

Franz Svoboda (1861-1934) was the youngest of 9 children born in Karolinethal (near Prague) to a Czech craftsman (basket maker) family. He attended secondary school (Realschule) but did not complete his studies there. Instead he joined the military which in 1878 was taking occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a young soldier he participated in this campaign and was subsequently stationed in the new occupation zone for several years. Later, he served in the cavalry as a constable in Hungary (photos from this time exist). He was also stationed in Stockerau near Vienna. Between these postings, he was engaged as gym and fencing instructor in the military academy in Wiener Neustadt.

After about 15 years service, Svoboda as “long serving noncommissioned officer” was granted the right to transfer to a civilian position in the Ministry for National Defense. There he served in the Gendarmerie. He retired as “*Oberdirektor*” in 1914 following 20 years in that division and having received the Order of Franz-Josef.

Svoboda was one of among those conscientious, duteous and correct soldiers and civil servants of Czech extraction upon which to a large extent the Monarchy depended in its last decade of existence. Nothing was more foreign for these people than the political revolution fomented by their fellow Czechs and which contributed to the collapse of the old Austria. Like so many other Austrians from Prague or Brünn and elsewhere in the Czech regions of the empire and who had spend a major part of their lives in Vienna, Svoboda rarely spoke in his mother tongue. He considered German as his second mother tongue which he pronounced without the Czech accent often heard among this group.

Adapted from writings by Margaret Müller-Winter, 1950