



World War I and The End of the Habsburg Monarchy Historical Background

For Austria-Hungary Serbia was the only one to be blamed for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, and the only consequence for this could be the subjugation of Serbia. As a result Austria-Hungary made a number of ultimate demands on Serbia, which induced Serbia to mobilize and Russia to lend them political support. Thus, a limited local conflict developed into a war against an alliance which at the end of July 1914 saw Austria-Hungary, the German Reich and later, at the end of October 1914, also the Ottoman Empire as the "Central Powers" (Mittelmächte) on one side and Serbia, Russia as well as France and Great Britain, both allies of Russia, as "The Entente" on the other. At first the emphasis of all military actions of Austria-Hungary was concentrated on the Balkans and on Galicia, while the German Reich set out to overthrow France. But Austria-Hungary was unsuccessful in Serbia and Galicia as were the Germans in the West. Already at the end of 1914 Austrians and Germans had to take every effort to stem the tide of the advancing Russian army. The danger from the East was not over until after the Austrian offensive at Tarnów-Gorlice in May of 1915, the same month in which Italy declared war on the Habsburg Monarchy. In spite of all these set-backs for Austria-Hungary and the German Reich, several important military victories could be claimed. Bulgaria joined in as an ally of the Central Powers by autumn of 1915. Serbia was defeated and the Central Powers were able to establish a land bridge to Turkish territory. In a first offensive, out of South Tyrol, at the beginning of 1916, the Central Powers failed to defeat Italy. This resulted in a series of battles of attrition along the Isonzo frontline until the end of 1917.

In the East the Russian army was forced to withdraw in 1917 because of the Russian Revolution. This led at first to a ceasefire and then to the conclusion of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The defeat of Romania, which in September of 1916 had also declared war on the Central Powers, was likewise a success. Another tactical victory was the 12th battle at the Isonzo in October and November of 1917 which was won by the Austrian and German armies. But the current military situation obscured the view on domestic political decay inside the German Reich and particularly the increasingly chaotic conditions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The lack of food and collapsing distribution reached catastrophic dimensions in 1917. Austria-Hungary, already having had severe problems of balance with its 17 different nationalities during peace time, was now threatened to fall apart. Emperor Karl I, successor of Emperor Franz Joseph after the latter's death in November 1916, intensively tried to reach a peace agreement, but could not succeed. In 1918 strikes and mutinies began to gain ground. In a last offensive, which started on June 15, 1918, Austria-Hungary again desperately tried to bring about a military decision, but this attempt failed at the Piave river. In autumn of 1918 the Habsburg Empire began to dissolve and the armed forces disintegrated rapidly. On November 3rd, 1918 an armistice agreement was reached and signed by Austria-Hungary at the Villa Giusti in Padua.

At that time the Habsburg Monarchy had already been split into various national succession states and nations - Europe had forever changed.

The Showcases

The showcases in the center of the first hall show the uniforms and arms of the Austro-Hungarian army and their allied troops as well as of their opponents in the first half of World War I.

Showcase A: The Austro-Hungarian infantry

Showcase B: The Austro-Hungarian cavalry

Showcase C: German troops

Showcase D: Russian, Serbian and Montenegro troops

Showcase E: The Italian army

The long stretched **Showcase F** on your left shows different major phases of the war; at first Galicia until the spring of 1915, secondly the Balkans until the winter of 1915/16 and at last the Italian front. The paintings which can be seen on the walls reflect scenes and events of these theaters of war. The only existing sample of an Austro-Hungarian flag of a new design, planned to be issued after the war, is displayed at the front wall above a mountain artillery cannon. After passing on to the next part of the hall, you will see the biggest gun in possession of the Museum of Military History, a 38cm calibre howitzer. Left of the passage paintings and objects related to the "second army command" and to Emperor Charles I are on display (**Showcase G**).

Showcase H: The war in Romania and the period of the Russian Revolution. Exhibits on Austrian aviation and air defense are on display in the left part of the hall. An early reconnaissance plane, the „Albatros B II" biplane, was in frontline use until 1915.

Showcase I: Uniforms, arms and equipment of the Austrian k.u.k. Aviation Corps. After passing one of the fortification cupolas of Przemysl, you will arrive at the **Tripple Showcase J**, which shows the Italian theaters of war, especially the 12 battles at the Isonzo between 1915 and 1917 as well as the offensive at the Piave river in June 1918, where Italians fought together with American, British and French soldiers against their enemies. Above the showcase the painting "The Nameless 1914" by A. Egger-Lienz is on display. Passing another fortification turret which originally came from one of the forts in Antwerp, destroyed by the Austro-Hungarian Artillery, you will come to **Showcase K**, which shows items related to the armament industry. On the right side of the hall an assembly of the main types of guns, in use at the Austro-Hungarian frontlines during the war, are to be seen. Unfortunately, one of the most advanced artillery weapons, the Austrian 30,5cm calibre mortar, which has been missing since 1941 when it was re-employed for service in World War II, cannot be shown.

Showcase L: The end of the Austrian army.

Showcase M: Collapse and ceasefire at the Villa Giusti.

Returning through the first hall, you will pass **Showcases N and O**, which are dedicated to various topics: prisoners of war, casualties and funerals. On the wall you can see a small selection of posters advertising war bonds and depicting scenes from the home front.

At the end of the exhibition hall you will have a look on the relic of a war memorial, origin unknown, and therefore fitting to symbolize the Unknown Soldier.