



The history of mankind is stained with the blood of countless battles and wars. History books usually speak of great leaders and brilliant strategists. Remembrance Day is dedicated to the millions of unknown soldiers who lost their lives, especially during the First World War and Second World War.

To honour the fallen soldiers

The conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in 1914 served as a **pretext**¹ for the First World War. The Allies (Great Britain, France and Russia) fought against the Central Powers (Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire). At the time the Czech lands were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many Czechs fled from the Austro-Hungarian army, formed 'the Legions' and fought for the Allies.

They Will Never Grow Old

Those who die in combat live on in our memory

The First World War ended with the signing of The **Armistice**² in France, at 5.00 o'clock on November 11, 1918. It **came into effect**³ six hours later. Taking it as a symbolic date, at 11.00 o'clock on the Sunday closest to the 11th day of the 11th month many countries around the world **commemorate**⁴ those who died in all wars. In the UK and Canada it is called Remembrance Day. Since November 2001 Remembrance Day has also been observed in the Czech Republic to commemorate Czechoslovak patriots who

risked their lives in the fight for freedom and **restoration of sovereignty**⁵.

People who are interested, military and civilian, prominent officials, usually wearing a symbolic red **poppy**⁶, **join remembrance services**⁷ that are held at war memorials where **wreaths are laid**⁸. "The Last Post" (a tune that ends the day at an army camp) is played and **a minute's silence is observed**⁹.

Inscribed¹⁰ on many war memorials is part of the poem *For the Fallen*, written in 1914 by British poet and art critic Laurence

We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.

Binyon (1869–1943). It is often recited during remembrance services for its lyrical and **straightforward**¹¹ message.

For the Fallen (1914)

*They shall not grow old,
as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning,
We will remember them.*

A veteran of the First World War trenches¹²

Harry Patch, born on June 17, 1898, was the last living survivor of the trenches. Harry had indeed grown old. He was 111 years old when he died on Saturday, July 25, 2009.

Harry was sent **with his unit to the front lines**¹³ in France when he was 18 years old. One night in September 1917 a German **shrapnel shell**¹⁴ exploded overhead and seriously wounded him. He returned to England to recover and never went back.

Trench warfare – a symbol of the First World War

The trenches were a military strategy that had tragic consequences for the soldiers on both sides while achieving very little in **terms of forward progress**¹⁵. The German

Army in the east faced the Allied troops to the west on a **battle line stretching**¹⁶ from Belgium down through France. Between them there was a neutral area called **no man's land**¹⁷, which **was fenced off**¹⁸ on both sides by **rolls of barbed wire**¹⁹. The **troops dug in into complex**²⁰ trench systems behind the wire.

During the day things were quite quiet but at night the **infantry**²¹ went 'over the top' into no man's land to attack the enemy. In 1917 alone, 70,000 British troops died in the trenches. At that time, the life expectancy of a soldier in the trenches was measured in days rather than weeks or months.

What were the conditions like?

In areas such as Ypres, in Belgium, it was like a **continuous hell**²². Attacks were frequent, bodies and body parts were difficult to remove and **decayed**²³ where they lay. There are horrific tales of rats eating **corpses**²⁴ and even biting soldiers who were sleeping. In the wet winter weather mud was everywhere and mixed with **sewage**²⁵. Toilets were just holes in the ground. The **unsanitary conditions**²⁶ led to diseases such as **dysentery**²⁷, typhus and cholera.

A high proportion of deaths were the result of disease. Shrapnel from an exploding shell would be covered in mud and pathogenic bacteria (bacteria



The symbol of remembrance

People wear real or artificial poppies in honour of Remembrance Day. The red poppy grew in great numbers in the craters and trenches of the war zone. It became a symbol thanks to a Canadian doctor, John McCrae, who in May 1915 after the second battle of Ypres wrote the poem *In Flanders Fields*^{*}, the place of battlefields and the resting place of dead soldiers where red poppies grew in **abundance**³⁰.

*"We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn³¹, saw sunsets glow
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
in Flanders Fields."*

Governments did little to help the injured and confused soldiers who returned from the war. In response, Earl Haig, the Commander in Chief of the British army, founded an organisation to assist soldiers which still exists today as the Royal British Legion. Red poppies are sold as a way of **raising funds**³² to commemorate those who died and for the **welfare of ex-servicemen**³³ or women and their children.



Harry Patch said that disputes should be settled by discussion rather than war.



In areas such as Ypres, in Belgium, fighting in trenches was like a continuous hell. Imagine the vast extent of the trenches when a soldier could walk on battlefields from Nieuwpoort in Belgium, located three kilometres from the coastline, to the Swiss borders (a distance of around 550 kilometres), without even his helmet standing out over the edge of trenches.

that cause disease). Antibiotics had not yet been discovered, so a wound, especially in the **abdomen**²⁸, was usually fatal in the end. A fungal infection of the feet (trench foot) due to the wet conditions often resulted in **gangrene**²⁹ and amputation.

Eye witnesses to life and death in the trenches commented that they thought that the lucky ones were those who died.

All Quiet on the Western Front

One of the most famous novels dealing with the First World War, *All Quiet on the Western*

Front, was written by German writer Erich Maria Remarque.

It is the story of Paul Bäumer, who together with his friends, joins the German army and fights on the Western Front. It is not a heroic story of bravery, but shows the conditions in which the soldiers found themselves. Young soldiers together with Paul must have asked themselves the reason for all the suffering as the battles fought seemed to be of small significance.

‘We are not youth any longer... We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.’

Nigel Haward (UK)

Marie Šormová (CR)



The most famous literary work about Czech soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army is the humorous novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* written by Jaroslav Hašek. The raw description of the war becomes an actual accusation of how human lives are wasted on the battlefields. Illustration © Josef Lada – heir, 2008



In honour of the brave

On November 11, 2004 a bronze monument was erected in Vítězné náměstí in Prague to honour the Czechoslovak soldiers who died fighting abroad in both Czechoslovak and Allied armies during the Second World War. The monument is inscribed with places and a map where the soldiers were killed. The area around the monument is paved with granite tiles under which boxes containing soil from different battlefields are stored. A part of the installation is an interactive database giving the names of soldiers, their unit and how they died. It's a reminder of all the brave men who perished serving their country.

VOCABULARY

¹ **pretext** ['pri:tɛkst] – záminka

² **armistice** ['ɑ:mɪstɪs] – příměří

³ **came into effect** – vstoupilo v platnost

⁴ **to commemorate** [kə'meməreɪt] – připomínat

⁵ **restoration of sovereignty** [rɪ'stɔ:reɪʃ(ə)n 'sɒvrənɪtɪ] – obnova nezávislosti (suverenity státu)

⁶ **poppy** – vlčí mák

⁷ **join remembrance services** – se účastnit pietních vzpomínkových aktů

⁸ **wreaths are laid** [ri:'θɔ:s] – jsou kladeny věnce

⁹ **a minute's silence is observed** ['saɪləns] – je držena minuta ticha

¹⁰ **to inscribe** [ɪn'skraɪb] – vytesat

¹¹ **straightforward** [streɪt'fɔ:wəd] – jasný, přímočarý

¹² **trench** [trɛn(t)] – (u vojska) zákop

¹³ **with his unit to the front lines** ['ju:nɪt frʌnt] – se svým útvarem na frontu

¹⁴ **shrapnel shell** ['ʃræpn(ə)l ʃɛl] – střepina z dělostřeleckého granátu

¹⁵ **in terms of forward progress** – pokud jde o postup vpřed

¹⁶ **battle line stretching** – bojová linie táhnoucí se

¹⁷ **no man's land** – země nikoho

¹⁸ **to fence off** – obehnat

¹⁹ **rolls of barbed wire** [rəʊlz bɑ:bd waɪə] – kotouči ostnatého drátu

²⁰ **troops dug in into complex** [tru:pz dʌg 'kɒmpleks] – vojáci se zakopali do spletitých

²¹ **infantry** ['ɪnf(ə)ntri] – pěchota

²² **continuous hell** [kən'tɪnjuəs] – nepřetržitě peklo

²³ **to decay** [dɪ'keɪ] – hnit, rozkládat se

²⁴ **corpse** [kɔ:ps] – mrtvola

²⁵ **sewage** ['su:ɪdʒ, 'sju:-] – splašky

²⁶ **unsanitary conditions** [ʌnsæɪt(ə)rɪ kən'dɪʃ(ə)nz] – nehygienické podmínky

²⁷ **dy sentery** ['dɪs(ə)nt(ə)rɪ] – úplavice

²⁸ **abdomen** – břicho

²⁹ **gangrene** ['gæŋgrɪ:n] – gangréna, sněť

THE SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE

³⁰ **in abundance** [ə'bʌnd(ə)nɪs] – ve velkém množství

³¹ **felt dawn** [dɔ:n] – zaživali jsme úsvit

³² **raising funds** [reɪzɪŋ fʌndz] – získávání financí

³³ **welfare of ex-servicemen** ['wɛlfə:] – sociální zabezpečení bývalých vojáků (příslušníků armády)

GLOSSARY*

Flanders fields – an area in present-day Belgium, France, and the Netherlands