

# The Great War

## in the Třeboň Region



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## 1. They killed Franz Ferdinand

The beginning of World War I is closely linked to the Trebon Region. Franz Ferdinand, successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne travelled to Sarajevo from his summer residence in nearby Chlum u Třeboně. The family's main residence was in Konopiště near Benesov. However, they regularly spent the summer in their summer residence in rural Chlum u Třeboně.

The family arrived at the summer residence on June 19, 1914. As usually, they participated actively in local life. They greeted the merchants, the parish priest and, together with other residents, attended holy mass at the parish church. On June 23, 1914, they left their three children in the care of their foster parents at Chlum Castle and Franz Ferdinand and his pregnant wife went to Sarajevo to never return. Both succumbed to assassination on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo, then still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During a military parade, the car carrying Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sophia was attacked by a group of six assassins led by Danilo Ilic. Ferdinand and Sophia were shot by Serbian separatist Gavrilo Principe and died before they could be rushed to a hospital. The Sarajevo assassination was an excuse for Austro-Hungary to declare war on Serbia, which quickly expanded into World War I.

It was also a personal tragedy for the three children of Franz Ferdinand, who were still in Chlum with their tutor Dr. Stranovský. The oldest daughter Sophia later recalled these terrible moments:

*"We just sat at lunch when the phone rang at 2:30 pm. My brothers' tutor was recalled and returned after a few minutes, completely pale in his face. He told us that our parents were hurt. We were all very uneasy and immediately went to church to pray. Only the next day we learned the whole truth... "*

## 2. The start of the war

Initially, life in the countryside continued to run at its own pace. People devoted themselves to farming but did not forget the folk festivals. One of them was the annual pilgrimage in Jílovice, which has been held since time immemorial for the feast of St. James, the patron of the local church.

On Sunday, July 26, 1914, many people from nearby villages set out for the pilgrimage to Jílovice to relax and meet with their relatives and acquaintances, and also to give their children a little joy. But here, amid merriment, they learned of the mobilization for war. At three o'clock in the afternoon, a coach stopped in front of the local pub. There, an official of the Třeboň Regional Government distributed the mobilization decrees. Suddenly the music stopped playing; everyone flocked to the mayor, who posted a great yellow decree with the title: My Nation!

This decree mobilized active troops and reservists less than 39 years, who had to join their military units until 11 PM July 27, 1914. Mobilization was there. All the men went home sadly, to crying women and children.

This decree gradually got to all rural villages. The next morning, families took the first soldiers to the railway station in Třeboň, where they left for Jindřichův Hradec to join the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Transport of civilians and goods was halted so trains could transport the reservists to the assigned military centres.

Everyone believed they would be home by the end of the year. However, more and more nations got involved, resulting in further mobilization. War turned into a long, never-ending hell.

### 3. New neighbours are coming

The men from the villages gradually went to the front, and refugees from the battlefields arrived.

During the war, the hinterland of the Habsburg monarchy became a refuge for many refugees who were fleeing or forced to evacuate the front lines. Among them were Poles, Ruthenians, Italians. A large number of Jews also fled from the Galicia and Bukovina regions overrun by the Russian army.

The Jews were not only afraid of the approaching front, but also of pogroms by the Russian army. These “Eastern” Jews were in many ways different from the Jews living in the Czech lands; they were very religious and strictly adhered to Jewish regulations. They refused to eat not-kosher food, walked in caftans, and spoke Yiddish. They were the embodiment of life in the ghetto, before emancipation and without the conveniences of modern civilization. Their encounter with the village people caused many conflicts and hostilities.

#### **We find brief reports about them in local chronicles:**

Chronicle of Mladošovice:

*Many Polish refugees were transported to the Třeboň district. 19 came to Kojákovice, 19 to Petrovice, most of them Jewish, 15 of them were to come to Mladošovice. The news that the village was supposed to go for the refugees did not arrive until late in the evening and the carriage left the next morning. However, it came back empty to “regret” of the whole village. The refugees were all allocated.*

*The chronicle of the Domanín describes the arrival of 25 refugees from Galicia on November 18, 1914. It was cold; they were hungry and had nothing to eat. A nine-year-old boy brought them a large, beautiful white loaf of bread, which brought tears to all.*

## 4. Military Hospitals

Castles, monasteries, and manor houses often served as military hospital. This was the case in Třeboň, Chlum u Třeboň, Nové Hrady and other places.

The following testimony in the local chronicle has been preserved about the hospital in Chlum u Třeboň: At the end of 1914, a military infirmary for convalescent soldiers was established in the village inn thanks to the care of the village council. Beds, blankets, duvets and linen were provided mostly by the locals. The ladies' committee, which took care of the soldiers at the station during the first military transports, also supervised the kitchen of the hospital. The first transport came on 2 December 1914, with 35 wounded Moravians. Later the wounded were soldiers from Chlum and its surroundings as well as soldiers of various nationalities.

The wounded received great attention from our population. We also provided a Christmas tree with many presents. Countess Chotková also showed interest in the hospital and often visited. Medical treatment was provided by local district physician Dr. Albert Slavík, the hospital commander. Inspections of the recovered were carried out by a regimental staff doctor from Jindřichův Hradec, sometimes a general from České Budějovice. After a short stay the troops were sent to the military centres and then back to the front. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915, the hospital should have been closed but upon request was extended and relocated to the first floor of a larger tavern, under care of the village and the manor.

In September 1915, there were 45 patients, and their number kept changing until the end of the war, when the hospital was abolished. Three soldiers died in our hospital and are buried in the local cemetery.

In the municipal archives are stored all the wounded lists and all books and interesting military documents relating to the management of the hospital.

## 5. Living with restrictions

People did not fight in the Czech lands, but the villagers were an important source for supplying soldiers on the front with food and raw materials.

It would seem that the locals were at the source of the food chain and had enough for themselves. But the opposite was true. Food inventories were carried out and mandatory levies for basic foodstuffs were established. Regulations restricted the consumption of flour, meat, potatoes, bread and other raw materials to free supplies for the front.

It was not allowed to bake rolls and buns, only bread. Rules limited the amount of wheat and rye flour you could put in bread. The rest had to be replaced with corn or starch flour. And as the war lasted, the amount of flour in the bread fell and bread was losing its taste and nutrition. Similarly, it was ordered that potatoes should not be scraped but only cooked in the skin. Everything was spared and the mandatory levies were great, regardless of the crop and the fact that there were not enough people to work in the field. Prices of food and other necessities rose sharply.

Living in the village was expensive and troublesome. War loans, collections of underwear for soldiers, collections for the preservation of war graves, collections for widows and orphans, poverty, waiting for news of loved ones, worries about who will be mobilized next.

Old men, women, and children remained here to work the fields. The returns were small, but the war needed more and more. Stocks were carefully regulated and forced requisitions left the villagers with little.

## 6. Live at the front

Young men from the villages in the Trebon region were drafted into the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Jindřichův Hradec. From there they left to the front. Depending on which units they were assigned to, they went to the Serbian, Western or Eastern Front and often were later reassigned to other fronts. They ended up in extreme areas such as high mountains, marshy areas, or extensive plains on the Eastern Front.

Soldiers at the front literally lived in the trenches they dug and built in various natural conditions. The trenches were constantly patrolled with soldiers engaged in fighting the enemy or training. However, they were also used for sleeping and resting areas. Toilets were made in a separate place, which over time was buried. Due to poor hygiene in cramped circumstances, deadly epidemics often spread among soldiers.

Deadly gases were first used on the Western Front. Conquering the opponent's trench was not easy. That troops moved only two meters forward in just two weeks, was quite common.

The personal correspondence of Bohumír Tesař from Třeboň shows how the situation gradually evolved. He enlisted as a simple soldier to the 75<sup>th</sup> IR. He was sent to the Eastern Front in Galicia and Ukraine. At first, his family had no news, but over time the situation stabilized and there was a lively correspondence. Parents supported their son not only by letters, but also sent money, food, warm linen and blankets. This ended when he fell into captivity and subsequently joined the independent Czechoslovak legions in Russia. At that moment he became an enemy and his letters were confiscated by censors and did not reach the family. They were very worried and had no way of knowing if he was still alive. Quite desperate, they turned to a family friend who had emigrated to America before the war. He made contact with their son and forwarded letters. Unfortunately, Bohumír could not get home and fell in Russia as Czech Legionnaire.

## 7. Prisoner of War camps

At the beginning of the First World War, Prisoner of War (POW) camps were established in the Czech lands. Existing military forts were used or dedicated POW camps were built on suitable meadows.

The treatment of prisoners of war was regulated by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. POWs were to be given the same food and accommodation as the soldiers of the captive country and were subject to the same disciplinary order. They could be used for work, but they were not to be abused, not associated with military activities, and had to be paid. They could maintain correspondence and receive packages from home. If POWs tried to escape and were captured, they could be punished. However, if they managed to escape and return to their army and then were captured again, they could not be punished for their previous escape. If their laws and their hostile countries allowed it, they could be released on parole and return home as non-combatant. However, if home they re-entered the fighting and were captured again, they were not considered POWs and could be punished.

During the First World War, millions of soldiers fell into enemy captivity - about 2.5 million Russians, 2.2 million Austro-Hungarian soldiers, 1.2 million Germans, 600,000 Italians, 500,000 French, and 200,000 British soldiers. Conditions in prison camps have led to high mortality, mainly due to food shortages, diseases, or climatic conditions. Especially in the first phase of the war, warring countries were not prepared to handle large numbers of prisoners; large POW camps were set up later.

In the Czech lands, prisoners were held in the existing fortresses in Terezin and Josefov. Several dedicated POW camps were built in the form of a small town, such as in Jindřichovice. The Red Cross inspected the camps on both sides. Sometimes, POWs were exchanged between countries.

## 8. Memorials to the Fallen

Directly after WWI, in the first years of independent Czechoslovakia, most WWI monuments were created. Municipalities, towns, families of the fallen, and individuals established large and small monuments, crosses or just stones built on the road to commemorate the victims of war, their courage and, above all, the invaluable importance for the emergence of freedom, democracy and an independent state.

Everyone is different, but they all express respect, memory and thanks to the fallen. Care for them does not stop after 100 years. This is because World War I was a major intervention in people's lives. Men going to war; misery and painful losses affected the lives of almost every family.

The volunteer fire fighters of Kojákovice also created a memorial for the fallen. They accepted the offer of painter and sculptor Jan Kojan, a local, former soldier and Czechoslovak Legionnaire from the Russian front. He designed and made the sculpture that till today still adorns the village. In two months of hard work, Kojan carved out of a 5700 kg sandstone the majestic figure of the "Liberation of the Nation". The statue was put on a pedestal. The four sides of the pedestal depict the suffering of our soldiers and their families during World War I, which brought liberation on 28 October 1918. The names of 18 fallen are carved on two side plates. The unveiling ceremony took place on 19 August 1922, with over 1300 people attending. After a welcome speech by the school administrator and singing by a choir, the secretary of Ceskoslovenska Legionnaire community recalled the suffering of people during the war, the importance of resistance at home and abroad. He appreciated the cultural value and importance of the monument. This was followed by the national hymn and other performances. Throughout the ceremony, an honour guard stood at arms around the monument. The municipality deposited CZK 1,000 for maintenance of the monument in the bank so that the necessary repairs could be made from the interest.

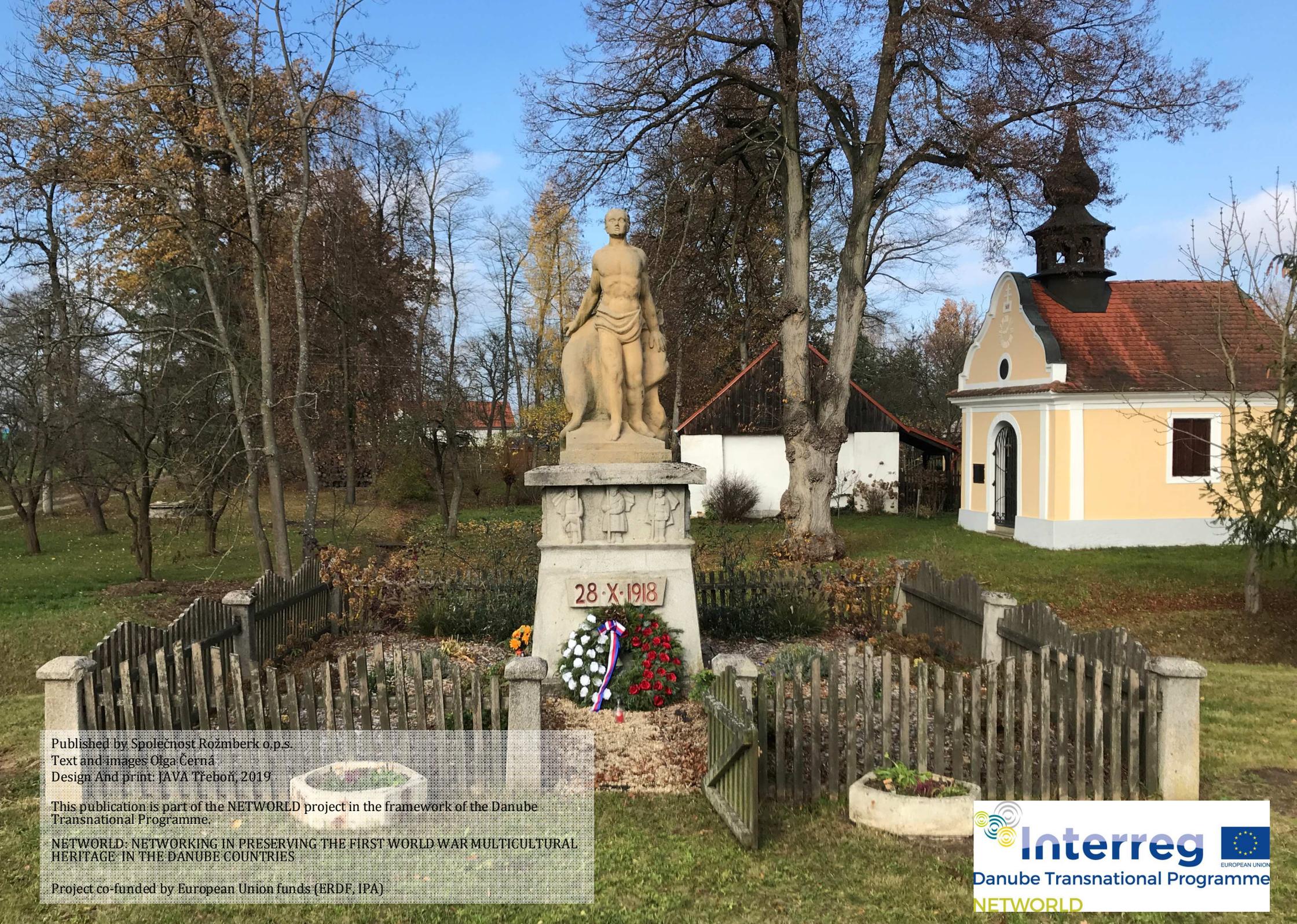
## 9. First World War

### The war that changed the world

### A war that nobody wanted

And millions of simple soldiers, conscripts, whose first experience in trenches, endless marches, starvation, lack of drinking water, new weapons, and poor command by their commanders, have resulted in enormous casualties - nearly 38 million people.

- Huge loss of life, suffering of the injured
- Masses of prisoners of war
- The Spanish flu pandemic of the autumn of 1918
- Change of map of Europe, creation of new states
- Resistance to the Lost Generation War
- War trauma, war disabled
- A difficult return to civilian life
- Emancipation of women, change of fashion
- Living memories - monuments, influence on art, the stigma of war
- Gradual economic recovery
- Overall lifestyle change
- Gain of the right to vote and equal access to education
- Founding of the League of Nations



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