

Emperor Franz Joseph Hall and Sarajevo (1867-1914)

Historical Background

As a result of Austria's defeat in the war against Prussia in 1866 the Habsburg Monarchy lost much of its influence in shaping the policy of the German states. Thus it was of utmost importance to create a permanent political structure for its own provinces. The most pressing problem was the Hungarian question. Since the revolutionary wars of 1848 and 1849, the provinces of the Hungarian crown, namely Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Transylvania, had partly lost their former liberties and came under strict Hungarian civilian and military control. But this should not last. In 1867, after lengthy negotiations, the so-called „Compromise of 1867“ (Ausgleich) could be reached in which the relationship between the provinces of the Hungarian crown and the rest of the Empire was completely redesigned.

The Habsburg Monarchy was henceforth divided into two parts, namely the Austrian provinces (Cisleithania) and the provinces of the Hungarian crown (Transleithania). Each half was supposed to have its own government and its own regional parliaments. After 1867 there were only three areas which were handled by both parts in common, namely foreign affairs, finances and defense. And only for these three sectors supranational ministers were appointed. This „Compromise of 1867“ brought the most far-reaching consequences for the army. In those days the „k.u.k.“ (imperial and royal) army and the „k.u.k. (imperial and royal) navy were formed. In addition to that the „k.u.“ (royal Hungarian) Honvéd was formed in the Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy and the „Imperial and Royal Yeomanry“ (k.u.k. Landwehr) in the Austrian half. The period of peace between 1867 and 1914 was interrupted only by one bigger military event, which is known in Austria's history as the campaign of the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. Bosnia and Herzegovina, former provinces of the Ottoman Empire, were then occupied by Austro-Hungarian troops. In 1908 these territories were fully annexed.

Apart from that the Austro-Hungarian Empire participated only indirectly in the European power game. Austria entered an alliance with Germany in 1879 which was extended to Italy in 1882. Thus we speak of the „Dual Alliance“ and of the „Tripartite Alliance“. From 1908 onwards the Austro-Hungarian Empire was more and more involved in the conflicts in the Balkans. After several decades it became apparent that the „Compromise of 1867“ had not brought about a completely satisfying solution for the Habsburg Monarchy's problems. The demands of the altogether eleven bigger nationalities of the Habsburg Monarchy, could obviously only be met by means of a completely new and radical restructuring of the Empire. Hopes that this goal might be achieved were, above all, placed in the heir apparent to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Emperor Franz Joseph had, however, not assigned significant political responsibilities to his nephew restricting him to a merely military role which included supreme command of the armed forces in case of war.

On Sunday, June 28, 1914, while visiting Sarajevo, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated by a Serbian nationalist.

The five sections (travées)

Section one: The big showcase on your left and its opposite part on your right show exhibits illustrating the restructuring of the Austro-Hungarian army after the „Compromise of 1867“. The left display case shows the uniforms of the newly formed „Yeomanry“ and „Honvéd“. On your right you can see the uniforms of the Austrian army. The uniforms worn by seven figurines are the same as worn between 1878 and 1890. The showcase on your right is dedicated to the occupation of 1878 and the commanding general of the occupation forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, general Philippovic.

Section two: This part of the hall reflects the wide variety of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, putting special stress on the different nationalities within the Empire. The showcases beneath the window illustrate the many different languages spoken within the Empire. You will also see items which belonged to Crown Prince Rudolf who presided the board of curators of the Army Museum, until he committed suicide in 1889. The next showcase, also located near the window, illustrates the introduction of alpine skiing in Japan by the Austrian major Theodor von Lerch. A portrait of Emperor Franz Joseph (on your right side) is flanked by a series of 34 oil paintings by Oskar Brück, showing uniforms and equipment of the Austrian army in 1895.

Section three: The double size showcase, located in the center of the hall, shows military innovations in the second half of the 19th century. With the beginning of aviation and the introduction of telephone and telecommunication as well as of machine guns and motorized vehicles a genuine revolution in military material took place. Many of these innovations can only be shown by means of models, as for example the prototype of an armored vehicle, developed by LtCol Günther Burstyn in 1911, which was capable of cross-country driving. It was, however, never used by the Austrian army. The development of small arms and hand guns can be seen in the showcases beneath the window.

Section four: The showcase on your right is dedicated to Emperor Franz Joseph in his function as supreme commander of all Austro-Hungarian forces. The next big showcase is devoted to the „Guards“ serving at the court of Emperor Franz Joseph. On the opposite side of this section you will see seven life-size figurines of the Austrian army with uniforms and equipment typical of the time shortly before World War I. In addition to that items showing the developments in the field of headgear, military decorations and medals are on display. And finally you can have a look at objects referring to the military command and its work.

Section five: Sarajevo

Three significant objects dominate this hall: the car in which Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were murdered in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, the chaiselongue on which the Archduke died and his uniform, still stained with his blood. Portraits and mementoes of this terrorist act, which had a far-reaching impact on world history, are also on display in this hall.