

Šance

lookout tower and land fortifications from the 18th century



1. ŠANCE LOOKOUT TOWER

The tower is located on one of the highest peaks of Opava district in Silesia at an altitude of 522 metres above sea level, at the north-western periphery of the town Jakubčovice. The place itself gained a strategic military importance in the Middle Ages and rightfully became the location of Austria's extensive military land fortifications at the end of the 18th century.

Between 2004–2005, a 15.5-metre-high lookout tower was built there. It was designed by Ing. arch. Miroslav Slíva from Opava and it stands on four concrete pillars covered in stone brickwork. 60 wooden steps lead to a 12.75-metre-high observation deck. In good weather conditions, it is possible to see the highest peaks of the Moravian-Sile-



Šance lookout tower

sian region from the top of the tower. In the south-east, the queen of the Beskydy mountains – the mountain Lysá hora (1323 metres above sea level) and in the west, the majestic mountain Praděd (1492 metres above sea level), which is the highest top of the Jeseníky mountains. In 2021, the tower was supplemented with standing telescope binoculars with a 20x magnification. In the same year the immediate surroundings of the tower were filled with interactive elements that commemorate the military conflicts of the 18th century between Austria and Prussia, and with a new space for relaxation.

2. OPAVA DISTRICT IN THE PERIOD OF WARS WITH PRUSSIA 1740–1763

Shortly after the death of the Austrian emperor Charles VI (1740), who died without a male heir, it was clear that the Habsburg Monarchy had stood on fragile foundations. Based on the Pragmatic Sanction from 1713



Maria Theresa (1717–1780), Archduchess of Austria, Queen of Bohemia and Hungary



Frederick the Great (1712–1786), King of Prussia, commander, the main enemy of Austria in war conflicts between 1740–1779, known for his famous quotation addressed to his soldiers before battle: "Rogues, would you live forever?"

(a monarch status enabling females to become the heir of the Habsburg Monarchy), Maria Theresa became the ruler of the Empire. This was, however, considered a very unusual step among the dynasties of that time, and thus it is no wonder that several states (France, Bavaria, Prussia) did not accept the Pragmatic Sanction and Maria Theresa's succession. Prussia benefited from this situation the most, though, and with its king Frederick the Great (1712–1786) invaded Silesia without declaring war. As early as 23 January 1741 the nearby city Opava fell into the hands of Prussians. The Silesian Wars then evolved into a long-time conflict throughout the whole Europe. The wars took place in years 1740–1742, 1745–1748, and 1756–1763. Nevertheless, Austria definitively lost the vast majority of Silesia and the Polish town Kłodzko on the basis of three peace accords. The border of Prus-

sia moved to a position only two kilometres from Opava, and it divided, among others, the duchies of Opava, Nysa, and Krnov as well. Economic, cultural, and social ties and relationships were broken because of the new border, members of several families now faced each other as enemies. The border area was heavily affected by duty imposition and a ban on various imported products. This was a period of the greatest decline of Silesia.

3. ANTI-PRUSSIA LAND FORTIFICATIONS NEAR JAKUBČOVICE FROM 1789–1790 CALLED "ŠANCE"

The tower's name Šance itself is derived from the German word Schanzen which stands for a mildly advanced land fortification. The one in Jakubčovice and others on elevations around Hradec were built towards the end of the 18th century, between 1789–1790. These fortifications were built because there was a repeated threat of a war conflict between Austria and Prussia. A military conflict was afoot at that time and both enemies were intensively preparing for it. The Opava district was de facto already a borderland after the defeat in the Silesian Wars, and it is thus no wonder that at the initiative of Joseph II, new land fortifications were being formed at the recently established border. The fortifications protected important land roads (Opava – Bílovec – Nový Jičín), which were strategic points for possible intrusion of foreign troops to the Austrian inland. The emperor Leopold II, Joseph II's successor, repeatedly appointed the renowned generalissimo Ernst Gideon Laudon the head of his army. He was experienced in military conflicts and in 1790, he settled with his military staff in the nearby town Nový Jičín. The famous general attended an inspection of the newly formed land fortifications near Jakubčovice and at the present Silesian Calvary above Hradec on 28 June 1790, after having lunch with Karl Alois, Prince Lichnowsky at the Hradec Castle. However, general Laudon was afflicted by intestinal catarrh during the inspection and was forced to get back to Nový Jičín, but he did not recover from the disease and on 14 July 1790 died at the age of 73 years in Nový Jičín. The formation of anti-Prussia land fortifications influenced the lives of the residents of Jakubčovice,



Imperial obligatory imprint of a map of the stable cadastre from 1836, portrayal of the village Jakubčovice with 8 land fortifications ("šance") in two defence lines on the North side

Bohučovice and Hradec as well during 1789–1790. For example, they had to participate in the formation of these fortifications. It was recorded that the locals were obliged to transport soil, stones, and even several oak stakes to the building site by horse wagons. At the time of its origin, the fortification near Jakubčovice was a square shape, approximately 30 metres in size, made up from high ramparts ending in pointed oak palisades. A defence ditch was dug out around the ramparts. There is an assumption that in case of a war conflict, wicker baskets with a stone-soil structure would complement artillery cannons (placed inside the fortification). However, a war between Austria and Prussia did not eventually take place during that period. Both feuding countries were united by a new danger posed by revolutionary France, which turned the former enemies into military and diplomatic allies. The land fortifications (Schanzen) near Jakubčovice and Hradec were



Ernst Gideon Loudon (1717–1790), famous Austrian general of the 18th century, who was renowned for wars against the Turks and Prussians, holder of the Military Order of Maria Theresa

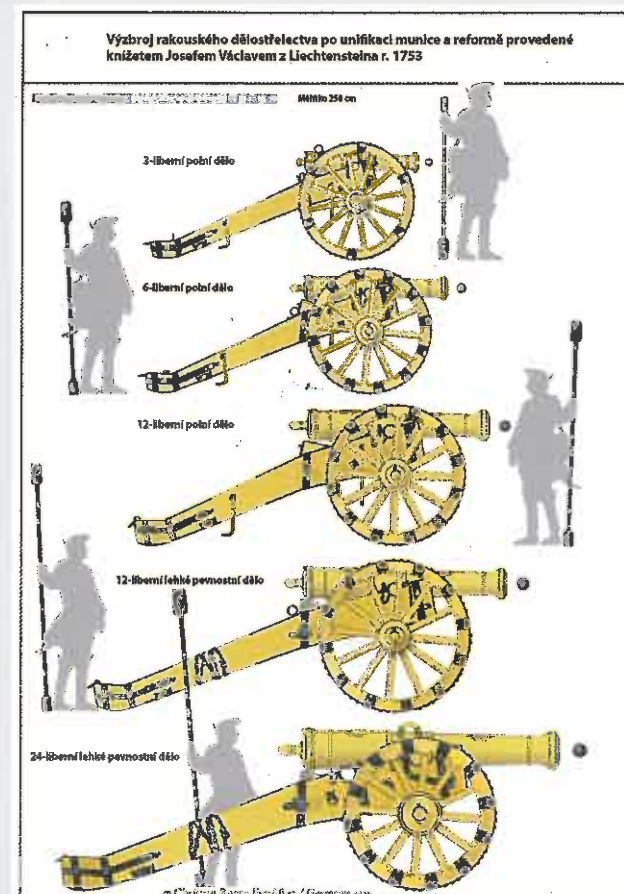
abandoned. The following rapid progress in military vehicles and combat tactics prevented those countries from participating in the next military conflicts.

4. AUSTRIAN ARTILLERY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The Austrian artillery underwent massive changes and reforms during the 18th century resulting from the need to be sufficiently qualified in battle to face the expansive intentions of the combative Prussian king Frederick the Great. The main initiator of the reforms was Joseph Wenzel I, Prince of Liechtenstein (1696–1772), the chief commander of artillery since 1744. Thanks to him (and to the Prussian example), the Austrian artillery gained new organisation, training, and armoury. A lot of attention was given to faster artillery mobilization, arm unification and ammunition transport. The prince invested his own money in the modern arm industry. He assigned a production of unified cannon barrels and shells in the Old iron works near Adamov. The calibre of field cannons was unified and reduced to three-pound,



Joseph Wenzel I, Prince of Liechtenstein (1696–1772), reformer and chief commander of Austrian artillery, holder of the Order of the Golden Fleece



Austrian field and fort cannon typology after the Austrian artillery reform carried out by Joseph Wenzel I, Prince of Liechtenstein in 1753

six-pound and twelve-pound cannons. The calibre of cannons was counted in pounds, depending on the weight of the artillery cannonball (counted in an old unit of weight – Silesian pound = 0.53 kilograms). Horse artillery was equipped only with light cannons and howitzers, so that it was mobile enough and could react quickly to a changing situation on the battlefield. Even the training of armed forces was altered. Artillerymen were taught ballistics, mathematics, and military tactics at a new military academy in Vienna and at three brigade artillery schools. Members of the nobility were usually not interested in the demanding artillery service and because of that, the ones that eventually voluntarily became officers were civil school graduates, often from the ranks of the bourgeoisie. The recruits had to be single



BÜCHSENMEISTER DES ARTILLERIE-CORPS
 MIT
 ARTILLERIE FUSILIER 1751-1786

Artillerymen of the Austrian artillery in uniforms used between 1751–1786

and know the oral and written German language. Artillery was completely based on scientific foundations and on development of natural sciences. It resulted in a major progress in aiming when simple sights and cannon quadrants were used. The adjustment of elevation of cannons was easier thanks to the elevation control screw. The Austrian artillery was at a scientific level during prince Liechtenstein's reign. Even the field artillery, field armory department, and army service corps increased in numbers. Whereas in 1746 the total number of artillerymen in the Habsburg Monarchy was 800 men, in 1781 it was constituted of 10.500 men. Thanks to Joseph Wenzel I, Prince of Liechtenstein, the Austrian artillery, along with many important Czech artillerymen, became the most feared component of the Austrian army up until 1918.



Project: Zatraktívění okolí a rozhledny v Bavorské a rozhledny Šance, Jakubčovice.
 © CZ.11.2.45/0.0/0.0/16_013/000/2589, co-funded by the Regional Development Fund – Program INTERREG-V-A Česká republika – Polsko, Euroregion Silesia Microproject Fund.

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 Visual materials: Ostrava Museum, National archive Opava,
 archive of the city Hradec nad Moravicí
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Visit

ŠANCE

lookout tower and historical
 land fortification

Hradec nad Moravicí – Jakubčovice



Centuries ago, the fortifications called "šance" protected the borders of our land and important land roads leading further inland. Today, along with a lookout tower, they attract visitors.