



# The Snows of Serbia: A child-soldier in the Great War

*Stevan Idjidovic Stevens*

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At a celebration of an important Serbian holiday, Stevan, a teen-age Serbian citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire learns that Archduke Ferdinand has been killed—by a Serb! This critical historical event leads to radical changes in the life of the author, of the Balkans, and of the world. This first-hand account of a school boy caught up in World War I in Southeastern Europe illustrates the horrors of war and illuminates some of the religious and ethnic tensions that continue to plague that area in the twenty-first century. The author provides a poignant memoir of survival, bravery, and coming-of-age in the midst of one of the most agonizing retreats in modern warfare. After seeing his father shot by the Imperial soldiers, Stevan swims across the Sava River to the Kingdom of Serbia, even while being fired at by the Austrian soldiers. He volunteers for the Serbian army. This poorly equipped and out-numbered army ties up many divisions of the Austrian, German, and Bulgarian armies for more than a year. Strategically, this provides time for the English and French allies to better protect the Western Front. For the Serbians, it involves a long winter retreat across Serbia and through the mountains of Montenegro and Albania. During this retreat, Serbia loses a substantial portion of its younger generation of men, as well as civilians of all ages. After gaining respite in Corfu, the author's life is again altered radically. The French and English allies take the under-aged Serbian soldiers to France or England to complete their education. Stevan chooses to go to England. Meanwhile, his mother and siblings believe him dead, the fate of so many of his contemporaries.

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