

THE ASSASSINATION OF ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND AND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

For a dozen years, living in Summit, New Jersey, and ensconced in my role as a buyer for Lamson Brothers, I have, in fact, travelled widely in Europe, the Balkans, Russia, Scandinavia and South America. I was quietly accompanied on each trip by a genuine buyer (another member of the team) so that I could return with goods and products that I had “acquired” in the countries that I visited. Otherwise, I can say nothing of the origin or real purpose of these trips, which is why, since my return from China, I have written nothing other than my personal diaries and letters. But world events have now moved to a different and dangerously complex level. Hostilities broke out in October 1912 when the Balkan League, an alliance between Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro, declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Within just a month, the Ottoman army collapsed and Bulgarian troops pushed the enemy to within twenty miles of the capital, Istanbul. The Serbs, Greeks and Montenegrins all made similar advances and by December, the Ottomans lost all areas to the west of Istanbul. The war ended with the signing of the London Treaty in May 1913, when the possessions of the Empire in the Balkan territories, which had been Ottoman for over five hundred years, were partitioned among the allies. The Balkan Wars left the region dangerously unstable and it is within this powder keg that my diary notes track the outbreak of the Great War.



18th June 1914: Under cover in Paris reviewing situation for Roosevelt: shocked that while Russia and Germany mobilise, the French sit and drink coffee

19th June 1914: Chief of Staff, General Moltke calls for a German “preventive war” against Russia “while we still have a chance of victory”

20th June 1914: The Balkan crisis is set to explode and I leave Paris today for Sarajevo to follow events and report back to Albert Beveridge

21st June 1914: Black Hand Executive issues recall to Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic (aka Apis) cancelling assassination plans - it is ignored

23rd June 1914: Membership of Serbian secret society “Unification or Death”, known as the Black Hand (Crna Ruka), estimated at 3500 pre WW1. Rumours are rife that the Black Hand assassins: Gavrilo Princip, Nedeljko Cabrinovic and Trifko Grabez have been smuggled across the border from Serbia to Bosnia

25th June 1914: There is consternation in Sarajevo at the news that Franz Ferdinand's visit will go ahead on 28th despite threats from the Black Hand group

26th June 1914: Security is high and all young men in Sarajevo are under suspicion. I have been stopped to show my papers four times today

28th June 1914: Franz Ferdinand's car turns onto Appel Quay - a blast cracks the morning air but the lead car escapes. The Archduke's car speeds away: the second car is wrecked: a young man jumps into the Miljacka river but it is only knee-deep. Fleeing the bombers, the Archduke's car turns into Franz Josef St but another assassin is waiting there. Two shots are fired. Archduke Franz Ferdinand is dead. Duchess Sophie is dead. The killer, Gavrilo Princip, is arrested. Clouds of war now gather

29th June 1914: Mobs of Croat and Bosnian demonstrators, directing their anger at Serb shops, banks and offices have destroyed the Hotel Evropa. From dawn, groups of Muslims and Croats have been on the streets of Sarajevo attacking and looting property belonging to Serbs

30th June 1914: Sarajevo newspapers report that riots against Serb civilians and their property resemble “the aftermath of Russian pogroms.” The bodies of Franz Ferdinand and his wife are transported to Sarajevo's railway station. Some order is restored in the city but Governor Postoriek declares a “State of Siege” and issues a proclamation to eradicate the “subversive elements of this land”

1st July 1914: A Russian report states that more than a thousand houses and shops have been destroyed in Sarajevo - my eyes tell me it is more. The Govt sets up a special Sarajevo court authorised to impose death penalty for acts of murder and violence committed during the riots. Press reports state that police encouraged the riots and that the authorities stood by while Sarajevo Serbs were murdered

2nd July 1914: The official press in Sarajevo are publishing hostile anti-Serb pamphlets, claiming that Serbs are carrying hidden bombs. Slovenian politician Ivan Šusteršič calls for non-Serbs “to shatter the skull of the Serb in whom voracious megalomania lives” and anti-Serb demonstrations and riots have now spread to other cities including Đakovo and Brod in Croatia, and Mostar in Bosnia

2nd July 1914: Sarajevo is now out of control. I fear that this ethnic hatred will sweep across the Balkans and into the heart of Europe

3rd July 1914: The funerals of the Archduke and Duchess take place today at Hofburg Chapel in Vienna - no foreign royalty are invited. Prime Minister Pasic orders all public entertainment venues in Sarajevo closed so that Franz Ferdinand is duly respected. Kaiser Willhelm’s plan to use the funeral as an informal conference is foiled, and a last chance to secure peace is wasted

3rd July 1914: Austro-Hungarian cabinet meet to debate their response to the assassination. Mobilisation against Serbia is the favoured option. Report from military attache in Berlin states that the German General Staff “would be pleased if war were to come about today.” Sarajevo press reports that the assassin, Gavrilo Princip, has confessed but is too young for death sentence and will die in jail

3rd July 1914: Telegram received this afternoon from Beveridge says that “across America there is a stunned feeling that something momentous has happened”

4th July 1914: Germany’s voice is strong but will they really support an Austro-Hungarian war with Serbia - Europe is in fear that they will, particularly since Kaiser Wilhelm says he is entirely for “settling accounts with Serbia and finishing with the Serbs, quickly - now or never”

4th July 1914: Hungarian PM Istvan Tisza opposes war with Serbia stating that it will trigger war with Russia, hence a general European war, and advises that before any war with Serbia, Bulgaria should be encouraged to join the Triple Alliance

4th July 1914: As the calls for war intensify no Head of State appears able to quell the collective madness of their politicians and generals

5th July 1914: Telegram from Beveridge says TR wants me to stay as long as possible - but my cover as a buyer for Lamson's is wearing thin

5th July 1914: Kaiser Wilhelm states that Austria-Hungary can "count on Germany's full support and should march at once against Serbia"

5th July 1914: One by one, as falling dominoes, countries will now be drawn into the growing conflict by their interlocking treaty obligations. We should have heeded the warnings of Washington and Jefferson 100 years ago about the dangers of "entangling alliances"

6th July 1914: the British Foreign Secretary "believed that a peaceful solution would be reached"

7th July 1914: German Chancellor states that the decision for war or peace is in Austria's hands - but advises that Austria choose the former

7th July 1914: Police and army patrols control the streets and all Serbian journalists have been ordered to leave Sarajevo within 24 hours. All telephone calls and telegraph messages are now being monitored and censored - Sarajevo becomes ever more dangerous

7th July 1914: A scribbled message under my asks me to a meeting of journalists at the office of "Serbian Word" - but nobody is there

8th Jul 1914: Visited in my lodgings today by a "Herr Schmidt" and told that I must leave Sarajevo before 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon ... chilling.

9th Jul 1914: I did not leave and at 5 o'clock, Herr Schmidt returned, took away all of my belongings except for my washing kit and a single change of clothes, and put me under house arrest

22nd July 1914: Released today after 20 days locked incommunicado in my lodgings. No idea why ... now attempting to make my way back to France and, fortunately, catch one of the last few trains to run

23rd July 1914: Press reports Austria has sent a humiliating ultimatum to Serbia and demanded an answer within 48 hours or she will march

23rd July 1914: Churchill is correct that “Europe is trembling on the verge of war” but sadly wrong to believe that Britain can stay neutral.

24th July 1914: Back in Paris just before midnight and I am both fascinated and saddened to witness the incredible juxtaposition of the music, the gaiety and the boulevard cafes as Europe staggers towards war

24th July 1914: The Times reports that the British Cabinet will discuss the “Serbian Affair” for the first time today - what madness is this? Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey offers mediation talks but Wilhelm orders that Britain’s “condescending offer” is rejected. British Ambassador to Austria-Hungary reports to London that “War is thought imminent. Expecting an Austrian declaration of war on the 25th, Serbia mobilises her forces and Austria breaks off diplomatic relations. Wild enthusiasm prevails in Vienna”

25th July 1914: Jean Baptiste Martin's caretaker government in Paris recalls forces from Morocco and cancels leave for French troops from 26th

25th July 1914: Press reports today that Emperor Franz Joseph has signed a mobilisation order for 8th army corps to begin operations against Serbia

27th July 1914: Grey tells the British Cabinet that they must now decide whether to choose neutrality or to enter the conflict if war arises. Kaiser Wilhelm refuses Bethmann-Hollweg's offer of resignation, with the acid comment - “You've made this stew. Now you're going to eat it!”

27th July 1914: Churchill orders that the dispersal of our fleet is halted a decision that Germany considers “has put the British Navy on a war footing.”

27th July 1914: Now that his Generals have brought Europe to the brink of war, Kaiser Wilhelm returns to Germany from his North Sea cruise. Grey warns that if Germany continues to support Austria, Britain will have no other choice than to side with France and Russia

28th July 1914: Feared but expected, Austria declares war on Serbia. An ignoble war born of politics declared on a militarily weak country. And so, it begins ... how many will have to die before it ends?

29th Jul 1914: Gen Leonard Wood and TR meet with President Wilson to map out plans for their “Preparedness Movement” - again Wilson insists on US neutrality

29th July 1914: Telegram from Beveridge: “Wilson's government again calls for neutrality in thought and deed” - TR, back from the Amazon, is furious

29th July 1914: Bethmann Hollweg reveals that Germany will soon violate Belgium's neutrality as their route to war against France and Russia. Foreign Secretary Grey warns that if Germany attacks France, then Britain will have to consider going to war with Germany. The British government now considers a world war inevitable and orders a general alert for its armed forces - the die is cast

31st July 1914: Kaiser Wilhelm orders German mobilisation and troops began preparations to enter Belgium as a preliminary to invading France. The German Ambassador in Paris tells Prime Minister Rene Viviani that if Russia continues its mobilisation then Germany will attack France. General Joffre calls for permission to order a general mobilisation of the French Army. His request is refused by Rene Viviani

31st Jul 1914: As Europe tears itself to shreds ... I am amazed to receive by private courier, my gilded invitation to Ambassador Herrick's Summer Ball at the American Embassy

2nd Aug 1914: Reports from yesterday of German troops advancing into Luxembourg and massing at Belgian border trigger full French mobilisation. Foreign Secretary Grey warns Parliament and German diplomat Lichnowsky that if Germany violates Belgian neutrality, Britain must go to war. He also promises the French Ambassador that the Royal Navy will protect France's coast from German attack

2nd Aug 1914: In the last 24 hours, Germany has declared war on Russia, occupied Luxembourg and invaded Belgium – the dominoes are falling

3rd Aug 1914: German troops have laid siege to the village of Longwy “the iron gate to Paris” near the Luxembourg border, opening France to invasion, and are now massed on the Belgian border but brave King Albert has again refused their request to cross en route to France. Claiming that French aviators have dropped bombs on Germany, Wilhelm von Schoen issues Germany’s declaration of war on France and invades neutral Belgium.

3rd Aug 1914: Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary said today, “Last week I stated that we were working for peace not only for this country, but to preserve the peace of Europe. Today events move so rapidly that it is exceedingly difficult to state with technical accuracy the actual state of affairs, but it is clear that the peace of Europe cannot be preserved. Russia and Germany, at any rate, have declared war upon each other. France makes its own counter-declaration of war against Germany and moves troops into the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine and Britain has now sent an ultimatum to Germany insisting that they withdraw from Belgium.

4th Aug 1914: Britain’s ultimatum to Germany remains unanswered and, on this day, Britain has declared war on Germany. A state of war will exist from midnight, Berlin time

4th Aug 1914: Paris, normally deserted for the August holidays, is seething with crowds of conscripts following Sunday's mobilisation order

4th Aug 1914: Heavy German columns have crossed the Meuse and are advancing rapidly through Venders, Francorchamps and Dolhain to attack Liege

4th Aug 1914: If Franz Ferdinand had not been shot in Sarajevo, what other reason would our leaders have chosen to justify this madness?

4th Aug 1914: As war erupts across Europe America confirms her neutrality. President Woodrow Wilson says again that the United States will remain “impartial in thought as well as in action.”

5th Aug 1914: On his return to Vienna Count Hoyos reported to the Austro-Hungarian Crown Council that Austria had Germany’s full support even if “measures against Serbia should bring about a big war,” yet,

somehow, the British Foreign Secretary still believes “that a peaceful solution can be reached.”

6th Aug 1914: Britain is now at war while America has declared neutrality. I have to leave France but since I am British by birth and American by adoption - where should I be going?

