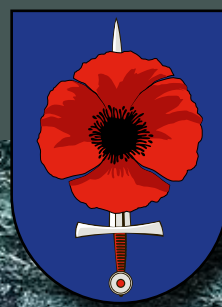


MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

War Veterans and War Graves  
Department



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Caring for war graves  
in the Czech Republic and abroad





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# FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

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The year 2023 at the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic was marked by important changes and significant progress regarding the care for war graves and commemorative sites which honour the memory of our fallen heroes. As of July 1, we made a significant organizational change when we, in accordance with our “Ten Priorities for Defence”, specifically point no. 8 “Development of war graves and commemorative sites”, we established the “Section for War Graves and Commemorative Sites”. This step is an important milestone which reflects proves the particular interest the MoD takes in this important agenda.

With this change, we increased the grants supporting war graves care from CZK 12 to 15 million. Thanks to this we can effectively meet the requirements by a higher number of applicants and improve war graves care in our country.

I am proud that the new section has picked up the threads of the activity of the War Veterans and War Graves Department and at the same time started to improve and develop the care for war graves and commemorative sites so that optimal conditions are created in the legal, economic, professional, and technological areas.

On my visits abroad, I am always interested in the topic of war graves care in particular countries. In 2023, I had the privilege to personally visit our war graves in Sokolovo and Kyiv in Ukraine, reveal a new war grave in Chişinău in Moldova, and I travelled also to Bosnia and Herzegovina where, at the place of the helicopter accident, I again had the opportunity to honour the memory of our service members. These visits always remind me how important this endeavour is and how significant its impact is on preserving the memory of our heroes. My special thanks also go to municipalities abroad which with all their care and respect look after our war graves in their territories. Their effort is an invaluable contribution to preserving historical memory.

The activities of the Section for War Graves and Commemorative Sites are based on three pillars: archival research, thorough technical preparation and realization, and memorial diplomacy. I am sure that the hard and systematic work of our colleagues bears fruit. Our priority is not only the renewal and building of war graves but also the recognition and tribute to these war heroes who, so far, have been neglected. We acknowledge the responsibility we have to duly commemorate their sacrifice and make sure their stories will never be forgotten.

I would like to thank very much all who contribute to the care for war graves and commemorative sites care – to my colleagues from the Ministry of Defence, representatives of municipalities, associations, foundations, non-governmental organisations, and individuals. Thanks to you we can further develop our activity and ensure that the memory of our fallen heroes will live on. We must never forget.

Jana Černochová









# FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE CZECH ARMED FORCES

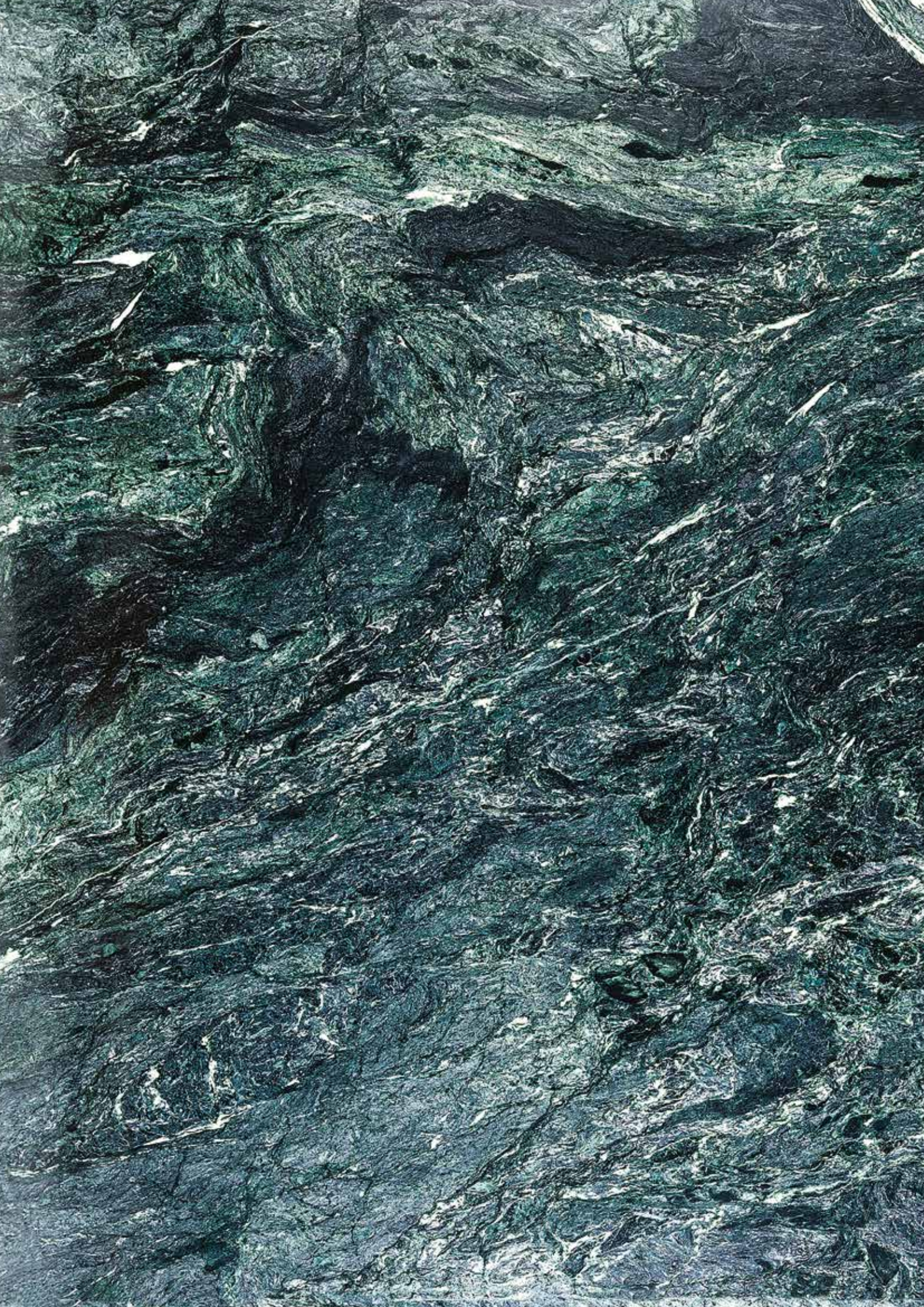
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War graves and commemorative sites are an important reminder of our history. They commemorate the events they are linked to. They remind us that the history of humankind is shaped by wars, suffering, and sacrifices. Taking care for such places has its historical, cultural, and ethical dimensions. If we can look at it from the perspective of human destinies without any national, religious, ideological or other subtext, it shows the maturity of the nation. Based on the examples, I can see that we are such a nation. We, the service members, have a special relationship to the places our colleagues from the MoD War Veterans and War Graves Department take care for. The reason for this is that these places are linked to our predecessors, military history, and tradition. These places are increasingly becoming sites of social life through the organization of remembrance functions and events. They connect citizens, associations, and local governments with the military. I would like to thank all who contribute to this process.

We all perceive the change these places have undergone in the last decades, since the adoption of Act No. 122/2004 Coll., on War Graves and Commemorative Sites. War graves have therefore become a respectable place in which we can cast our mind to the fallen and other victims of war conflicts and by doing that bring them back to life. They deserve it!

Lieutenant General Karel Řehka









# INTRODUCTION

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In this report, we present our main activities in the care for war graves in 2023, maintaining, save for minor exceptions, the same structure as in the last year's report. We focus mainly on the care for war graves in the Czech Republic, war graves care abroad, and grants within the programme Conservation and Renewal of Historical Values I.

We consider the establishment of the separate Section for War Graves and Commemorative Sites with nine positions on July 1, 2023, to be a fundamental change. These changes oblige us to carry out existing tasks and at the same time develop the activities related to war graves care which were neglected due to lack of personnel.

The tasks are especially systematic research in the unprocessed holdings of the War Graves Register deposited in the Military Historical Archive. In 2023, we established cooperation with the Military Historical Archive and the Military History Institute whose goal is to digitalize and process the entire holdings.

In May, we launched a dedicated Facebook page "War Graves – Ministry of Defence" which we want to use to attract the attention of the expert community and the general public and further familiarize them with our work. On the other hand, we receive feedback thanks to our followers. The number of followers and reactions of the public confirm that our efforts are successful.

Last year, we increased the grants for war graves care in the Czech Republic from CZK 12 to 15 million a year thanks to which we can accommodate more applicants and improve the care for war graves in our territory.

Regarding our work abroad, we continued with the renewal project of war graves from fights with Hungarians 1918–1919 in Slovakia, we revealed a war grave in Staryi Martyniv in Ukraine and we also negotiated in Munich about how to solve the situation of the remains of the members of the Iridium and Bronze paratroopers. In June, we travelled to Kazakhstan to identify WWI prisoner of war graves. This visit was a follow-up to our two previous trips through Central Asia where thousands of WWI prisoners of war lived and died.

In the territory of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) significantly contributed to the finishing of the war grave in Orlová, which refers to the Polish–Czechoslovak War in January 1919. We launched works in the WWI military cemetery in Chodský Újezd which is in the possession of the MoD. The scope of support of the building or renewal of war graves from the MoD level extended from the 1866 War to WWII.

We expand the scope of our awareness-raising activities in order to appeal to a broader and more varied audience. We are going to participate in professional conferences, lectures, workshops, seminars, webinars, and other forms of expert presentation of the topic of war graves care to the general public. We continue with our effort to improve the current care and create optimal conditions in the legal, economic, professional, and technological areas. This goal requires a diligent and systematic approach to identify shortcomings and opportunities for improvement, taking into consideration current trends. In order to achieve that, we conduct a detailed analysis of the latest procedures and methodologies, we learn about proven methods from our foreign partners and apply new innovative approaches. Creating an optimal environment in the legal, economic, professional, and technological areas requires constant monitoring and adaptation to changing conditions and needs via the active participation of relevant stakeholders and use of modern tools and technologies.



# OVERVIEW OF KEY MOMENTS IN 2023

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## United Kingdom

After almost 80 years, an official meeting of the Czech MoD representatives with the representatives of the British Commonwealth War Graves Commission (hereinafter "CWGC") was held. As part of the discussions that took place in the seat of the Commission in Maidenhead, we discussed the possibilities of verification of the dates regarding the Czechoslovak fallen service members in the CWGC database. We will gather correct information based on archival research in Czech and Slovak archives and hand it over to the British authorities to conduct subsequent alignments. We also discussed the procedures for the replacement of headstones by the CWGC so that the information stated on them is correct.

During the negotiation, we also put forward the question regarding the burial of the members of the Iridium and Bronze para teams at the Perlacher Forst cemetery in Munich and we appealed to the representatives of the CWGC for a joint solution. The United Kingdom promised to help to find a suitable procedure including through negotiations with Germany.

## Ukraine

In July, we revealed a new war grave in Staryi Martyniv, which honours more than 700 soldiers from the territory of the present-day Czech Republic, who died in 1915 in the fights for Dniester in the ranks of the Austria-Hungarian Army. We started the project in 2017, the MoD donated CZK 1.1 million. In March, the Minister of Defence visited the war grave in Sokolove where we are planning to carry out a complete reconstruction. In November, during the Minister's visit in Kyiv, we negotiated regarding the other Czechoslovak war graves in Ukraine we would like to renovate in the future.





## Moldova

In November, the Minister participated in the revealing of the war grave dedicated to the memory of the Czechoslovak legionaries in Chişinău, which was built in 1926. However, after the war, when Moldova became a part of the USSR for many years, it was destroyed. The design of renewal of the grave to its original form was prepared by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Moldova together with the MoD War Veterans and War Graves Department (WVWGD). The renovation was carried out by the civic association Momentum, with which the authorized representatives of the Ministry of Defence signed an agreement on the renewal of the grave in June 2023 during the visit of Prime Minister Petr Fiala in Moldova. The MoD contributed to the renewal the amount of CZK 500,000.





# Lebanon

Defence Minister Jana Černočová travelled to Lebanon on March 16-18, 2023. On that occasion, she visited the grave in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Beirut, in which Mr. Karel Weiner (born in Modra on November 4, 1918, died July 2, 1941) rests in peace, who was, according to recent research by the Military History Institute Prague, our first service member to fall in the Near East. Karel Weiner was a soldier of the Czechoslovak Infantry Battalion – East. He died in the course of an operation against the Vichy France. On behalf of the Czech Ministry of Defence, Minister Černočová thanked for the care of the Czechoslovak war graves in the territory of Lebanon and personally honoured the memory of Karel Weiner at his grave and the Memorial of Fallen in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Beirut.



# Italy

During her visit in Italy, Madam Minister went to the Milan War Cemetery to honour the memory of passengers and aircrew of Halifax aircraft that crashed at Biella, Italy, on November 12, 1944. Captain Rudolf Hrubec (born in Bernartice at Tábor on November 15, 1914) and Lieutenant Bohuslav Nocar (born in Pilsen on October 22, 1920) were airlifted back to their homeland as part operation group Silica with the objective to contact the members of the Protectorate Government Troops and convince them to fight the Nazis. In the North Italy, the aircraft carrying the airdrop hit a rock massif and all persons onboard died. In total, the crash killed 14 Allied service personnel comprising the air crew and members of 2 paratroop teams. Besides the two Czechoslovak soldiers, the aircraft carried members of air and airborne forces originating from the Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and two Italian airborne soldiers.



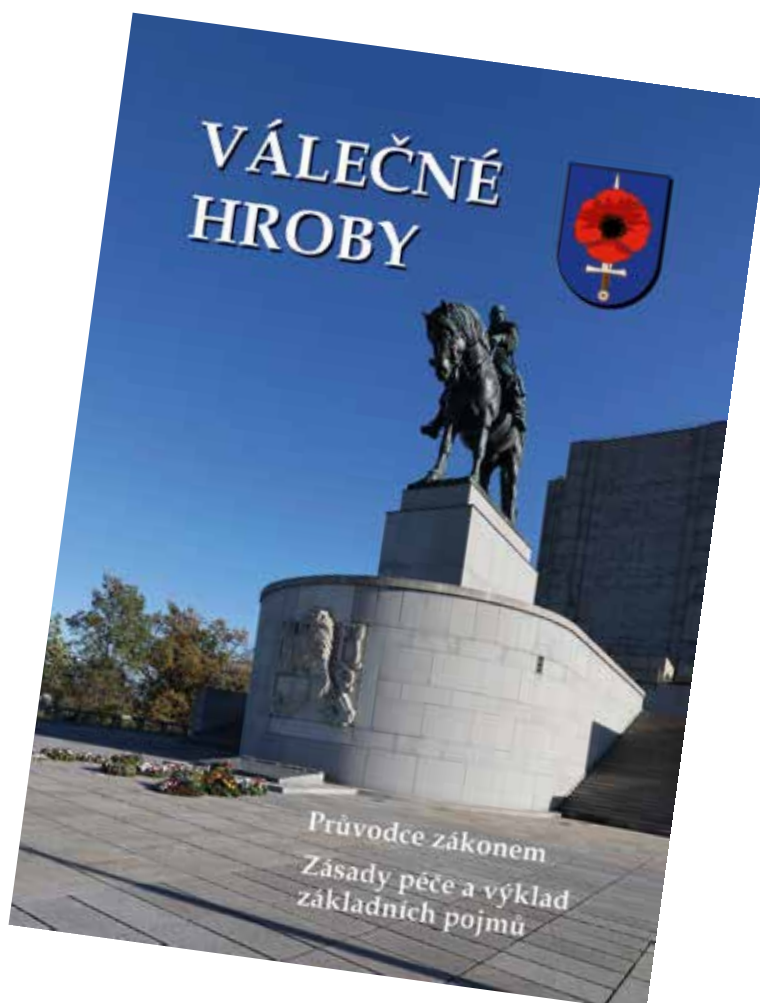


## Prisoner of war cemetery in Chodský Újezd

Near the village Chodský Újezd, Czech Republic, there is a prisoner of war cemetery from WWI. The whole cemetery including the land is in possession of the MoD. A total of 287 prisoners of war and one Czech guard are buried here. According to the original war graves register of the Czech Armed Forces, the nationalities of the buried soldiers were as follows: 24 Italians, 8 Lithuanians, 190 Poles, 2 Romanians, 59 Russians and 4 persons of unknown nationality. In 2023, the Director WVGWD requested the cemetery to be taken out of the surplus property register in order to renew it. This request was approved, and the cemetery was transferred into the responsibility of the WVGWD. Nowadays, the WVGWD works hard to repay its old debt and prepares a design for a full restoration of the cemetery so that it can become a dignified place of final rest for the fallen soldiers.

## War graves publication

In November 2023, a publication on war graves was printed, which comprises of two sections: a guide on the Czech War Graves Act and a commentary on the principles of care for war graves and basic terms. The publication is primarily intended for municipalities and other owners of war graves, as well as for government and self-government bodies involved in the care for war graves pursuant to the Act on War Graves. Those involve municipal authorities with extended powers and regional authorities. The aim of the publication is to offer a detailed interpretation of the provisions under the Act on War Graves and associated terms, and, finally, to offer solutions to frequent situations and issues encountered in the implementation of the Act.



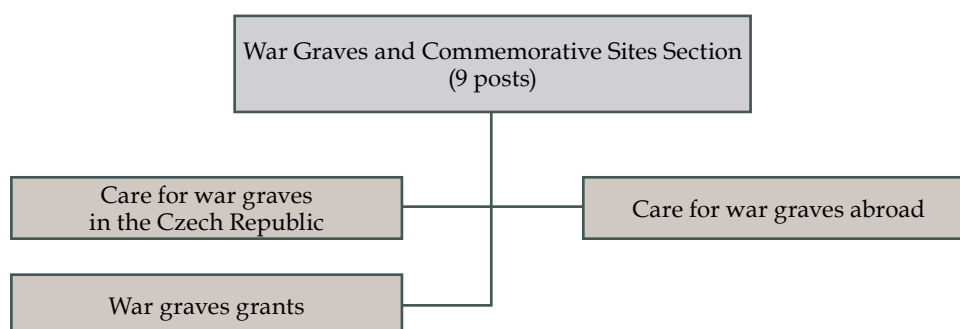
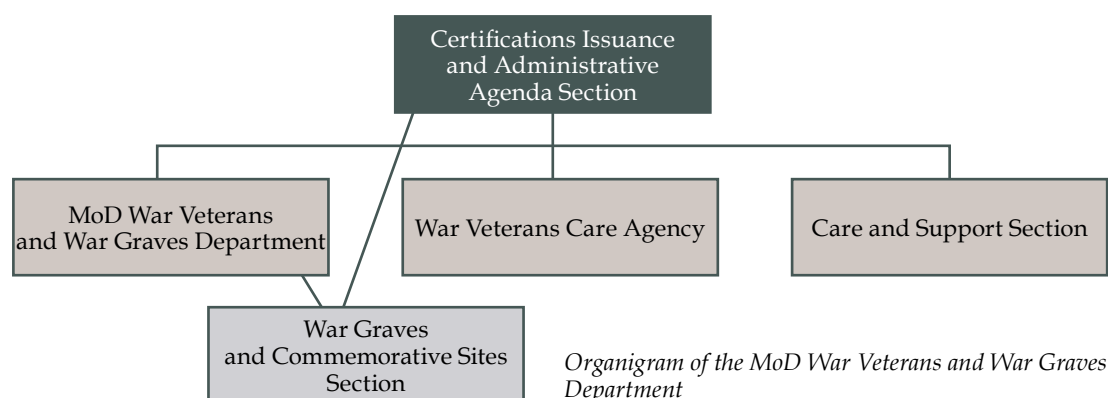


# WVWGD STRUCTURE AND AGENDA

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As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, there was a substantial organizational change in the structure of the War Veterans and War Graves Department. The Section of War Graves and Commemorative Sites was established (hereinafter "Section") with nine positions. The formation of the Section, almost twenty years after Act No. 122/2004 Coll. on War Graves and Commemorative Sites came into effect, reflects the great interest the MoD takes in such an important agenda. We draw inspiration from the euro-Atlantic region where war graves care has a long tradition and enjoys high-quality standards.

The primary goal of the Section was to extend and deepen local and international cooperation and to ensure quality care not only for all war graves in the territory of the Czech Republic but also for graves of Czechoslovak service members who sacrificed their life in combat in the territory of other states.



*Organigram of the War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section*



# BRIEF HISTORY OF WAR GRAVES CARE IN THE TERRITORY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC SINCE THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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The beginnings of a systematic war graves care are related to associational activities and the two most important conflicts of the 19th century which affected our territory. During the Napoleonic Wars and the war in 1866, several important battles took place here in which many soldiers fell and therefore many graves come from this period. The maintenance of these graves and the creation of new graves and ossuaries in those times were linked to civic associations whose members were usually veterans. The most known example of such an association is the "Committee for Monuments on the Hradec Králové Battlefield" founded in 1888. Based on this association, smaller associations in other battlefields of the 1866 war were created. In 1892, the umbrella association "Central Association for 1866 War Monuments Preservation in Bohemia" was an umbrella organisation for local associations and was active until 1919.

Some local associations continued to work, but their activity ceased during WWII and subsequently, following restoration attempts, stopped after 1948. Nowadays, following 1990, the renewed organization named "Committee for 1866 War Monuments Preservation" is running. The Austrian-Hungarian military administration cooperated with civic associations and via them ensured the care for war monuments in our territory. The war graves themselves were cared for by the chaplaincy service in terms of registering while garrisons were responsible for keeping them up. The turning point was the start of WWI and especially the year 1915. Until December 1914, the Austrian-Hungarian Army had approximately 115,000 fatalities, some 358,000 casualties, and 100,000 went missing in action. Such high numbers led to the creation of an independent military authority whose responsibility was to take care for war graves and this the War Graves Section was formed at the Ministry of War. One of its primary tasks was to keep the records of war graves. At each military command, an Inspectorate for War Graves was formed in subordination to the War Graves Section. In 1917, the administration of war graves was passed to the Ministry of War and the newly established Section for War Losses which completely took over the war grave agenda and at the same time had full records of injured, missing, captured, and fallen soldiers from the entire Austro-Hungarian Army.

In the first months after the formation of Czechoslovakia, former Austrian-Hungarian institutions temporarily remained in existence but soon after, the newly formed Ministry of National Defence (MoND) had to start to deal with the problem of war graves of which there was a great number in the territory of the new republic. Their number was increasing as soldiers succumbed to injuries they had sustained at the front long after the war. In April 1919, the Central Inspectorate for War Graves was established at the MoND with the mission to process and keep records of war graves, care and service state-administered war graves, and respond to requests regarding exhumation and transport of fallen soldiers. Later, it was renamed the Central Administration of War Graves, which registered 139,557 war graves in 4,970 cemeteries in 4,591 municipalities at April 1, 1924. It also searched for war graves abroad of both legionaries and soldiers from the Czech Lands who served in the Austrian-Hungarian Army. The Central Administration of War Graves worked until the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, when the Ministry of the Interior overtook the administration of war and peace military graves, specifically the Military Files Office, however, it concerned only graves from before WWII. The graves of the armed forces of Nazi Germany in the territory of the Protectorate were care for by the occupation authorities.



After the end of WWII, the war graves care was taken over by the MoND for a short period of time. Later, in 1951, the agenda fell under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and remained there until 1999. Until now, the care for war graves is under the agenda of the MoD, and the way it is carried out is regulated by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., (hereinafter “the Act”). This is the first national law addressing this issue, until then war graves care observed only international agreements and treaties.

At the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, the responsibility for war graves care was vested in the MoD External Cooperation Department in which a war grave group was created which later ceased to exist because this level of management was cancelled. Subsequently, the war graves care constituted a part of the agenda of one of the sections of the External Cooperation Department, which was later renamed the Department for War Veterans. The last renaming and reorganization took place in 2023 when the dedicated War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section was formed, and the Department was newly renamed the War Veterans and War Graves Department of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic.



*Guard of honour in a remembrance ceremony at the Faraway Graves Monument in the Olšany cemetery in Prague in the 1920s.*

*(Central Military Archives - Military Historical Archives)*



# SOCIAL MEDIA

Stories of war graves are not just about facts and figures – they are about human destinies, courage, and sacrifice. Through the Facebook, we present the life stories of individuals who became part of history. We show their determination, selflessness, and bravery, qualities that would otherwise remain anonymous. By sharing posts on our profile *War Graves – Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic – facebook.com/valecne.hrobymo*, we refer to the past that is essential for understanding the present. We point out that war graves and memorial sites are symbols reminding us that the freedom and peace we have today were never taken for granted.

The *War Graves – Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic* profile was launched on May 15, 2023, and has since featured 154 mostly original posts. The authoring team includes all WVVGD employees and a few external contributors. We designed the profile as a rich mosaic composed of several recurring sections: news, Graves Tell Their Stories – Ministry of Defence Grants, remembrance ceremonies and journeys, educational and informational series on the history and current state of war graves care at home and abroad, a calendar of significant events, and a popular series on Czech prisoners in Central Asia during the Great War. In shared posts, we typically highlight media appearances of the WVVGD Director and the Head of the Section or inform about their participation in important meetings, ceremonies, and other key events, as well as updates in the field of war graves care.

Our followers particularly appreciated the geographical section Graves Tell Their Stories – Ministry of Defence Grants where we published weekly short texts about preserving and restoring the value of our war graves and memorials, each with a brief story about the people buried in each location. Unsurprisingly, these posts received the most likes, especially those about monuments in the villages of Kuřivody (325 likes), Jezvė (312 likes), and, regarding monuments abroad, a post on the restoration of the Monument to Czechoslovak Legionnaires in Yekaterinburg, published on the highly significant date of November 17<sup>th</sup> (300 likes).

During the period from May 15 to December 31, 2023, we achieved 387 new followers and page likes, along with 15,443 profile visits. Our highest reach was in November, slightly surpassing the 10,000 benchmark, with an average reach of about 3,000 throughout the period. In total, our posts achieved a reach of 86,046 Facebook users who viewed our content at least once.

Period	5/2023	6/2023	7/2023	8/2023	9/2023	10/2023	11/2023	12/2023	In total
Number of posts	12	16	15	17	16	22	34	22	154

*Number of posts on the Facebook profile*



*A view of the Facebook profile War Graves – Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic*



# Number of war graves

At December 1, 2023, there were 38,001 war graves in the territory of the Czech Republic, of which 23,632 graves with remains of persons who died as a consequence of active participation in a military operation or war captivity, or remains of persons who died as a consequence of their participation in resistance movements or military operation during a war (fallen) and 14,369 remembrance sites which commemorate the fallen. We register war graves via the web application Central War Grave Register (hereinafter "Central Register").



A view of the home page of the Central War Graves Register

Users of the Central Register from municipal authorities of municipalities with extended authority included other 1,816 objects which are not war graves. Those are graves, monuments, memorial plaques, etc. which are not subject to the Act but their character, designation, or contents connect them to the agenda or they contribute to the preservation of military history. These are for example graves, monuments, and memorial plaques commemorating persons who joined the fights or the Czechoslovak resistance movement but did not die as a consequence of their involvement, or these monuments commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, sites where partisan staffs operated, the liberation of municipalities, meeting of armies, etc. In total, the Central Register comprised 39,818 entries as of December 31, 2023.

## Online tools

In order to keep records, to provide service to war grave owners and responsible public servants in regional and municipal authorities with extended powers, and to popularize war graves care among the general public, we administer these websites:

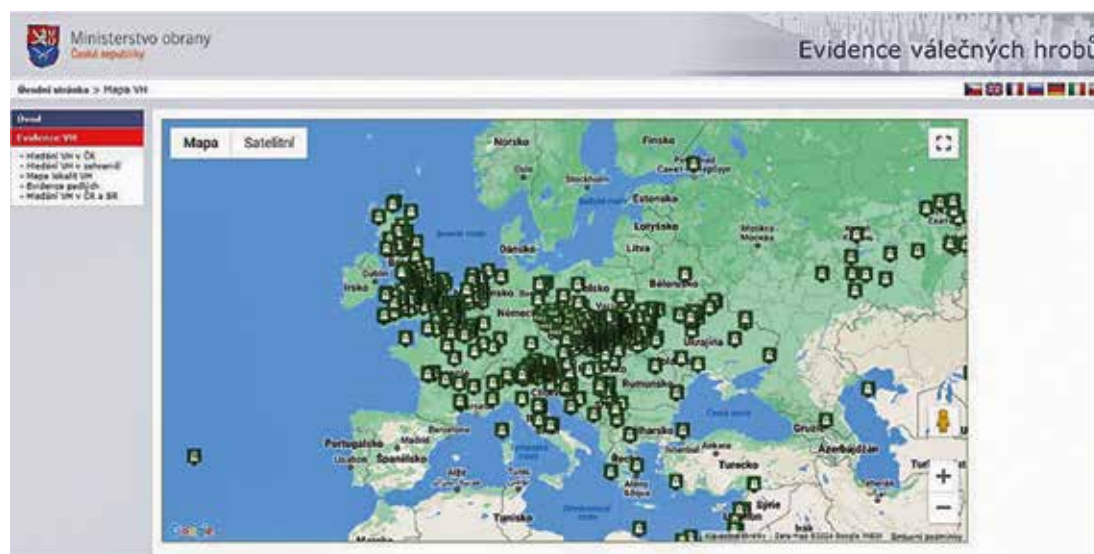
- **cevh.army.cz** application, programme equipment of the Central Evidence serves for war grave record keeping and is accessible only for registered users,
- **valecnehroby.army.cz** provides basic services regarding war graves including necessary information for grant applications,
- **evidencevh.army.cz/Evidence/hledani-hrobu-v-cr** allows the public to view the war graves register.



The record-keeping of war graves works at three levels:

- The Ministry of Defence manages the Central War Graves Register.
- A regional authority manages a total war graves register of graves located in its administration district (14 regions).
- Extended authority municipality office keeps records of war graves located in its administration district (227 extended authority municipalities).

Besides the MoD, 240 entities take part in the keeping of records. In fact, we register more users for some offices. As of December 31, some 377 users had active access to the Central Register – 7 from the MoD level, 270 from the municipalities with extended authorities, 30 from the regional authority level, 12 foreign contributors, 48 guests (from various levels and authorities), 3 researchers (database of the fallen), and 6 users with the administrator authorization. In order to ensure quality care for war graves, the MoD cooperates with designated employees of regional and municipal authorities. Especially the cooperation between municipal authorities' employees and war grave owners has an immediate effect on the physical state of such graves.



A view of the War Graves Register – search and map of war graves

# PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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The MoD conducts the care for war graves in accordance with the law. Based on the law, the MoD performs government functions to the extent of:

- a. Deciding, in cases of doubt, what is and what is not a war grave;
- b. Coordinating the care for war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad;
- c. Maintaining a central registry of war graves;
- d. Providing grants under a specific regulation for the care for war graves to the owner, or if unknown, to the property owner, and;
- e. Providing compensation for restrictions on the use of the property and covering expenses for the purchase of the property or part of it.



# INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

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The MoD continuously monitors and evaluates the performance of the mandatory tasks of government bodies at the regional level through inspections of delegated authorities. The MoD has set the inspection system in a three-year cycle. In this cycle, we inspect compliance with the law in each regional authority. The scope and form of inspection are consistent across all regional authorities during the inspection cycle. During the inspection, we check the status and completeness of war grave records in full scope, as well as the form and results of coordination for the care for war graves within the region, including the inspection activities of the regional authority, with emphasis on physical condition checks of war graves and the financing of care through regional grant programs. We also focus on eliminating deficiencies identified in the previous inspection, including the inclusion of war graves in spatial analytical documents prepared by the regional authority and, not least, on addressing administrative delicts related to the care for war graves. The primary focus of each inspection is on verifying the physical condition of a selected sample of war graves in the region. In 2023, we began a new inspection cycle, which will finish in October 2025.

Many inspected war graves containing remains and remembrance sites are in excellent condition. A longstanding issue remains the status of the Military Cemetery in Černovír. On this national cultural monument in Olomouc, only basic maintenance of the grassy area has been conducted for several years. However, individual graves of soldiers from the WWI are neither identified nor properly marked.

In isolated cases, we identified examples of insufficient care for war graves, such as in Opava-Kateřinky, where memorial site number CZE8117-7752 is in poor condition and requires major maintenance or a full-scale repair. Another example is a war grave containing remains, number CZE8117-57151, which is in a completely decrepit condition and requires total reconstruction.

Recognizability of war graves containing remains in cemeteries, particularly their differentiation from other graves, remains a persistent problem. The basic designation of war graves is a text on the grave indicating that the burial site contains the remains of individuals, which meet the provisions of Section 2, Paragraph 1 of the Act. However, private graves generally have no such marking, making them difficult to locate in cemeteries.

In cases where the text on the grave does not meet the requirements for identifying the war grave, it will be necessary in the future to mark the grave appropriately to indicate that it contains the remains of individuals, which meet the provisions of Section 2, Paragraph 1 of the Act, and is thus a war grave.

*An example of grave instruments not meeting requirements for war grave identifiability with only the family name on the gravestone. Moreover the grave is overgrown and not tended well.*

(MoD WVGWD)



# CARE FOR CZECH WAR GRAVES

## ABROAD

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By taking care for the graves of our fallen soldiers and airmen, we preserve historical memory and remember those who should not be forgotten. According to international conventions, and especially bilateral agreements between the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Serbia, and Romania, the principle is that the care for war graves falls under the responsibility of the state in whose territory they are located. However, this is not always the case. While Czech law under the term “war grave” includes “remembrance sites” that commemorate a war sacrifice, even if they do not contain remains, international conventions and bilateral agreements consider a war grave to be only a site with the remains of fallen soldiers. Therefore, the Czech state often has to ensure the care for these sites on its own.

As of December 31, 2023, there were 3,666 Czech war graves (WGs) in 47 countries, commemorating 17,547 fallen soldiers, registered in the Central Register. Compared to the previous year, this represents an increase of 122 graves with 1,347 victims. The largest number of Czech war graves are in Slovakia (962 WGs with 3,602 victims), France (593 WGs with 985 victims), Poland (529 WGs with 2,324 victims), the United Kingdom (396 WGs with 640 victims), Italy (356 WGs with 1,344 victims), Russia (237 WGs with 3,454 victims), Slovenia (154 WGs with 510 victims), and Ukraine (144 WGs with 2,739 victims).

Smaller numbers (dozens) can be found in Belgium (61 WGs with 62 victims), Hungary (30 WGs with 70 victims), the Netherlands (28 WGs with 54 victims), Germany (21 WGs with 223 victims), Uzbekistan (18 WGs with 96 victims), Austria (14 WGs with 96 victims), Israel (14 WGs with 14 victims), Libya (13 WGs with 15 victims), Canada (10 WGs with 15 victims), and Serbia (10 WGs with 101 victims). There are even fewer in Croatia (8 WGs with 14 victims), Egypt (7 WGs with 12 victims), the Bahamas (7 WGs with 12 victims), Yemen (7 WGs with 10 victims), Kazakhstan (5 WGs with 40 victims), Kyrgyzstan (4 WGs with 33 victims), Singapore (4 WGs with 7 victims), Portugal (4 WGs with 4 victims), Greece (3 WGs with 8 victims), and Panama (3 WGs with 3 victims).

One or two war graves are located in Romania (2 WGs with 47 victims), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 WGs with 4 victims), Australia (2 WGs with 2 victims), India (2 WGs with 2 victims), and Lebanon (2 WGs with 2 victims). One grave can be found in China (55 victims), Moldova (32 victims), Belarus (15 victims), Afghanistan (15 victims), the Philippines (7 victims), Japan (5 victims), Kosovo (2 victims), and Syria (2 victims). We have registered one fallen soldier in Montenegro, Georgia, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Macedonia, and Turkey.

Let us focus on the countries with the largest number of Czech war graves, where major remembrance functions organized by the MoD in cooperation with memory policy partners took place over the past year. In the following section, we will review last year’s activities in the agenda of care for war graves and memorial sites in Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Moldova, and Canada.

## Ukraine (144 WGs with 2,739 victims)

We continue registering soldiers from the territory of the present-day Czech Republic who fell in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Their number has risen to 1,275, making up nearly half of all recorded victims. There are 612 registered Czechoslovak Legionnaires who fell, and 809 Czechoslovak service members from the WWII. In the battles defending the Czechoslovak borders, 43 Czechoslovak armed forces members fell in Carpathian Ruthenia.

On November 12, 2023, Czech Defence Minister Jana Černočová, while in Ukraine, commemorated the heroism of Czechoslovak soldiers who laid their lives 80 years ago during the liberation of Kyiv. The 1st Czechoslovak Independent Brigade in the USSR played a significant role in these battles.





*In July, we unveiled the restored war grave of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Stryi.*



*Minister Černochová's advisor Martin Žour presented a War Graves Care plaque to Mr. Jurij Fatula, who played a significant role in restoring the war grave. Mr. Fatula, the head of the surgical ward at a hospital in Uzhhorod, treats and rehabilitates Ukrainian soldiers injured in combat with Russian aggressors, while dedicating his free time to restoring WWI graves.*





*The monument honours 707 fallen soldiers from Recruitment Command in Jindřichův Hradec, Plzeň, Olomouc, Cheb, and České Budějovice.*



*Ceremony at the memorial in the museum premises in Novo Petrovce with the participation of Defence Minister Jana Černochová.*



Minister Černochová, along with her delegation, traced the entire combat route taken by the Czechoslovaks from the Lyutizh Bridgehead, through the “Bolshevik Factory,” to the main train station and the Dnieper River.

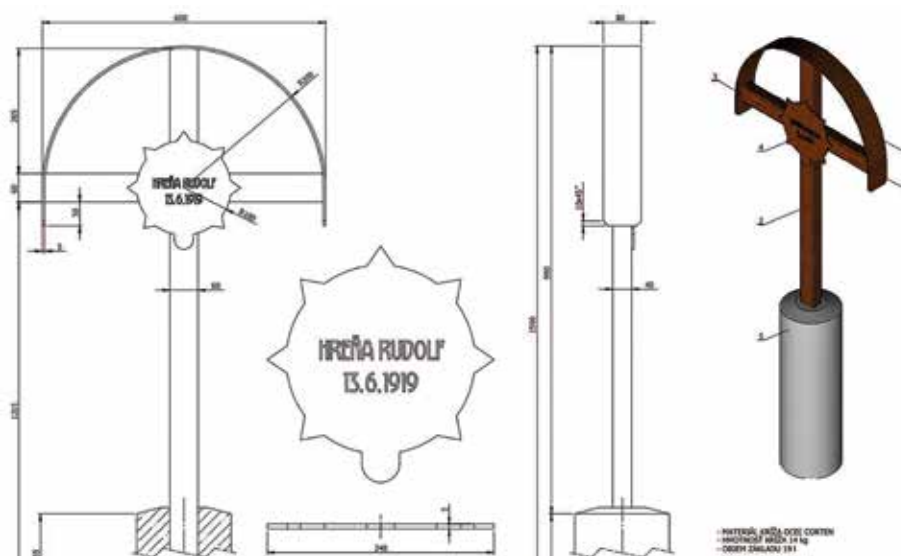
The liberation of Kyiv in November 1943 is regarded the most successful operation of the Czechoslovak Land Forces in the Second World War. The First Czechoslovak Independent Brigade, which had a significant share in the liberation, left its mark in the fights at the WWII eastern front. On November 5-6, 1943, over 3,500 Czechoslovak soldiers took part in an attack operation that liberated one of the most significant European capitals, which is also considered to be the cradle of Czechoslovak Legions. “Both my priorities for the Ministry of Defence and the Tenliner for Defence include as one of the main points the maintenance and building of military traditions and the commemoration of significant anniversaries and heroes. I considered it to be of high importance to visit Sokolovo in March to honour our fallen soldiers and I regard it just as important to do so in Kyiv as well,” said the Minister, who visited Kyiv with her delegation on the occasion of the Veterans Day.

“I had personally taken the battle path of our unit from Lyutezh through the Bolshevik factory (original factory of the Czech businessman Josef Křivánek, all the way to the central train station and the Dnipro River). I was honoured to lay flowers at the war graves of our soldier in cemeteries in Lukianivska and Sviatoshyn as well as in the newly discovered cemetery in Degtyarev,” she said. “The endeavour of our soldiers in Kyiv in November 1943 deserves admiration and has made a mark in our armed forces’ traditions. I consider it symbolical to visit Kyiv at a time, when Ukraine is faced with an unprecedented Russian attack. During the memorial acts, we witnessed an act of deep gratitude of a senior citizen who, upon seeing the Czech flag on the uniform of Colonel Robert Speychal, took his hand and with teary eyes thanked him for our help,” Minister Černochová concluded.

The delegation included the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Ukraine Radek Pech, the Defence Attaché of the Czech Republic to Ukraine BG František Ridzák, the Director of the Military History Institute BG Aleš Knížek, the Director WVGWD COL Robert Speychal, Martin Ondráček of the “Gift for Putin” initiative and Martin Žour and Jarmila Žourová of the Sokolovo non-profit association. Some remembrance functions were also attended by the representatives of the Slovak Republic.

## Slovakia (962 WGs with 3,602 victims)

We continue the renewal of graves of Czechoslovak soldiers who fell in combat against Hungarians and Hungarian Bolsheviks between 1918 and 1919, almost exclusively in cooperation with the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Foundation (hereinafter “Foundation”). Slovak government partners (the responsibility for war graves care is vested with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic) have shown no initiative in this matter.



*In cooperation with the foundation, we had made a standardised cross with a First Republic star set upon war graves and a typical Slovak cover. These crosses are put upon individual war graves where the headstones with names did not survive.*



*The renewed war grave of Antonín Klement of Pilsen in Čifáře*



*Renewed war graves of six Czech soldiers in Klenov*



*The renewed war grave of Čeněk Fišer of Lysá nad Labem in Kostolány nad Hornádom near Košice*





*Renewed war grave  
of Slovak soldier Jozef  
Pilko in Malá Lodina  
at Margecany*



*The renewed war grave of Slovak soldier Ján Hudák in Pečovská Nová Ves near Prešov*





*The renewed war grave of a Slovak soldier in Šamudovce*



*The renewed war grave of a Slovak soldier in Štrkovec*





*The renewed war grave of Czech soldier Jaroslav Hruška in Velký Folkmar.*



*The renewed war grave of soldier Josef Košťál of Beroun in Žipov.*





*The renewed war grave of Czech soldier Ferdinand Neužil in Jablonec u Senice was solemnly unveiled by the Czech Defence Attaché in December.*



*The renewed war grave of Czech soldier Michal Benda in Senice was solemnly unveiled by the Czech Defence Attaché in December.*



*The reconstructed war grave of twelve Czechoslovak soldiers in Kotešová near Žilina was unveiled by a delegation of members of the WVVGD and the Foundation. WVVGD Director COL Robert Speychal handed over a memorial war graves care plaque to Member of Parliament and activist Martin Gacík.*



## Poland (529 WGs with 2,324 victims)

We launched identification of Czechoslovak soldiers who died in the Polish territory during the Battle of Dukla in 1944. By the end of the year, we found over 900 victims in the archives, thus significantly increasing the number of identified fallen soldiers.



*As part of the visit of the WVGWD and the Czechoslovak Legionnaires Association at the British cemetery in Poznań in March, the delegation honoured the memory of Czech airman Arnošt Valenta, executed in March of 1944 after his escape from a POW camp.*



*The WVGWD delegation honoured the memory of six service members of the Czechoslovak armed forces in Glubczyce, who were killed by members of the SdP in September 1938.*

## Moldova (1 WG, 24 victims)

As mentioned in Key moments above, a war grave was unveiled in Chisinau in November which is dedicated to the memory of Czechoslovak Legionnaires. The volunteers got to Chisinau thanks to the intervention of Milan Rastislav Štefánik who carried out a mission to Romania in autumn of 1916 to claim prisoners of Alsace-Lorraine, Czechoslovak and Southern Slavic origin from local prisoner camps. In January of 1917, when Chisinau was a part of Bessarabia Governorate of tsarist Russia, some 1,100 prisoners arrived in the city. Over 500 Southern Slavs continued to Odesa to serve in the Serbian Legion while approximately 50 Alsatians and over 500 Czechs and Slovaks recovered before continuing to France. As a result of prison conditions in Romanian camps and a typhoid epidemic, several dozens of them died in Chisinau. About 400 volunteers travelled in two transports in June and July of 1917 via Archangelsk to France where they became the basis of the newly formed 21st and 22nd Czechoslovak Legion Regiment. During the design phase of the renewal of the memorial, it was discovered there is no official or unofficial list of the deceased in any of the Czech, Moldovan and Romanian archives. Only published contemporary photos of the memorial could have been used, but the quality was insufficient. A lucky find of the source photograph enabled a reliable transcription of all 31 names. However, further research decreased the number to 27. The plaque allows for further adjustments if other names are to be added.



*The restored war grave monument honouring the memory of Czechoslovak Legionnaires in Chisinau.*



## Canada (10 WGs, 15 victims)

Fourteen Czechoslovak service personnel died in training during the Second World War, most of whom were airmen of the Royal Air Force (RAF). In September, the original grave of Czechoslovak Legionnaire František Kučírek who died in Valcartier in July of 1920 was completed with a tombstone with identification data and Legionnaires' symbols.



*The war grave of Czechoslovak Legionnaire František Kučírek*

# TALKS ON THE RENEWAL OF CZECH WAR GRAVES ABROAD

## Slovakia

In July, consultations were held regarding the renewal of Czech war graves in Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Kálnica, Kotešová, Brodno, Nezbudská Lúčka, Vrútky, Turany, Dolný Kubín, Ružomberok, Poprad, Spišská Nová Ves, Hendrichovce, Pečovská Nová Ves, Orkucany, Šarišské Michaľany, Žipov, Klenov, Kysak, Veľká and Malá Lodina, Ružiná, Veľký Folkmar, Kostolany nad Hornádom, Milhošť, Komárovce, Poproč, Jasov, Štós, Slavec, Silická Brezová, Čoltovo, Lenka, Štrkovec, Veľké Turovce, Čifáre, Veľký Ďur, Kalná nad Hronom, Vrábľa, Nitra, Pernek, Jablonica, Senica and Kúty.

In December, the 18th meeting of the Joint Czech and Slovak Intergovernmental War Graves Committee took place, during which we have informed our Slovak partners of substantial changes

in the structure of war graves care within the MoD. We asked for their support and help in designing renewal of joint war graves of soldiers fallen during battles against Hungarians and Hungarian Bolsheviks in 191-1919 in Trnava, Ružomberok, Banská Štiavnica, Levice, Šahy, Lučenec, Turňa nad Bodvou, Nitra and Medzeva.

*After the meeting, members of the Committee laid a wreath to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier on the riverbank of the Danube.*



*Closing photo of the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Czech and Slovak Intergovernmental War Graves Committee*



## Poland

In 2023, we continued talks on the renewal of war graves in Poland. In March, a business trip was carried out to Łódź, Poznań and Wrocław. During the meetings, we discussed the possibility of mass exhumations in connection to the debate of the Ďáblice cemetery in Prague, whose committee established by the Government includes representatives of the War Veterans and War Graves Department. The Polish Instytut pamięci narodowej is among the best in the world in the field of identification and exhumation of victims of the Nazi and Communist regimes.

The Archaeology Institute of the University of Łódź has a long-standing tradition of WWI archaeology and published numerous works on this subject. During the meeting with archaeologists, we discussed future cooperation in war graves care for our service personnel in the Polish territory and we informed them of the possibility of donation-based funding offered by the Government of the Czech Republic. We also informed our Polish partners about the Dukla project and requested their support.

## Kazakhstan

A delegation led by the Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies followed upon previous trips to Uzbekistan (2021) and Kyrgyzstan (2022). Central Asian countries which host the remains of over 10 thousand war prisoners of WWI including prisoners of Czechoslovak origin, and represent a priority region from the point of view of construction and establishment of war graves. The meetings were held on Akimat (local government) level and support was expressed by the Kazakh party. The Czech Republic promised maximum assistance with the search through archived documentation and war graves of Kazakh soldiers who died in the territory of Czechoslovakia during WWII.

Currently, we have recorded 606 fallen Czech soldiers in Kazakhstan in a total of 11 main locations. In the first phase, we intend to repair the existing war grave in Fort-Shevchenko by the Caspian Sea, establish a central war grave in the third largest city Shymkent and renew the war grave dedicated to our Legionnaires in Petropavlovsk in the north of the country.



*War grave in Fort-Shevchenko*

# Germany

In December, a meeting was held with the representatives of the Bavarian State Office and the city of Munich. The Czech delegation also included the Czech Defence Attaché in Germany and the Consul General to Munich. We discussed topics regarding the Munich cemetery in Perlacher Forst.

The first of the topics was possible exhumation of remains of Czech resistance fighter Karel Hladeček executed in Munich and their repatriation. Hladeček's family members were also present at the meeting. He was buried in a part of the cemetery called Forrest of Honour II alongside 94 victims of execution (out of which 64 were Czechoslovak citizens. A potential exhumation turned out to be complicated and the German side proposed an alternative in the form of restauration of the burial area and addition of information boards to familiarise cemetery visitors with Hladeček's life story. The final decision was made by a family member who chose the alternative solution, to full respect of the WVWG Department.

In the second part of the meeting, we discussed possible exhumation of members of the Iridium and Bronze airdrops who died when their aircraft were shot down near Munich in 1943. Their remains were buried the section of "Displaced persons". The cemetery for example contains remains of forced labour workers who died in Munich during WWII. German partners were very obliging in this case and promised to perform probing in spring of 2024 to verify exhumation options. If exhumation turns out to be doable, discussions will follow regarding their reburial in the CWGC military cemetery in Durnbach by the aircrews of both RAF aircraft. The second option is their transfer to the Czech Republic.



*Photo of the Displaced persons cemetery*



# AWARDS FOR WAR GRAVES CARE

In order to appreciate individual contribution to the care for war graves, the MoD established a Memorial war graves care plaque in January 2006. The MoD awards the plaque to legal and natural persons with significant merit in the care, maintenance and repair of war graves in the Czech Republic and in foreign countries, or in the domain of war graves care.

The basic motive of the obverse of the plaque is a flame symbolising the all-consuming flame of war, as well as the candle flame on the graves of the fallen and the eternal memory of war victims, which must be maintained and cherished. The shape also reminds of a tear referring to the grief of the bereaved. The basic motive is complemented with a stele of the Czech lion symbolizing the graves of the deceased Czechoslovak and Czech soldiers and airmen all over the world.



*Obverse and reverse of the plaque*



# GRANTS

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The Ministry of Defence provides financial support for war graves care through the subsidies program Maintenance and Renewal of Historic Values I, announced for years 2020 – 2029 in the total value of CZK 170 million. The MoD intends to use CZK 120 million for the care for war graves in the Czech Republic. The remaining CZK 50 million were allocated by the MoD for donations for the care for war graves abroad.

The MoD provides financial support through specific purpose subsidies to eligible applicants in accordance with the War Graves Act. The claim to subsidies is not automatic.

The program is designed to accommodate no less than 60 % of applications on sustained basis.

The MoD evaluates the applications in two aspects:

1. Points score for how much the application meets the defined criteria.
2. Preferential points given to selected applications by the members of the war graves care committee.

The score given to applications derives from predefined priorities. The highest score is given to applications meeting most of the following criteria:

- a. The MoD prefers the repair of existing war graves which are in a bad condition due to their age and weather conditions over other objectives.
- b. The MoD prefers the care for war graves which document the activity of persons who died in a specific resistance operation or military operation during the Second World War over other objectives.
- c. The MoD prefers the care for war graves containing the remains of persons who died as a result of their active participation in a military operation, as war prisoners, as a result of participation in resistance or military operation during war over war graves whose main objective is to serve as a symbol to commemorate war events and their victims.
- d. It is necessary to use the financial resources efficiently to divide the subsidies to as many war graves as possible. The process of granting subsidies helps to guide eligible applicants through their use.
- e. It is necessary to support smaller municipalities considering that 55 % of them have a population of less than 500 inhabitants and it is therefore difficult for them to gather sufficient funds to take care for war graves, as well as to support owners in towns which have a larger budget at their disposal.
- f. It is necessary to keep the general public informed about the financial participation of the MoD in the care for individual war graves.
- g. If possible, the war graves are to be possibly located in public places commonly frequented by citizens even outside of commemorative functions.

Applications can get maximum 300 points.

The scores are also awarded by the members of the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for the Care for War Graves (hereinafter “the Committee”). Each of its members has 50 preferential points which they can award to a maximum of three applications as follows: 25, 15 and 10 points to one of the three applications respectively.

Pursuant to the 4th call for applications for war graves care subsidies, we have received 94 applications worth CZK 29,829,935 through the RISPF 94 system. Three of them did not meet the definition of a war grave according to legislation, one application was declined due to formal aspects and two applications were not submitted in writing.

A total of 84 applications in the total value of CZK 28,889,898 were included in the grant selection procedure.

A proposal of order for subsidies was prepared based on the evaluation of applications, score and available financing. The subsidies for 2023 were then discussed within the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for the Care for War Graves on 27 July 2022, which set up the order in which subsidies will be allocated to the satisfaction of applicants until the spending of funds.



The Committee proposal was then submitted to the WVGWD Director who decided to provide war graves care funding of a total of CZK 17,284,177. Based on the application, the Director decided to increase the limit by CZK 71,600 for application No. 21, Roman-Catholic parish in Všestary.

# OUTLOOK FOR 2024

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In the upcoming year, we want to stabilize the personnel situation at the WVVWD by filling all vacancies. Furthermore, we wish to include further employees through part-time contracts in the digitalisation of archived documentation and their transfer into the Central War Grave Register (the Central Register). We also intend to extend cooperation with other partners such as architects, builders and stonemasons in the area of war graves both in the Czech Republic and abroad. A systemic digitalisation of the War Graves Register will lead to a significant increase of the quantity of entries in the Central Register. The Register itself will be updated so that its functions are in line with modern technology and can be used in a mid-term horizon by the general public.

Abroad, we again seek to renew war graves in Slovakia, Ukraine, Italy and Poland. In accordance with the newly developed concept, we want to increase our effort in the registering, repairs and renewals of war graves of our soldiers and airmen who fought and died in the Austrian-Hungarian Army, as we are still indebted to the memory of these 250,000 soldiers. We also focus our activities in Central Asia and the Balkans on this objective. We want to coordinate our activities in this field with Austrian Schwarzes Kreuz.

In 2024, we will unveil a new war grave in Trieste, Italy, and war graves in Slovakia linked to the border war with Bolshevik Hungary in 1918-1919. On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of Dukla, we wish to move forward our discussions with Poland on the establishment of a war grave of 900 fallen Czechoslovak soldiers who are most likely buried on the Polish side of the pass and do not have their own war grave. We will continue the comprehensive reconstruction of the war grave in Sokolovo, Ukraine. Furthermore, we will continue our discussion from December of last year in Munich regarding the burial of remains of Bronze and Iridium airdrops members.

In the territory of the Czech Republic, we will support war graves care through grant program Maintenance and Renewal of Historical Values I. In 2023, we were able to increase available funding in the program from CZK 12 to 15 million. Above all, we wish to intensify our cooperation with regional administrations and municipalities, for whom the WVVWD prepared a methodological instruction *War Graves. Legal Guide. Principles of Maintenance and Basic Terminology*. Our activity in the upcoming year will include regular methodological meetings, inspections of delegated authority from the level of the Ministry of Defence and presentations of our activity at regional levels. The objective is to spread awareness of our activity among regional administration so that they are also aware of their possibilities and obligations in war graves care.

We consider it to be of high importance to establish cooperation with the German Volksbund in the matter of searching for the remains of German soldiers fallen in our territory and their orderly burial, which became less intense in the past years, including due to complex undertaking legislation of the Czech Republic. The dignified burial of German soldiers (and of other armed forces, for instance Red Army members) also relates to our cooperative communication with archaeological institutions.

We expect development of official cooperation with Central Asian countries, formerly members of the Soviet Union with the aim to identify soldiers who died in the ranks of Red Army and their places of final rest. For several years now, we have been cooperating with the Romanian Embassy in Prague on commemorating Romanian soldiers who died during the liberation of Czechoslovakia.

The above-mentioned activities are only the most important ones we are up to in 2024. It clearly illustrates the magnitude of the Czech Republic's prospects with respect to its military and historical development and traditions.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We wish to wholeheartedly thank our faithful colleagues from the regional administrations and municipalities with extended powers for their meticulous and self-sacrificing work in the war graves care coordination.

Furthermore, we want to express our gratitude to Ambassadors, Honorary Consuls, Military Attachés and other representatives of the Corps Diplomatique with whom we have had the honour to cooperate. And last but not least, we wish to thank our partners from associations, private initiatives and volunteers who help us fulfil our mission.

We believe we will continue developing our successful cooperation in the future, as our mission never ends.

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