

CZECH CELEBRATION

Czechoslovakia (CZ) was annexed and occupied by Germany in 1938. Before WWII ended in Europe in May 1945, the Allies had already determined which areas would be occupied by various countries. CZ was to be under Soviet (Russian) control. When US Forces reached the western CZ boundary, Russian troops were miles away. Since Germany had an uncommitted Army with elite, well-equipped units there, SHAEF notified Russia that we were going into the western part.

Miles North, First Army had advanced past Leipzig and met the Russians. V Corps (including 2nd ID) was transferred to Third Army and sent South to go into CZ. Opposition was light, as Germans preferred surrender to Americans rather than Russians. Most of the 2nd ID stopped at or near the city of Pilsen, but the MANCHUS continued another 10 miles or so to the town of Rokycany, and War in Europe ended May 8. The Czech people everywhere were ecstatic that they had been liberated by Americans. 2nd ID left in mid-June as we were scheduled to be sent to Pacific after a 30 day leave at home.

Other American units took our place until November 1945, when all US troops pulled out of CZ. Russia took over and Communist government was installed. During the next 44 years, they tried to erase all evidence that we liberated that area. Monuments were destroyed and even photos were confiscated. But the Czechs never forgot.

In June 1989, a group of 2nd ID veterans (including seven of us Manchus) spent two nights in Pilsen at the end of a three week (re-tracing our footprints) tour. Under Communist rule, the City looked dull and unprogressive, people solemn and many avoided us. A few conversed with us. Next day, we headed to Prague, to fly home.

We stopped in the Rokycany City Square for only 10 minutes, to take a few photos.

Six months later, December 1989, the Berlin Wall (Iron Curtain) came down and communism was history. The following May, Pilsen held its first Liberation Celebration, as it has done every year since. Veterans who were there in 1945 are honored guests and are treated like celebrities.

In May, 2016, my daughter, Carol, husband David, and I went to Pilsen for the annual festival. The City provided transportation from and to the Prague Airport, some 50 miles away. Seven of us US veterans and four Belgian veterans were there. A guide and several assistants (all speak English) and a modern bus were for us and family members all four days. We visited the Gen. Patton Museum and participated in wreath laying ceremonies at various monuments and memorials. Several dinners and lunches, and to three nearby small towns. The RIDE OF FREEDOM, with veterans and kin riding in restored WWII jeeps and other vehicles. Crowds everywhere. In a ceremony in the Town Square, a scholarship was awarded and I received a Medal from the Czech Army.

The day after the Celebration, five young Czech reenactors, in GI OD uniforms (with 2nd ID patches) escorted me to Rokycany,

where the 9th Regiment spent about a month in 1945. They had arranged a meeting with the Mayor. He had a reception for us. I answered questions about my experiences there in 1945. I signed the official town book as a MANCHU there in 1945. On the exterior wall of the City Hall Bldg. there is a plaque thanking the 9th Inf. Regiment for their liberation. We placed a wreath there. I was able to see again, the house used as Co. H CP and the house where three of us slept. Also, the lake where we swam, the Demarkation memorial at the east end of the City, marking the boundary that the Russians did not cross, and other remembered sites.

It was a very enjoyable day I will never forget.

Glynn Raby, Sgt., Co, H, 9th Inf. 1944-45

Memphis, TN

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