

Centenary (Czech Republic)

By [Jan Adamec](#)

Summary

The article describes commemorative acts and festivities marking the centenary of the Great War in the Czech Republic from 2014 to 2018. It examines the trend of individuals exploring their private collections and discovering what their ancestors did during the war. It also reviews the exhibitions held by memorial institutions. Further, it focuses on various acts of remembrance held by official institutions, NGOs, local communities and municipalities.

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Introduction

The Great War was not a “Czech war” at the beginning. The lack of patriotic fervor, however, did not equal rebellion. Initially, the Czechs marched on battlefields in a disciplined manner as loyal subjects of their emperor. The split between them and the [Austro-Hungarian Empire](#) widened only as the war went on with the prospect of the [empire’s collapse and the birth](#) of independent [Czechoslovakia](#).¹

A prominent scholar and a politician of the pre-1914 era, [Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk](#)

(1850-1937), who had fought for the establishment of Czechoslovakia outside the empire since 1914, invented a powerful narrative in which he framed the Great War as a colossal fight between the progressive, democratic forces, and the theocratic, reactionary ones, where the Czechs and Slovaks joined the former and thus stood on the right side of history.² The horror and tragedy of the Great War was transformed into a success story of national independence and freedom. This narrative constituted the backbone of the Great War's 2014-2018 [commemorative activities](#). However, it was counter-balanced with the perception of the war as a key European and global tragedy of the 20th century.

The general direction of the Great War's commemoration activities shifted from politics and ideology to *alltagsgeschichte*, focusing on the everyday hardship of those in the trenches, regardless of the side they were fighting or dying for, and those in the rear, particularly women and children. The perception of the Great War as a human tragedy enabled the "transfer" of the war from the contested ideological arena of politics of history into the intimacy of families or local communities. This process was facilitated also by the fact that the current political regime showed no particular interest in presenting any coherent state-sponsored narrative of the Great War, except for the commemoration of the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in October 1918, presenting it as a cornerstone of current Czech statehood and a source of national pride.

Most public commemorative acts or [exhibitions](#) marking the Great War were presented in 2014. They focused on the outbreak of the war. In 2018, they focused on the centenary of the foundation of independent Czechoslovakia, proclaimed on 28 October 1918. In between, the Great War was commemorated only scarcely, mentioning selectively a few key historical moments of the Great War, such as the [battle of Verdun](#) in 1916, the [Russian revolution](#) in February and November 1917, and the U.S. entry into the Great War in 1917.

The Czechs commemorated the centenary by publishing books and articles and discussing the war in the media; discovering, digitising, and publishing diaries and individual memorabilia held in private possession; exhibiting the war in [memory institutions](#); erecting statues, renovating memorial sites, re-staging military parades and re-enacting field battles and everyday life during wartime.

Commemorating the War

Acknowledging the significance of various historical anniversaries that were to be commemorated between 2014 and 2018 (and particularly the 100th anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918) for present Czech political culture, statehood and nationhood, both Czech president Miloš Zeman and Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka

declared their intention to take personal auspices over key commemoration activities and participate in them personally as well. The Czech government approved the resolution N. 906 on 27 November 2013 and it tasked the Minister of Defense to prepare and present a draft of a concept of the commemoration of key historical anniversaries between 2014 and 2018, especially focusing on the reenactment of “living history” projects such as *Legiotrain* (see below) and the commemoration of the First World War in general. The concept of the centennial anniversary of the First World War was approved by the government on 16 April 2014. The Minister of Defense was tasked with forming a working commission that would transform the concept into an action plan. The task of the commission (with the participation of representatives of both chambers of the Czech Parliament and regions of the Czech republic), was to evaluate commemorative activities between 2014 and 2018 and report regularly to the Minister of Defense and to produce an annual report for the Czech government.³

The official commemoration of the Great War began in June 2014. The scientific conference titled *1914 – The Changes of Society and State during the War* took place in the Chambers of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic on 16-17 June 2014, and was organized by the Military Historical Institute in cooperation with the Chambers of Deputies and the Ministry of Defense. More than forty historians from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Austria presented their papers, focusing not only on the history of the Great War but also the military aspects of the end of 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.⁴ Opening the conference, both the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Jan Hamáček and the Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický held speeches, stressing the importance of the military activities of the [Czechoslovak Legions](#) during the war and linking them, via the struggle for freedom and independence, to the current foreign Czech military missions in Afghanistan.⁵

The head of the Czech Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Dominik Duka, celebrated a requiem mass in the courtyard of Konopiště Castle on the 100th anniversary of [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este's \(1863-1914\)](#) assassination in [Sarajevo](#). The mass was attended by the Minister of Culture, Daniel Herman, and the Austrian ambassador to the Czech Republic, Ferdinand Trauttmansdorff, to commemorate not only those who died during the war but also those who made protests against the killing, refused to kill and were executed.⁶

State officials then gathered at the Vítkov Military Memorial in Prague. In his official speech, Czech President Miloš Zeman also paid tribute to the Czech troops serving in the military missions in Mali, Afghanistan and Ukraine and claimed that this was the way the Czech Republic could repay its debt from the time it gained its own independence in 1918.⁷

Four years later, in 2018, the Czech Republic joined the all-European commemoration of the end of the war by having the church bells ring out on Friday, 11 November,⁸ visiting the official celebrations commemorating the 100th anniversary of the signing of the armistice in Paris,⁹ and holding public gatherings, masses and official state commemorative acts¹⁰ such as the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Vítkov Military Memorial. Minister of Defence Lubomír Metnar awarded twenty-two Czech army veterans who fought during World War II and the Czech Republic's modern-day foreign military missions.¹¹

In October 2018, the Czech Republic hosted top politicians such as French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who visited Prague on the occasion of Czechoslovakia's centenary celebrations.¹² In his message, conveyed via Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, U.S. President Donald Trump stressed both countries' longtime friendship and alliance, with reference to the participation of Czech soldiers in Afghanistan and shared values such as security, freedom and prosperity.¹³ President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, sent a congratulatory telegram, stating that the Czech nation together with the Slovak nation defended their right to have a sovereign state 100 years ago.¹⁴ Congratulatory telegrams were also sent by Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth, Spanish King Felipe IV, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.¹⁵

On 27 October 2018, soldiers, police officers and firemen made a pledge of allegiance at Prague Castle, overseen by President Zeman.¹⁶ Prime Minister Andrej Babiš also hosted foreign officials and politicians such as Slovak Prime Minister Robert Pellegrini, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Romanian Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu.¹⁷ Babiš and Pellegrini then joined Zeman at the ceremonial re-opening of the National Museum in Prague after a three-year renovation.¹⁸

On 28 October 2018, Babiš and Pellegrini laid wreaths at the National Memorial at Vítkov, paying respect to the memory of those who fought Nazism and died during the Second World War. They also laid a wreath to the statue of Slovak politician and astronomer Milan Rastislav Štefánik, one of the founders of Czechoslovakia, on Petřín Hill in Prague.¹⁹ Babiš, Pellegrini and Zeman, joined by U.S. Minister of Defense James Mattis, then oversaw the military parade of the Czech army and other security forces, police and fire services.²⁰ Foreign media covered the celebrations, emphasizing Czech soldiers parading with their NATO allies and viewing it as a sign of unity with the states who "fathered" Czechoslovakia in 1918: [Great](#)

[Britain](#), [France](#), [Italy](#) and the [USA](#).²¹ The official commemoration was centered around traditional events at Prague Castle where Czech presidents hold traditional ceremonies, recognizing outstanding personalities from politics, military or culture with state awards.²²

These official commemorative acts such as state or municipal officials holding speeches, laying wreaths, singing anthems, planting memorial trees,²³ unveiling new memorial sites or statues dedicated to the members of the Czechoslovak Legions²⁴ or key politicians, most commonly the first president of Czechoslovakia Masaryk (such as the new statue on Bakhmach square in Prague 6 or the memorial desk in Zlín)²⁵ were accompanied by public events, gatherings, popular concerts, retro-exhibitions, fashion shows in period dresses, re-staging of historical events in costumes and historical settings,²⁶ classical music performances such as 19th century composer [Bedřich Smetana's \(1824-1884\)](#) symphonic poem "My Country" or his opera "Libuše" at National Theatre in Prague,²⁷ or theater play "Zítřka to spustíme" ("Tomorrow's the Day!") about the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, written by [Václav Havel \(1936-2011\)](#) and staged at the Dejvice Theatre in Prague.²⁸

The traditional narrative of the Czech Great War was supported by several commemorative projects such as *Legiotrain (Legiovlak)*. The Czechoslovak Legion Association purchased eleven historical passenger cars, renovated them and transformed them in a replica of the *Legiotrain* used by the Czechoslovak Legion soldiers in their way on the Trans-Siberian Railway from 1918 to 1920. The train toured the Czech Republic and Slovakia from 2015 and attracted a lot of attention particularly from the youth.²⁹ The battles at Zborov in July 1917 and Bachmač in May 1918 where the Czechoslovak Legion clashed with the Austro-Hungarian and German armies were officially commemorated at the original sites of the battle, now in [Ukraine](#).³⁰ The commemorative act was visited by the representatives of the Ministry of Defense.³¹

Exhibiting the War

Museums constituted an important platform for commemorating and exhibiting the Great War. The mission of the museum was manifold, from documenting the development of the society based on their collections to presenting the results of their work to the public. In 2005, the Association of Museums and Galleries in the Czech Republic launched a general campaign "Museums and the 20th century" which was aimed at continually informing the public about the activities of museums with a special focus on the 20th century. The aim was

to promote a range of museum “products” such as expositions, exhibitions, publications, publications, seminars, workshops, web presentations, living history reenactments, or theatrical performances.³² To commemorate the Great War, “...the most tragic and important event of modern history”, the association launched an additional campaign, entitled “Museums and the 20th century – Museums and the Great War” to inspire all museums to search through their repositories for any objects, documents and visual documents connected to the Great War period. The campaign took place from 2014 to 2018 and ended with the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War and the foundation of Czechoslovakia.³³

As for a comparison, when the end of the Second World War was commemorated during the campaign entitled “60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War” in 2005, there were seventy-five institutions involved in 111 projects. In 2014, during a similar joint campaign entitled “Museums and the Great War”, there were 110 museums involved in 177 projects altogether. In 2018, during a joint campaign “Museums and the foundation of Czechoslovakia or 100”, there were sixty-one institutions and museums involved in ninety-four projects.³⁴ Two websites www.100.army.cz and www.velkavalka.cz were established and launched for private and public institutions to present their events, exhibitions and publications.³⁵

Nine institutions focused on preserving and exhibiting national memory – The National Museum in Prague (NM), National Technical Museum in Prague (NTM), Technical Museum in Brno (TM), Military Historical Institute in Prague (MHI), Municipal Museum of Brno (MM), Moravian Regional Museum (MRM), Moravian Gallery (MG), The Postal Museum in Prague (PM) and Konopiště Castle – pooled their resources within the project *The Great War 1914 – 1918* which officially commenced on 28 June 2014, simultaneously in Prague and Brno (with some additional and accompanying programs beginning in April 2014).³⁶ The aim of the project was to present and commemorate for the Czech public various aspects of the conflict, from various exhibitions in museums based on collections and accompanied by lectures, workshops, public events, competitions, acts of remembrance and commemoration.³⁷

It was officially launched at Prague’s Dejvice Railway Station on 27 June 2014. People could visit the official passenger railroad car of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and take a ride in the Austro-Hungarian postal office car. The second part of the official launch followed in Brno where mass was celebrated for the victims of the Sarajevo assassination and all the dead of the Great War in St. James Church.³⁸

MM's exhibition *The Great War – It Began in Sarajevo* (June to December 2014) at Brno's Castle Špilberk focused on the impact of the war on the town's inhabitants, from the shock of mobilisation to everyday hardship, as well as the lives of the wounded soldiers in [hospitals](#). The exhibition was accompanied by numerous commemorative acts, lectures, seminars, as well as educational tours, programmes and workshops for schools.³⁹

As for Brno, Brno Municipal Museum at Špilberk presented the town as in 1914, showing the livelihood in this Moravian key city during the war and the impact of war on it. The commemorations strategies also focused on reenactment (living history).⁴⁰

MRM's exhibition *Home during the Great War. The Impact of the War on Civilian Suffering in the Rear* (June to December 2014) focused on how the country struggled to ration, fund and accommodate wounded soldiers, [prisoners of war](#) (POWs) and displaced persons from various parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. It also focused on women and adolescents who were to replace the enlisted soldiers in factories and also on the influence of both aggressive war [propaganda](#) and new radical thoughts on [pacifism](#) and anti-militarism. The interactive educational program *Home during the Great War*, designed for children from 5th to 9th grade, elementary and secondary schools (June to December 2014), aimed to present key events of the war, the impact of it on the rear, and its reflection in art.⁴¹

MGM's exhibition *Stop and Think over the Fate of War Widows and Orphans... The First World War as Seen from the Rear* (June to December 2014) was divided in three sections – the transformation of a draftee into a combat soldier (*When I was marching...*); those who waited for their relatives to return from the battlefield, focusing also on the aesthetisation of the war in postcards and prints (*My dear husband...*) and finally on the phenomenon of [war widows](#) and orphans (*Do stop and think over the fate of war widows and orphans...*).⁴²

NTM's exhibition *Our sea...*, staged in cooperation with the Historical and Naval museum in Pula, presented the history of the Austro-Hungarian war fleet (*K.u.k. Kriegsmarine*) from 1850 to 1918, underlining the fact that every tenth sailor in the fleet originated from the Czech lands and a substantial part of the fleet machinery was [manufactured](#) in the Škoda Works in Pilsen.⁴³ The exhibition was followed by the NTM conference *Science and Technology in the Czech lands during the First World War* in October 2014.⁴⁴

PM's exhibition *I am Writing to You from the Front... The Postal Service during the Great War* presented the Austro-Hungarian military and civilian postal service which made possible the communication between the millions of GIs and their relatives in the rear. It focused on the

employees, the artifacts, [correspondence](#), stamps, and also the propaganda and [censorship](#).⁴⁵

NM's exhibition *The First World War – A Prologue to the 20th century* (September 2014) presented the war through the eyes of Russian society in cooperation with the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia. Its aim was to impartially reflect the events and impacts of the Great War.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, NM launched a temporary exhibition of the history of the Czechoslovak Legions during the Great War and the perception of their legacy from 1918 onwards at the National Memorial on the Hill Vítkov in Prague.⁴⁷

The exhibition *Bound by Marital Status – Bound by the Same Destiny* at Konopiště Castle was centered around the “tragic end of love...” between Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife [Sophie, Archduchess of Austria \(1868-1914\)](#) based on [photographs](#), correspondence, memories and press clippings.⁴⁸

TM's exhibition *The Great War 1914 – 1918: Technology in Peace, Technology in War* (June 2014 – June 2015) focused on the launch of new [weapons](#) and arms systems as well as the post-war conversion to peace production.⁴⁹ It was accompanied by interactive programs for the youth *At the front, or in the queue?*, *Following the traces of piety*, *Look at the memorial site* a *Once upon a time there was a war*.⁵⁰

MG's exhibition *The Great War – Dušan Jurkovič's Galizian Cemeteries* presented a famous Slovak architect and artist [Dušan Jurkovič \(1868-1947\)](#) who was assigned to design thirty-three military cemeteries in Galizia, now highly praised for their architecture value.⁵¹

MG's exhibition *Cubism in the midst of the War* (June to September 2014) aimed to commemorate Czech and Moravian artists, such as [Emil Filla \(1882-1953\)](#) or [Otto Gutfreund \(1889-1927\)](#), who fought in the war and actively participated in the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918.⁵²

MG's exhibition *Brno – The Manchester of Moravia. 250 years of the centre of the textile industry* (2014) focused on the local wool and textile industry in Brno, one of the empire's centers of the production of army uniforms.⁵³

The curators sought to combine modern practices to attract all generations, primarily the young to be able to “feel, live and understand” the horrors of the war. MHI's exhibition *In the Trenches of the First World War*, opened by President Zeman in the Military Museum in

Prague on 25 June 2014 focused on the personal stories of ten soldiers.⁵⁴ It attempted to stress the traumas of the war, from physical [mutilation](#) to [psychological problems](#) or commonly shared negative experiences from the trenches. It also focused on an often neglected topic of war: invalids and widows and their post-war hardship.⁵⁵

Regional and small town museums and exhibitions

The exhibition *The Faces of the Great War* in Olomouc (opened by an actor playing [Charles I, Emperor of Austria \(1887-1922\)](#), who originally visited Olomouc in 1917) presented private documents or objects, collected by and from the people of the region.⁵⁶ The Southern-Bohemian Museum's exhibition *The First World War – The Years of Horror and Pain* in České Budějovice attempted to show not only soldiers experiencing key life moments, but also women and children, forced to live in poverty, facing various critical situations in their everyday life in the rear. It also attempted to present the Austro-Hungarian perspective on the empire's demise. The exhibition was recognized with the Czech Committee ICOM's award for a project contributing to international cooperation and enhancing education within the National Museums Competition Gloria Musealis in 2017.⁵⁷ Its guarantor Jiří Petráš commented that the exhibition was not to be about "...the beauty of arms but about the horrors of war..."⁵⁸

Another important narrative was stressed by the exhibition in the town hall of a Northern Bohemian town, Liberec, *Forgotten Histories of the Liberec Region*. It attempted to commemorate 913 soldiers from the region who died during the war, regardless of whether they fought as Habsburg soldiers, or as members of the Czechoslovak Legions.⁵⁹ As for other exhibitions, we can mention the Museum of the Capital Prague's exhibition on everyday life in the city during the war⁶⁰ or dozens of local exhibitions in smaller towns such as the exhibition in Frýdlant, presenting the history of a POW camp,⁶¹ or the Nejdek exhibition of the uniforms, arms, photographs and diaries obtained from private collections,⁶² or Náchod's exhibition commemorating eighty-four people from that town who died in the war.⁶³

2018 exhibitions

In 2018, there was a fresh wave of exhibitions inspired by and focused on the establishment of Czechoslovakia in October 1918. NM's *Czech-Slovak Exhibition* (October 2018-June 2019) was launched as a key exhibition to commemorate the declaration of Czechoslovakia and was prepared jointly by the Czech Republic and Slovakia.⁶⁴ The Museum of South-East

Moravia's exhibition *The Bata Principle: Fantasy Today, Reality Tomorrow* (January 2018-December 2020, Zlín) focused on the history of the Bata company which was presented as a personification of economic success and prosperity of interwar Czechoslovakia and also as a key driver of the transformation of the regional town Zlín into one of the republic's key industrial hubs.⁶⁵ The National Museum of Agriculture's Jubilee exhibition (September 2018-June 2019) opened a new, interactive exhibition, underlining the importance of agriculture within the history of Czech and Moravian lands.⁶⁶ The Moravian Museum's exhibition *How they made acquaintance* (October 2018-June 2019) focused on mutual interactions between Moravia and Slovakia up to the point of a joint state, Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷ NTM's exhibition *Made in Czechoslovakia* (October 2018-September 2019) focused on trade, economic and industrial aspects of the Czechoslovak industry and enterprises from 1918 to 1992.⁶⁸ TM's exhibition *Industry 1918 in Moravia* (October 2018-April 2019) focused on Moravian enterprises, industries and factories as well as key personalities and businessmen, who shaped the industrial map before, during and after the Great War.⁶⁹ Trade Fair Palace's exhibition *1918-1938* (October 2018-December 2019) focused on the art scene in interwar Czechoslovakia.⁷⁰ The Museum of John Amos Comenius' exhibition *The Tailor Makes the Man or The First Republic Fashion* (October 2018-April 2019) focused on various aspects of Czechoslovakia's everyday and social life.⁷¹

Personalizing the war

There was a visible shift from state-centered, -sponsored and -organized commemoration festivities to regional and local ones which attempted to examine how the Great War affected particular regions, municipalities or villages. A number of books and publications were by-products of exhibitions in local museums or exhibition halls, or local historical conferences or workshops, organized at the local and regional level with private or non-profit support. Local educational institutions such as grammar and secondary schools commemorated the Great War at the local level, attempting to explain history through local monuments or memorial sites, erected and unveiled after the Great War and then sometimes intentionally forgotten, if not destroyed or removed after World War II.

The centenary's momentum created a welcoming atmosphere not only for institutions but also individuals to "dig into" their personal archives and make public their private testimonies in cooperation with journalists or professional historians. The monographs, exhibitions and documentaries were often based on freshly found or newly released personal accounts, diaries, local chronicles, bureaucratic documents, and pictures, produced mostly by

privates or POWs.⁷² The strong interest in revealing, telling and interpreting personal stories of relatives, regardless of the side they were fighting for, was demonstrated by numerous websites, social media sites and digitized archival collections.

PBS audio-visual media

The public broadcasting services such as Czech Television and Czech Radio reflected this trend by producing several documentaries and TV series based on personal histories, accounts, letters and diaries such as Czech TV's *The Report on the Great War*,⁷³ *Our Great War*,⁷⁴ or Czech Radio's *The Field Post*.⁷⁵ In its *Stories of the 20th Century*, a non-governmental nonprofit organization, Post Bellum, collected and made available memories of the witnesses involved in the Great War.⁷⁶ The online collaborative wiki portal *The Great War*, run by NGO *Signum belli 1914*, was set to gather information on the impact of the war on the inhabitants of the Czech and Slovak lands.⁷⁷

Visual exhibitions

The public and the media were particularly interested in visual testimonies – photographs or postcards – preserved in family archives and then restored, digitized, published and exhibited. For example, [Jindřich Vlček \(1885-1968\)](#) was a member of the Czechoslovak Legion who took pictures of the combat line and everyday soldiers' hardships. His newly discovered pictures were exhibited in Hradec Králové's Gallery of Modern Art.⁷⁸ The Czech Center, a state sponsored institution aimed at promoting Czech culture abroad, put together photographs made by three soldiers, Gustav Brož, Jan Myšička and [Jan Rajman \(1892-1965\)](#), and exhibited them in London, Milan, Warsaw and Vienna.⁷⁹ Radek Kurka discovered the pictures of his grandfather, [Antonín Kurka \(1888-1951\)](#), 100 years after they had been taken. He digitized them and made a selection of more than 200 of them for public exhibitions in Jihlava and Žďár nad Sázavou.⁸⁰

Educational activities

Collecting, reproducing and analysing personal testimonies out of the personal archives proved to be a useful and popular educational tool for history teachers in order to raise awareness of history among the youth. Students of Jan Valerián Jirsík Secondary School in České Budějovice gathered more than forty diaries, both in individual and institutional possession, and by excerpting them, they managed to reconstruct the personal histories of soldiers fighting on various battlefronts of the war, be it Russia, or Italy. The students also

travelled abroad to follow the traces of the Czech soldiers fighting in the Austro-Hungarian army.⁸¹

Memorial and cemetery renovations

The centenary also provided an opportunity, supported by an overall “anniversarial” atmosphere created by politicians, the media and public, for governmental and state agencies, NGOs as well as municipalities to be more open to provide funds for or initiate renovations of damaged, forgotten or long-time unkept war memorials and memorial sites, mausoleums and ossuaries (located either on distinct military cemeteries or as separated parts within civil cemeteries).⁸²

For example, the Southern Slavs’ Mausoleum in Olomouc designed by architect [Hubert Aust \(1891-1955\)](#) was built and unveiled in 1926. It was originally the property of the Kingdom of [Yugoslavia](#). It contains an ossuary with wooden coffins with 1,300 remnants of soldiers and POWs who died due to various reasons in Olomouc’s hospitals (or elsewhere in the Czech Kingdom). Only recently the mausoleum was transferred into the property of Olomouc’s municipality (five successor states of Yugoslavia had to agree to relegate their ownership rights) and the process of renovation and application for financial funds could begun.⁸³ Similar renovations took place at the Prague central cemetery Olšany where the coffins with remnants of almost 3,500 soldiers who died during the war were moved back in a newly renovated ossuary in 2016.⁸⁴

Numerous local communities decided to renovate memorial sites and commemorate their relatives or neighbors who died 100 years ago. For example, in Opatov u Lubů, local organisations in cooperation with the municipality renovated forgotten and damaged memorial sites which were originally erected in 1925, in 2017.⁸⁵

Restoring damaged German monuments

An important feature of this centenary was the attempt to remember and commemorate those fallen soldiers who were drafted from the German-speaking regions of the Czech kingdom. Local municipalities in cooperation with historians and NGOs raised funds and renovated sites in attempts to restore the memory of them. Most of these monuments were erected during the interwar period by Czech Germans, but then were left unkept, disintegrated, removed or even destroyed due to country-wide and commonly shared anti-German attitudes after the expulsion of the Germans out of Czechoslovakia in 1945 and 1946. The monument in Jablonec nad Nisou (Gablonz) with the names of 724 fallen and 139

soldiers missing in action, mostly Czech Germans, who were drafted in this region, was erected in 1936, removed after 1945 and then renovated in 2017.⁸⁶ In a small town, Rudn k in Riesengebirge, the Great War's memorial site made by sculptor Ernst Kleinwachter was erected in 1934 and removed in 1945, only to be brought back and renovated with both the Czechs and Germans raising funds to pay for the renovation.⁸⁷ The memorial *Weeping Mother* in Hejnice was destroyed with its parts used for a public sidewalk after 1945. Those stones were brought back in 2016 and put into a new memorial site.⁸⁸

The Memory of POWs and Refugees

There were several POW camps in the territory of the Czech Kingdom, with Ostařov near Liberec as one of the biggest, interning more than 50,000 [Russian](#) and [Italian](#) POWs. It is estimated that 720 POWs died there due to injuries or illnesses. A memorial desk in Russian, Italian and Czech was unveiled there and a plan was designed to build a chapel on the site of the camp and a mass grave.⁸⁹ Another large POW camp was located in Braunau near Mart nkovice in eastern Bohemia for more than 30,000 Russians, Serbs, Romanians and Italians. The exhibition entitled *Lager Broumov/Braunau 1915-1918* commemorated them in the open landscape on the site of the camp.⁹⁰

The Czech Kingdom also provided a place of refuge for thousands of displaced persons coming from war zones in eastern Galicia in 1914 and Lake Garda in 1915.⁹¹ In 2012, the Italian Cultural Institute opened an exhibition of photographs commemorating this rare (and mostly forgotten) Czech-Italian national encounter and presented it in various towns in the Czech Republic in subsequent years.⁹² The Jewish Museum in Prague held an exhibition of Jewish refugees from Galicia.⁹³

Conclusion

This article has attempted to describe the various ways the Czechs remembered and commemorated the centenary of the Great War between 2014-2018. Most public commemorative acts or exhibitions of the Great War took place in 2014, commemorating the outbreak of the war, and in 2018, commemorating the centenary of the foundation of independent Czechoslovakia, proclaimed on 28 October 1918.

Two key narratives transformed commemoration practices – the war as a pretext for the establishment of Czechoslovakia, focusing particularly on the history of Czechoslovak Legions, and the war as a profound human tragedy affecting people both in the trenches and

the rear. Without any single, coherent state-sponsored narrative of the Great War, the general direction of commemoration activities shifted from politics and ideology to *alltagsgeschichte*, examining the everyday hardship of the people in the trenches, regardless of the side they were fighting on or dying for, and also those in the rear – women or children. There has also been a visible shift from state-centered, -sponsored and -organized commemoration festivities to regional and local ones, examining how the Great War affected particular regions, municipalities or villages. We have also seen joint efforts between local key educational institutions such as grammar and secondary schools to commemorate the Great War on the local level, attempting to explain history through local monuments or memorial sites, erected and unveiled after WW1 and then sometimes forgotten if not destroyed or removed after WW2.

The article has also discussed the phenomenon of the exploration of private collections by individuals and the discoveries of what their relatives did during the war. The article has also reviewed the numerous exhibitions held by memory institutions throughout the Czech Republic. Lastly, it has focused on how NGOs, local communities and municipalities renovated monuments and memorial sites. The centenary provided an opportunity, supported by the overall atmosphere created by the media and public discourse, for state agencies, NGOs as well as municipalities to be more open to provide funds for and initiate renovation of damaged, forgotten or neglected war memorials and memorial sites or mausoleums and ossuaries, located either on distinct military cemeteries or as separated parts of civil cemeteries. The important feature of this centenary was the attempt to commemorate those fallen soldiers who were drafted from the German-speaking regions of the Czech kingdom.

Jan Adamec, Independent Scholar

Notes

1. Zídek, Petr: Lojka odbočil a svět se zachvěl [The driver Lojka digressed and the world trembled], Lidové noviny, 28 April 2014, p. 1. ↑
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- [Krapfl, James: Sites of Memory, Sites of Rejoicing. The Great War in Czech and Slovak Cultural History, 20 August 2014 \(European Network Remembrance and Solidarity\) \(Article\)](#)
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