and was uninjured. Several officers riding in his attendance were injured.

The cars sped to the Town Hall and the rest of the conspirators did not interfere with them. After the reception in the Town Hall General Potorek, the Austrian Commander, pleaded with Francis Ferdinand to leave the city, as it was seething with rebellion. The Archduke was persuaded to drive the shortest way out of the city and to go quickly.

The road . . . was shaped like the letter V, making a sharp turn at the bridge over the River Nilgacka. Francis Ferdinand’s car could go fast enough until it reached this spot but here it was forced to slow down for the turn. Here Princip had taken his stand.

As the car came abreast he stepped forward from the curb, drew his automatic pistol from his coat and fired two shots. The first struck the wife of the Archduke, the Archduchess Sofia, in the abdomen. She was an expectant mother. She died instantly.

The second bullet struck the Archduke close to the heart.

He uttered only one word, “Sofia”—a call to his stricken wife. Then his head fell back.

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and he collapsed. He died almost instantly.

The officers seized Princip. They beat him over the head with the flat of their swords. They knocked him down, they kicked him, scraped the skin from his neck with the edges of their swords, tortured him, all but killed him.

The next day they put chains on Princip's feet, which he wore till his death. . . .

I was placed in the cell next to Princip's, and when Princip was taken out to walk in the prison yard I was taken along as his companion.

By Oct. 12, the date of Princip's trial, his prison sufferings had worn him to a skeleton.

His sentence was twenty years imprisonment at hard labor, the death sentence being inapplicable because he was a minor.

Awakened in the middle of the night and told that he was to be carried off to another prison, Princip made an appeal to the prison governor:

"There is no need to carry me to another prison. My life is already ebbing away. I suggest that you nail me to a cross and burn me alive. My flaming body will be a torch to light my people on their path to freedom."

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