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Investigation of Mass Graves from the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 near Hradec Králové

Summary: The most important battles of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 took place on the battlefields in today's Czech Republic. The war was significant for the formation of present-day Europe and ranks among the largest conflicts of the 19th century in terms of its extent. Many modern elements were used in combat during the war, but soldiers fighting in battles often died without help on the battlefields and were also buried there. Today, their graves are marked by more than a thousand monuments. Many unmarked graves are at risk due to the construction of local roads, but they are being rescued and archaeologically examined. In 2024, the route of one of the motorways leading through the territory of East Bohemia was archaeologically investigated, thanks to which dozens of remains of soldiers who fell on the battlefield near Hradec Králové (Königgrätz) were uncovered and examined. Therefore, based on archaeological and anthropological research, completely new knowledge can be revealed as to the form of the war graves and the way they were created shortly after the battle.

The discovered graves will be the subject of further future research, as this is a completely unique example of their extensive exposure. The significance of these graves are presented in this article in advance of all the completed analysis. The remains will later rest in a newly built ossuary.

Keywords: battlefield archaeology, Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Hradec Králové, Sadová, Königgrätz, anthropological research, war graves

The Austro-Prussian War of 1866

The Austro-Prussian War left an indelible mark on the history of the north-eastern region of Bohemia and a part of Moravia, which witnessed extensive field battles. These have not yet been paralleled in the Czech lands for their extent, and the overall outcome of the war also influenced the further formation of Central Europe. In 1866, Prussia sent more than 255,500 men and approximately 32,000 horses against Austria, organised into a total of three separate armies. These armies were tasked with advancing separately and attacking together. Austria opposed Prussia with a smaller force of 238,000 men and in the region of 67,000 horses. The largest Prussian Second Army numbered 115,000 men and was to enter the territory of the monarchy through Silesia, while the smaller First Army with 100,000 men advanced from northern Bohemia, supported by the Elbe Army with 40,000 men.¹

After the Prussian armies entered the territory of Bohemia, the Austrian corps tried to push the invaders back to the border, but their lack of cooperation led to important defeats and losses, which could not be replenished. Under the orders of their commanders, the infantrymen of the Austrian Army engaged in murderous bayonet attacks, which could not withstand the rapid fire of Prussian breech-loading firearms. Apart from the victorious Battle of Trutnov on 27 June, Austrian weapons were unsuccessful in defeating the often smaller Prussian formations. The plan to hold the defensive positions on the Jizera River or at the Josefov Fortress could not be fulfilled and the entire Austrian Army had to retreat to the Elbe and to the vicinity of the fortress at Hradec Králové. As the Austrian military intelligence reported the advance of larger Prussian troops towards Hradec Králové from more than two directions, instructions for a potential fight were quickly issued, which were received by individual commanders at two o'clock in the morning of the fateful day of 3 July.

The main position was a semicircular defensive line 20 km long, leaning in its centre on the rolling hills around Chlum and Lípa. The plan also included the positioning of an army reserve with reserve artillery and heavy cavalry divisions. However, it lacked any instructions for retreat, extremely risky in this position on the Elbe. During the morning, the Prussians repeatedly tried to break through the positions at Chlum and Lípa with the main formation of their First Army, which advanced from Sadová, Mžany and Benátky. However, their movement in the direction of Lípa was halted due to heavy artillery fire of the Austrian cannons and could only be supported by the attack of the Prussian Second Army. This army moved in an accelerated march to Chlum from Hoříněves with the clear goal of squeezing the Austrian positions in pincers and thus freeing the main Prussian Army from the hopeless situation at Sadová.²

1 Wawro G. 1996.

2 Bělina P., Fučík J. 2005, 331–449.



Fig. 1 Attack of Austrian infantry units in tight formations on positions above Trutnov, cut-out from a painting, author: Fritz Neumann, oil on canvas (Source: Museum of Podkrkonoší Region in Trutnov)



Fig. 2 The victorious staff of the Prussian Army in the Battle of Sadová, cut-out from a painting, author: Georg Bleibtreu (Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin)

The Prussian Elbe Army did not fare any better on the left flank in the vicinity of the villages of Probluz and Dolní Přím, and since it advanced slower than expected, it did not actually intervene in the morning fighting. The fights on the right flank of the Austrian position at Máslojedy were more critical. Almost the entire right flank of the Austrian Army was gradually, in several waves, became engaged in the incredible bloodshed in the Svíb Forest. With great effort, however, the Austrian corps finally managed to push a single Prussian division out of Svíb. However, they soon had to abandon the hard-won positions, as the Prussian VI Army Corps together with the 1st Guards Division attacked in the direction from Nedělišťe to Lochenice, broke through the defensive lines and launched the main attack on the exposed centre of the Austrian position at Chlum. At this point, the battle was in fact decided, because the long-awaited arrival of the Crown Prince on the battlefield was intended to distract the main attention of the Austrians from the Prussian First Army, which could thus resume its advance.

The Austrian defensive position could not resist such pressure for long, and after an unsuccessful attempt to recapture Chlum by army reserves, the battle was decided in Prussia's favour. The complete destruction of the Austrian Northern Army, which embarked on a frantic retreat from the encirclement, was prevented by the heroic fight of the Austrian reserve cavalry divisions, which was regarded in the history of warfare as the second greatest cavalry battle of the 19th century. The Austrian cavalry was able to hold back the larger Prussian cavalry in the area between Střezetice and Dlouhé Dvory and thus sufficiently defend the entire retreat of the Austrian Army. The battle was over, and after a closer analysis of the statement of losses, it is clear that it was a decisive battle. The Austrians lost a total of 42,812 men (killed, missing, wounded or captured), 6,010 horses and 187 cannons from their contingent. The Saxon forces lost 1,501 men (135 killed, 940 wounded). Prussian official statistics reported a total loss of 9,172 men and 939 horses. The entire Austrian Army thus retreated to Hradec Králové and later to Holic and Vysoké Mýto with a plan to assemble for another march to defend Vienna. However, the Prussians successfully complicated their advance by occupying Hodonín, which led to another battle at Tovačov. The last clash of the war took place on 22 July in the suburbs of today's Bratislava, Slovakia, during which a ceasefire was declared, and the next day peace negotiations began in Mikulov.³

Burials of the fallen in historical records

After the guns fell silent, the defeated Austrian units withdrew from the battlefields in great haste. Prussian soldiers thus later took control of all the battlefields, built camps, military hospitals and organised the burials of the fallen. In general, the fallen

³ Urba O. 1986, 252.

Prussians were first buried by their own fellow soldiers after a battle clash or, very rarely, during it. Later, the graves were dug by locals under the supervision of Prussian patrols. This is evidenced by a large number of written sources, especially from the vicinity of the largest battlefield of the war near Hradec Králové. Here, the entire burial process allegedly lasted in the region of eighteen days. As is known, burying the dead was not sufficiently organised and conducted uniformly, which is evidenced by the fact that many graves had to be relocated, modified or disinfected later due to their inappropriate location and form. The record of a large-scale disinfection of the battlefield then mentions that in the worst-affected villages, for example in the vicinity of Máslojedy and the Svítb Forest, it was necessary to bury approximately two thousand dead soldiers at once. The basic rules were not set for digging large pits for the mass burials of such a huge number of bodies, so for this reason, the dead were also thrown into drainage furrows, ditches, grenade holes or even just into ruts in unpaved roads. It is therefore unsurprising that there are records of unburied bodies being found in the Svítb Forest even ten months after the battle. By the spring of 1867, close to eight hundred crosses or other monuments are said to have been erected, which were supposed to mark the graves.⁴

To this day, circa five hundred crosses and monuments have been preserved on the vast battlefield, often erected above military graves. Over the course of decades, this battlefield has been transformed into a specific place of reverence and a zone of monument protection. However, the 20th century historical records have yielded substantial information regarding the finds of unmarked graves in the area of the entire battlefield. Most recently, an unmarked war grave was found in Rozběřice in 2022,⁵ and with the approaching construction of a motorway leading across the battlefield, it was clear that more finds would definitely occur.

Archaeological research

The archaeology of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 is still a novelty among scientific topics. Archaeologists in the Czech Republic focus mainly on battlefields from the 15th to 18th centuries.⁶ The war remains from 1866 in the form of war graves were examined by archaeologists only to a minimum extent during the 1990s. However, the intensity of the discovery of war graves on various battlefields has been on the increase since 2003 due to more frequent construction activities. Most have thus been investigated in the form of rescue archaeology.⁷ In general, the topic of archaeological investigation

4 Svatoňová S. et al. 1991, 96–131; Košťál R. 1925, 36–38; Feld F. 1867, 4–13.

5 Holas M. 2021.

6 Krajč Z. et al. 2017.

7 Holas M. 2017.

of war remains from 1866 was not comprehensively published until 2019,⁸ and other results of interdisciplinary research of selected battlefields helped to establish a basic methodological framework⁹ for domestic and foreign readers.¹⁰

Uncovering war graves is absolutely crucial for gaining knowledge concerning the form of military service in the 19th century and the nature of war injuries from battles. The most frequently examined graves in Europe are those from the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), which caused the deaths of a large number of men, who are often buried in graves that have not yet been marked to this day. These are uncovered both for research purposes and as a result of local building development. The latter situation occurred recently during a similar highway construction in Austria (Wagram battlefield),¹¹ where a number of war graves of soldiers and horses were found. Other research was conducted, for example, in Russia¹² (Smolensk, Borodino), Belgium (Waterloo) and Lithuania¹³ (Vilnius). In addition, the findings from the graves at the last-mentioned site have become an important source for analyses of a sample of the human population in the pre-industrial age of the early 19th century.¹⁴ In recent years, large-scale battlefield research projects, for example, in Poland, have targeted the battlefields of Pułtusk¹⁵ (1806), Sarbinowo (Zorndorf, 1758), Kunowice¹⁶ (Kunersdorf, 1759) and Warsaw¹⁷ (1831). From more recent conflicts, it is worth mentioning the specialised research into mass graves of Polish soldiers murdered by the Soviets in Katyn.¹⁸

However, more extensive research into graves from the military conflicts of the 1850s and 1860s is not being undertaken in Europe, which is why the finds from Hradec Králové are absolutely crucial and deserve at least a preliminary presentation for now.

In 2024, the long-awaited beginning of the construction of the D35 motorway leading from Plotičtěstě nad Labem near Hradec Králové to Sadová, with a total length of 7.5 km, came to fruition. The route crossed almost in a south-north direction the centre of the zone of monument protection on the battlefield of 1866 near Hradec Králové, which is legislatively protected in the Czech Republic by the Act on State Monument Care. Therefore, the research was conducted using above-standard archaeological methods within a cooperation between the University of Hradec Králové, the company

8 Holas M. 2019.

9 Holas M. 2022; Holas M. 2023.

10 Holas M. 2024.

11 Binder M. et al. 2021.

12 Baumgartner G. 2019.

13 Signoli M. et al. 2008.

14 Palubeckaitė Ž. et al. 2006.

15 Wrzosek J. 2012.

16 Podruczny G., Wrzosek J. 2012.

17 Weker W. 2014.

18 Głosek M. (ed.), 2003.

Archaia, z. ú, the Museum of East Bohemia in Hradec Králové and the construction companies Eurovia and Smola HK. The commemorative aspect of the project was ensured by the construction of a new ossuary, where all the remains will be stored. For the purpose of investigating the war graves from 1866, a special research team was assembled, led by the authors of this paper.

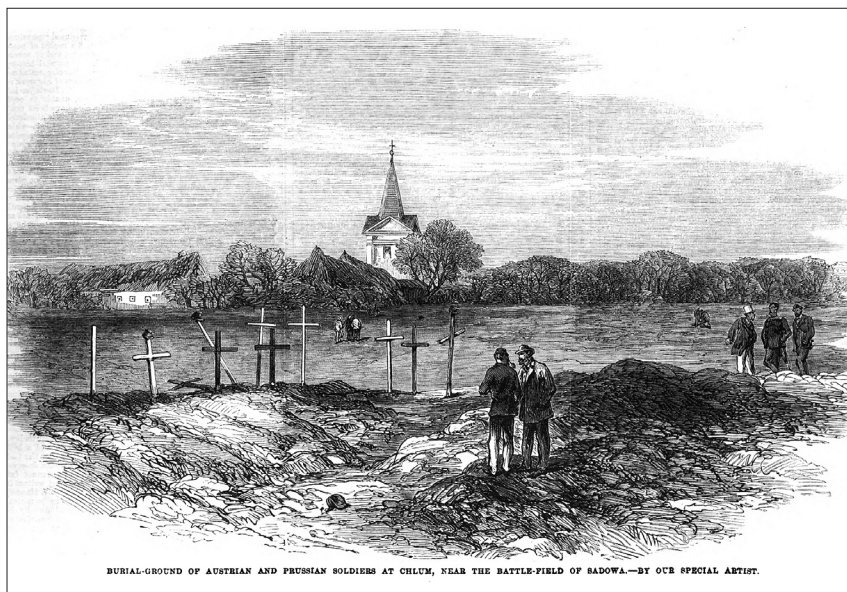


Fig. 3 Graves of soldiers at Chlum shortly after the battle (Source: The Illustrated London News, vol. 49, 25.8.1866, 193b)

The information provided is thus only preliminary, and more precise findings will be known after a complete laboratory evaluation, which is ongoing. However, from the basic field documentation significant differences can already be inferred in the form of war graves, which in the entire area under examination contained the remains of a total of 62 soldiers. A total of 12 funerary contexts of fallen soldiers (6 individual burials, 6 mass burials) and one war horse were examined. Demonstrable differences between the forms of burial of the fallen soldiers are most noticeable in the character of their placement in mass graves. According to the preliminary identification of the sets of artefacts, they were exclusively soldiers of the Austrian Imperial Army. The preliminary findings also showed that half of the individual burials were soldiers of the Prussian Army. In some cases, the fallen soldiers of the Prussian Army were buried separately even if the mass grave of the Austrian soldiers was less than 40 metres away, which indicates a possible sorting of bodies to be buried according to their military affiliation. In the following text, the focus will be on the burials of soldiers of the Austrian Army.

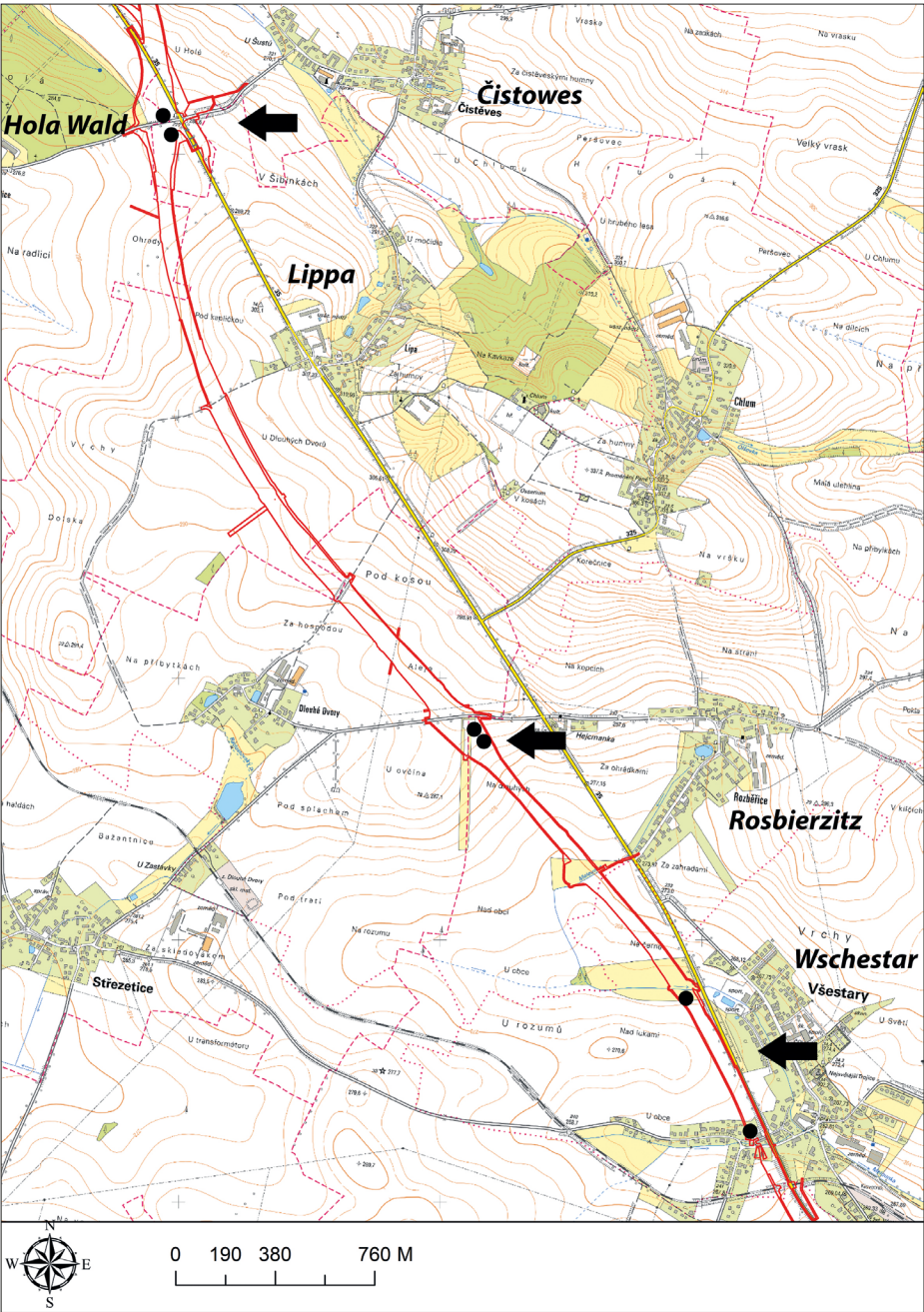


Fig. 4 Location of the examined graves on the route of the D35 motorway near Hradec Králové (Graphics by M. Holas)

In the overall distribution of the mass graves under investigation, three locations are prominent, which for clarity are recorded in the direction of the advance of the Prussian First Army, i.e. from north to south. The northernmost location is the area near the village of Čistěves (Čistowes). The second location is in the centre of the Austrian Army's position near Rozběřice (Rosbierzitz) and the third is near the village of Všešary (Wschestar). All three sites contain two mass graves each. In total, there are 6 mass graves, in which 56 bodies were deposited.

The first mass grave in the location at Čistěves contained a total of sixteen fallen soldiers in a grave pit 4 metres long and 2 metres wide. Before burial, the soldiers were undressed and their uniforms and military equipment were removed. Ten soldiers were buried in their underwear (documented by buttons from shirts and pants) and only one soldier was buried in a military coat and trousers. Fragments of metal components (small hooks at the legs) of these trousers point to the origin of the military uniform in the Hungarian part of the monarchy. All soldiers had a neckerchief fastened around their necks, which acted as neck protection from the cloth collar of the uniform. The neckerchiefs were fastened with iron buckles, thanks to which we know that no soldier was missing them in the grave. All soldiers were buried without shoes on and only two soldiers were placed in the grave with a headdress in the form of a felt shako with the brass emblem of a double-headed imperial eagle, which was covered with a protective cloth, as stated in the military regulation. The gravediggers placed the soldiers in the grave pit relatively irreverently in two layers and, at the edges of the pit, in three layers. The undressing of the soldiers and the removal of military equipment happened on the spot, because some parts (projectiles, fragments of shoe fittings) were found in the backfill of the grave pit away from the remains. The soldiers had no personal items with them, no rings or pendants.

The second grave was located not far from the first and contained the remains of a total of eight soldiers in a smaller pit (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide). Once more, no soldier was dressed in a uniform and only six soldiers were found with underwear buttons made of bone or porcelain, similar to the first grave. A total of five soldiers had neckerchiefs fastened around their necks and only one soldier wore trousers, again with the Hungarian cut. Only one soldier was buried with a Christian pendant in the form of a medallion.

At the second location near Rozběřice, the remains of a total of ten bodies were uncovered in the first larger grave. The pit here reached a length of 4 metres and a width of 2 metres. At first glance, the procedure of burying the bodies was better organised, as the bodies were placed next to each other in one layer. However, only nine of the individuals can be identified as soldiers, because one skeleton bears, in addition to a different set of artefacts (earrings), female features. The assemblage of artefacts generally suggests the presence of a large number of military uniforms and equipment. The uniform with Hungarian-style trousers is evidenced here with all

soldiers buried. A total of three shakos were found in the grave, the complete military equipment (leather straps for the ammunition pocket and bayonet sheath with iron components) remained with six soldiers and only one soldier was missing shoes. Various preserved ammunition pockets or bullet pouches were of interest. Four soldiers had these pouches full of ammunition and, conversely, two soldiers had empty pouches. One soldier had ammunition ready to shoot in his uniform pockets. It is remarkable that a total of 99.5 kreuzers in the form of many different copper and silver coins were found in the possession of one soldier (individual No. 2), which were kept in the pockets of his uniform.

The second grave at this location (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide) could accommodate only four buried soldiers, two of whom were again dressed in uniforms with Hungarian-style trousers. Only one shako was preserved in this grave and fragments from the field equipment of the Austrian Army were found again with three bodies. Three bullet pouches were also found, and only one was still closed and completely filled with ammunition. It is therefore evident that this soldier did not have time to fire his weapon during the battle. The shoes were uniquely preserved with all bodies.

At the last location near Věstary, a total of eighteen soldiers were buried in mass graves. The first grave (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide) contained only three soldiers, two of whom were buried with uniforms, military equipment and shoes. A Shako was found preserved with one soldier and for the first time fragments of a haversack (backpack), which was made of hairy calf skin, were discovered in the grave. One of the soldiers had a cruciform pendant with Christ around his neck, another soldier had a wallet in his pocket.

The last described grave, containing the remains of fifteen men, was dug into the shape of an almost regular square with a side length of 2 metres. In this grave, ten bodies were buried with uniforms and twelve were buried with shoes. No remains of any pouches, shakos or other parts of military equipment were preserved. However, many of the buried soldiers had personal items in the pockets of their uniforms. These included one cruciform pendant, three wallets (in one case with coins and medals), three tobacco pipes, three knives and two combs.

In addition to the forms of burial, it is possible to further investigate recurring grave characteristics, including the dimensions of the pits and the average number of artefacts. Judging from the findings in the field, the grave pits were dug in three different sizes. The deepest with a depth of between 80 and 90 cm, medium-deep with a depth of between 50 and 60 cm and shallow with a depth of between 35 and 45 cm. The sets of artefacts also confirm three levels of their frequency. On average, the smallest number of artefacts per soldier was five to ten pieces. The middle level consists of ten to fifty artefacts, and the most numerous level exceeds fifty artefacts. Another important criterion is the location of the grave pits in the context of events of the battle day, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Grave locations and field battle

In order to discover why and for whom the military graves were dug, it is necessary to revisit the historical events related to the field battle and its spatial arrangement. At the beginning of the battle day, the Prussian commanders led their units of the First Prussian Army in several streams in the direction of Sadová (Sadowa), where the first shots of the battle day were heard. Here, the Prussian vanguard first clashed with the advanced patrols of the Austrian Northern Army, who, after exhausting resistance, withdrew to Lípa (Lippa). Against the advance of the Prussians, the Austrian corps deployed a total of 160 cannons at Lípa, which prevented the Prussians from moving forwards with their fire. At noon, however, the Prussians were able to oppose the Austrian batteries with 132 of their cannons and, supported by infantry reinforcements, tried to destroy the village and the artillerymen, which was unsuccessful. With this failure, the Prussian soldiers attracted the attention of the Austrian Infantry Regiment No. 49¹⁹ (IR Baron Hess) and its commander, who arbitrarily gave the order to attack in the direction of Dohalice and the Holá Forest (Holla Wald). This regiment was also supported on the right flank by the Infantry Regiment No. 44 (IR Erzherzog Albrecht), which, unlike the previous one, was recruited from the Kingdom of Hungary. However, the Prussian gunmen opened such terrifying fire from the forest at a distance of 300 steps that both regiments had to retreat with a large number of casualties.²⁰ These historical events in the vicinity of the Holá Forest and the findspots of two mass graves near the village of Čistěves correspond accurately with the form of the preserved artefacts in the graves. The buried soldiers thus most likely belong to the Infantry Regiment No. 44, which attacked on the right flank of the 49th Regiment and advanced exactly where the graves were found. According to the information from the official lists²¹ issued by the Austrian Military Office, it is known that the Infantry Regiment No. 44 reported 87 soldiers killed on the battlefield and 99 soldiers missing.²² It is possible that some of these 186 soldiers were buried in the above-mentioned two mass graves.

At the decisive moment of the battle at around two o'clock in the afternoon, when the Prussian units of the Guards Division occupied the village of Chlum in the very

19 The recruitment area was in Styria, Austria.

20 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, 261–264; 275–286.

21 The most important for this method of interpretation are the records of the number of soldiers killed on the battlefield and the number of soldiers who were no longer found in the military unit, but there were no witnesses to their killing, i.e. they were marked as missing. Frequently, the number of missing soldiers equals, sometimes even exceeds, the number of killed soldiers. It is therefore highly likely that the missing soldiers were also killed on the battlefields.

22 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, Appendix 3, p. 30.

centre of the Austrian defensive line after the Austrian unsuccessful defence, the Prussian Guards were also to seize the village of Rozběřice. In order not to allow the Prussian troops to advance and concentrate in the centre of the Austrian position, the Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian Northern Army ordered the still undeployed brigades of the Austrian Army Reserves to attack Chlum. These reserves consisted of the Austrian I Army Corps and VI Army Corps. The VI Army Corps first attacked Rozběřice, after which the I Army Corps was supposed to support it with an attack on Chlum. After reaching the area near the church in Chlum, however, the advance of the Austrians stopped, as at one point they found themselves in the crossfire of the Prussians, both infantry and artillery, from three sides. The Austrian troops had no choice but to return to their starting positions before being completely destroyed and gradually retreated to the Elbe.²³

These events had a major impact on the creation of four more mass graves, where two graves near Rozběřice are situated directly at the site of the VI Corps' attack on the village. As previously described, almost all the soldiers wore trousers with the Hungarian cut. The mentioned corps included only soldiers of the 60th Infantry Regiment (IR Prinz v. Wasa) who were recruited from the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (the city of Eger in today's Hungary) and, according to official records, this regiment reported the most missing men of the entire corps, totalling 573, which is five times more than the numbers reported by the other regiments. According to the records, this regiment identified only 14 soldiers as killed on the battlefield, which is very similar to the number of men buried in the two graves mentioned and examined.²⁴ Soldiers buried in the mass graves near Věstary may also belong to the same corps. In the smaller grave containing three buried soldiers, however, a more precise determination of the military unit is quite complicated. In the second grave, where fifteen soldiers were buried, in two of them the presence of numbered buttons of the 25th Jaeger Battalion is documented, which point to this corps. However, due to the small number of other military items, their more accurate identification is impossible for the time being.

After comparing the locations of the graves with historical cadastral maps (Imprints of Stable Cadastre from the mid-19th century), it can be observed that the mass graves near Čistěves have an evident relationship to the nearby road, and the same is also true of the graves near Rozběřice. The smaller grave at Věstary was dug in the area of grassy meadows and a nearby stream, and the larger grave was dug on plot No. 57, where there was a meadow between houses No. 46 and No. 47.

23 Bělina P., Fučík J. 2005, 412–419; K. K. Generalstabs 1868, 356–361.

24 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, Appendix 3, p. 32.



Fig. 5 An example of the irreverent burial of fallen soldiers without grave goods (a total of 16 individuals) in a mass grave at the location near Čistěves (Photo by M. Holas)



Fig. 6 The appearance of the smaller mass grave near Všeřetý with three soldiers and a number of artefacts (Photo and graphics by M. Holas)

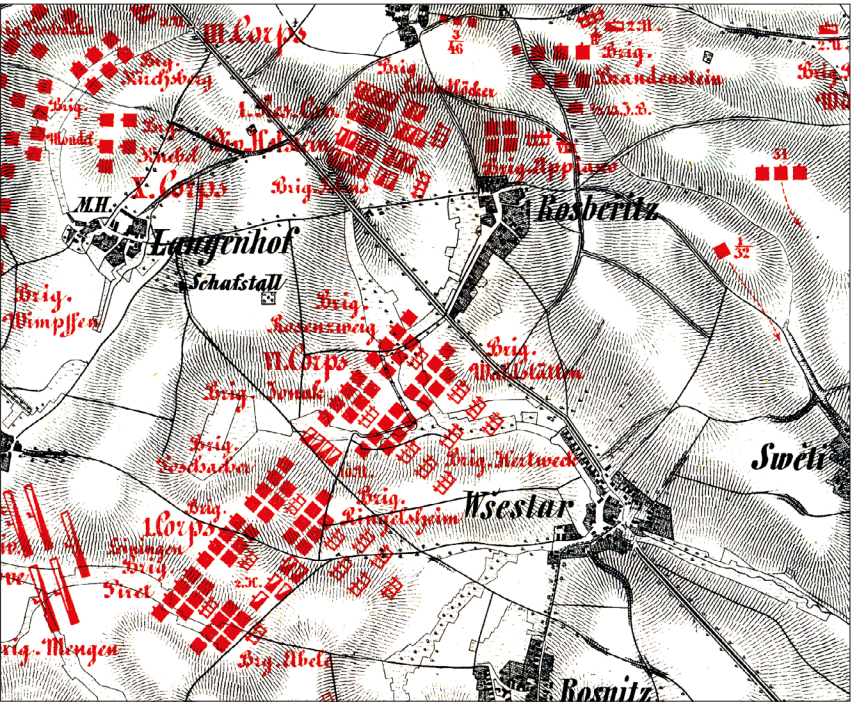


Fig. 7 Map with the positions of Austrian corps near Rozběřice (Source: K. K. Generalstabs 1868)



Fig. 8 Entry wound in the skull caused by a Prussian projectile (Photo: University of Hradec Králové)

Preliminary anthropological findings

Anthropological research of all remains is still in progress, therefore, it is not possible to provide an analytical assessment of all findings (e.g. age, stature, types of injuries).

The basic anthropological assessment took place directly on site using standard anthropological methods.²⁵ The age at death and stature were determined, and gunshot wounds and other injuries were recorded. With the exception of one questionable case, all individuals were clearly identified as male. For the individual whose sex cannot be determined by non-invasive methods, DNA analysis will be used.

The study characterises the population as very young and healthy, with an average age ranging from 18 to 25 years and stature between 160 and 165 cm. The most common pathological findings include tooth decay (caries), tartar (dental calculus), and tooth loss during life. Furthermore, the skeletons predominantly exhibit a robust build, with muscle attachments indicating increased physical exertion. No inflammatory changes were observed. Gunshot wounds were identified in two-thirds of the examined skeletons, manifesting as bullet holes in the skull, pelvis, chest, or limbs. Comminuted and complex limb fractures often indicate that a portion of the injured bone is missing. In contrast, gunshot injuries to the pelvis are simpler, characterised by clearly visible round entry and exit wounds.

Evaluation

In the preliminary evaluation, the authors have tried to answer the questions of who was buried in the graves and who had made the graves. The former question can be answered first, based on the character of the artefacts found. However, it is necessary to reconstruct the appearance of military uniforms and equipment at the time of the burial. This can be made possible by interpreting the placement of artefacts with the examined remains. This allows for the subsequent identification of the military unit of a specific fallen soldier. The findings may support the known spatial relationships of the grave pits with historical events and stages of the field battle.

In order to clarify who had conducted the burial, it is necessary to examine the placement of the bodies and thus reconstruct the form of the burial process. It is therefore evident from preliminary findings that the soldiers who were buried in the centre of the battle events at Rozběrice and Všešary were placed in the graves in full military dress with uniforms, shoes, equipment and sometimes even caps. Many were also buried with coins or other personal items. They were not robbed and the items from their uniforms were not removed. This approach corresponds to a burial process conducted under the supervision of the Prussian Army, observing a certain form of

25 Buikstra J.E., Ubelaker D. 1994.

piety or respect for the fallen soldiers. It is highly possible that in the first days after the battle, captured Austrian soldiers dug the graves for their fallen comrades-in-arms.

The opposite cases are known from the peripheral parts of the battlefield. The mass graves near Čistěves correspond to a burial process without much control, when soldiers are disposed of into the pits without any reverence and in the vast majority without uniforms, shoes, equipment or personal items. Strangely, two soldiers were buried in the graves with caps on their heads and only dressed in their underwear. The number of bodies in these graves, considering the pit size, is significantly increased compared to the previous ones.

The grave of fifteen soldiers near Věstary presents a third form of the burial process. For the most part, the soldiers were buried here in uniforms with shoes but without any military equipment. However, there were numerous personal items in their uniform pockets, from wallets with coins to tobacco pipes, knives or combs.

Preliminarily, it is possible to typologically divide the graves from a total of twelve funerary contexts into several groups according to depth and dimensions. These are the deepest ones with a depth of between 80 and 90 cm, medium-deep ones with a depth of between 50 and 60 cm and shallow ones with a depth of between 35 and 45 centimetres. The mass graves are either rectangular or square in plan, where larger graves are always dug to a width of approximately 2 metres with different lengths, which were probably based on the planned number of buried bodies (most often 4–5 metres).

Future evaluation of skeletal remains and further tracing of the origin of fallen soldiers will help to supplement this knowledge and expand upon it appropriately.



Fig. 9 Comminuted fracture of the distal part of the left femur after reconstruction in the laboratory (Photo: University of Hradec Králové)



Fig. 10 Burial of fellow soldiers under the auspices of the Prussian Army, Prussian-Danish War of 1864 (Kolding. Drawing by: Robert Landells)



Fig. 11 An example of the burial of fallen soldiers by the civilian population (Source: Hindorf A., Biron von Curland C.P.J. (eds), 1878, 25)

Conclusion

The research on the future route of a motorway running across the historic battlefield of the 1866 war near Hradec Králové has yielded a large amount of unique information regarding the forms of burial of soldiers of the Austrian Imperial Army directly on the battlefield shortly after the battle. The findings, which are of a preliminary nature, are evidenced mainly by the archaeological description of grave contexts and the recovered artefacts. The findings confirm the different forms of burial, which depended fundamentally on the place where it was performed. Burials were conducted preferentially in the centre of the battlefield, probably due to the large number of fallen and perhaps under the supervision of the Prussian Army. In the peripheral parts, the burials apparently took place without supervision, which is confirmed by the striking absence of military material and personal items of the fallen soldiers and the irreverent handling of the bodies.

According to historical maps, out of the six mass graves, four were dug in the middle of fields, one grave was dug in a meadow and one grave was dug in a plot between houses. The fact that none of these graves has been marked in the field or the marking has not been preserved to this day is strange. It can therefore be said with certainty that under the topsoil on the battlefield near Hradec Králové, hundreds of similarly unmarked war graves must be still hidden.

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