

Seven in Wait

SEVEN MEN STRUNG OUT ALONG the visitor's route. Not one or two, not an army, but exactly seven.

Five, perhaps all seven, suffering from tuberculosis, and five of them under twenty years of age, the oldest of the other two not yet twenty-eight. Every one of them a fervent nationalist, true, but when opportunity presented itself, five would be unable to act.

Two of them would.

There they were, this day in late June, 1914. Four students, a printer, a carpenter, and a teacher. The seven, never before known to have banded together to commit a crime...much less outright murder.

It was late morning, and the town of Sarajevo, Bosnia, baked under a hot sun as they took their positions on Appel Quay, a street alongside a river. Flags flew and excited crowds waited along the same route. The motorcade would be coming...but a short one. Just four cars.

No guards, of course. After all, this was peaceful 1914. Guards...who needed them?

In the second open-top car sat a middle-age, rather famous couple, Franz and Sophie.

It was their fourteenth wedding anniversary, and so he wanted it to be special and joyous for his younger bride.

The conspirators at their separate stations waited with taut nerves as the moment for action loomed ever closer.

Millions around the world, but most of them in Europe, had no idea that their lives were about to be turned upside down...even snuffed out.

The first two would-be assassins were waiting at the Cumuria Bridge, each armed with a hand bomb. As the motorcade drew abreast, the first of the two failed to act. A policeman got in his way, Muhamed Mehmedbašić later said as his excuse. But his nearby partner, Nedeljko Cabrinovic, did act.

Spotting the green feathers on Franz Ferdinand's military helmet, he "heaved his bomb," as is related by American military historian S. L. A. Marshall in his 1985 book *World War I*.

But Cabrinovic had been spotted. The royal car suddenly leaped forward. Ferdinand apparently sensed or saw the threat, raised his arm to protect his wife, and actually deflected the deadly missile.

It fell into the street, but not without effect: "A flying splinter hit Sophie in the face." Others in the motorcade and a handful of spectators on the street were struck by metal fragments as well. Cabrinovic, for his part, gulped down the capsule of cyanide he had been carrying and dived into the adjoining Miljacka River. But here he failed again, on both counts. Obviously defective, the alleged poison only made him vomit, and the river at this point was only inches deep.

As the first two cars of the motorcade now sped onward toward the city hall of Sarajevo, Burgomaster Fehim Effendi Curcic, in the lead car, was unaware of the tumult left behind. "He had missed the explosion in the roar of the crowd, and his mind stayed on his speech of welcome."

Quite unnoticed, the two cars had swept right past the next three of the conspirators. None took action. That meant two more were yet to be encountered.

Unbelievably, the motorcade, such as it was, stopped as planned, whereupon the angry Archduke Ferdinand left his vehicle, took the burgomaster's arm, and shouted: "One comes here for a visit and is received with bombs. Mr. Mayor, what do you say? It's outrageous. All right, now you may speak."

Still confused, the mayor launched into his welcoming speech, saying his people's hearts were filled with happiness, but didn't acknowledge regret about the bomb or relief that the party had escaped serious injury...for the moment.

Franz Ferdinand responded in princely manner, "smiling as he closed with the words, 'I assure you of my unchanged regard and favor.'"

The principals in the group then debated whether to continue the program as planned, with Military Governor Oskar Potiorek saying yes and predicting there would be no further trouble. But the archduke said he wouldn't take part; his greater duty would be to visit the injured bomb victims at a local hospital.

Sophie should not go with him, he argued. He begged her not to share in the possible risk, but she insisted, "No, I must go with you."

She did, and as their car passed the Imperial Bridge close by, it went right past the sixth of the seven conspirators. Like most of those before him, he took no action.

The mayor's vehicle was still in the lead as it and the royal car neared the intersection with Appel Quay again. There, they should have followed it to the hospital, but instead the lead chauffeur turned right into Franz Josef Street by mistake.

This was ironic since Franz Ferdinand was heir to the aging Emperor Franz Josef of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, for whom the street was named. The would-be assassins awaiting him and his bride that twenty-eighth day of June 1914 were young Serbian nationalists bent on greater things for their small country.

And now, as the cars turned right into Franz Josef Street, Military Governor Potiorek protested: "What's this? We've taken the wrong way!"

With that, confusion reigned. The cars stopped, with no choice but to turn around or back up. Just five feet away stood Gavrilo Princip, the seventh and last of the conspirators. He had a pistol and he fired just twice, "with as little noise as if he had fired blanks."

But of course they weren't blanks. One bullet struck Franz Ferdinand in the neck; the other hit Sophie in the abdomen.

For long moments, they each sat so upright, without appearance of distress, Potiorek thought the gunman must have missed.

But then the crown prince expelled "a stream of blood from his mouth." And Sophie cried out, "For heaven's sake, what's happened to you?" Then she herself collapsed.

The archduke briefly rallied, pleading with his wife, "Sophie, Sophie, don't die. Stay alive for our children!"

She died before they could remove her from the car.

Asked if he were in pain and suffering, her husband several times said, "It is nothing." But it was...he was also dead in a short time.

And thus, with the millions about to be affected still unaware, the world's greatest war yet had been started, with the royal couple's to be the first deaths of an estimated sixteen million about to follow.

Additional Note: Austrian Count Franz von Harrach was standing on the running board of the open touring car bearing the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie as a bodyguard when the fateful two shots crackled in the summer air. Even as the car was immediately thrown into reverse, he later said, "[A] thin stream of blood spurted from His Highness's mouth onto my right cheek."

Pulling out a handkerchief to wipe off the blood, he heard the Duchess Sophie dramatically ask her husband had happened to him.

Before she could get an answer or fathom the real situation, the count also related, "she slid off the seat and lay on the floor of the car, with her face between his knees."

Von Harrach "had no idea that she too was hit and thought she had simply fainted with fright."

But then he heard the archduke say his last words to her about caring for their children.

"At that," adds the count's eyewitness report (taken here from the website www.eyewitnesstohistory.com), "I seized the Archduke by the collar of his uniform, to stop his head dropping forward and asked him if he was in great pain. He answered me quite distinctly, 'It's nothing!' His face began to twist somewhat but he went on repeating, six or seven times, ever more faintly as he gradually lost consciousness, 'It's nothing!' Then, after a short pause, there was a violent choking sound caused by the bleeding."

Lady Almina

ONCE UPON A TIME—DURING World War I, that is—there almost was a real *Downton Abbey*, just like the one in the television series. In fact, the magnificent building rising so dramatically out of the English countryside on the television screen really does exist, only it's called Highclere Castle, a wondrous pile of stone rising from a chalk ridge in Hampshire, between London and Bristol.

This was where a real-life Lady Almina, 5th Countess of Carnarvon, and her husband, the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, lived with their children and dozens of servants, enjoying the Edwardian style of English country life up to the start of war for Britain, August 4, 1914. At that moment, writes the present Countess of Carnarvon in her 2011 book *Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey: The Lost Legacy of Highclere Castle*, "upstairs and downstairs, the people of Highclere were staring life-changing tragedy in the face. They just didn't know it yet."

Well, actually, it seems that Lady Almina, for one, did have a notion or two in that regard. She had already obtained permission from both her husband and from Lord Kitchener, the most important man in the armies of Britain, to turn the commodious Highclere Castle into a hospital for wounded officers when the widely expected war actually came about.

And true, writes the current countess in residence at Highclere, the war really was expected for months, if not for years in advance—for instance, by Lady Almina's own immensely wealthy father, the banker Alfred Rothschild.

"Alfred had placed his considerable powers of influence, his network of contacts and his money at the disposal of the British government, acting as an unofficial intermediary between the unraveling Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany," writes the present Countess of Carnarvon in her book. "Half of