

## **Tuesday, May 1, 1945**

Continuing its limited attacks, the 97th Division arrived at Domazlice (Taus). Another regiment farther to the north launched an assault to gain better ground, while advancing and occupying Schönbrunn, southwest of Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad). In the South, the Second Cavalry Group cleared the Einstein Pass into Czechoslovakia while facing moderate small arms fire and reaching Prokop. The troops lined the pass, keeping the gateway into Czechoslovakia open.

## **Wednesday, May 2, 1945**

Early the next day, further plans for handling the end of the European phase of the war began to emerge. At 2:00 p.m., Major General Stafford Leroy Irwin received orders not to cross the Danube into Austria and to limit the number of troops sent to the East.

“Apparently we invade Czechoslovakia,”

Irwin wrote in his diary. As part of the plan, General Huebner’s V Corps (First Army) began relieving the northernmost units of XII Corps. Two days later, V Corps would be transferred to the Third Army. Gradually, the First Army was preparing to redeploy in the Pacific Theater of the war, leaving the Third Army to mop up in Central Europe. The stage was also being set for an operation that General Eisenhower had told the Russians about a few days earlier — an advance of troops up to 64 kilometers inside Czechoslovakia to Karlovy Vary, Pilsen, and Ceske Budejovice (Budweis). It took two more days for the troops to be sufficiently in place and ready for the final push into Czechoslovakia. During those days, until the order was given to advance on May 4, reports of large-scale Nazi surrenders elsewhere began filtering in. The Russian flag flew over Berlin, and Nazi forces in Denmark had turned themselves over to Danish patriots. As though he sensed the final demise of Germany, Admiral Donitz declared Prague an open city, or “hospital town,” before leaving Hamburg on May 3. By that designation, he indicated abandonment of hope that it could be held as a final citadel. Yet Nazi troops still occupied the “Golden City,” and both American and Russian generals were eager to grasp the prize.

## **Friday, May 4, 1945**

When Patton at last received the go-ahead from General Bradley on the night of May 4, V Corps and XII Corps were ready to mount the attack. Part of the mission was still vague, and Patton preferred it that way. Prague, perhaps, could be the goal. Patton wrote: “I had instructions from Bradley, which passed on to the Corps, that we were not to advance beyond a northwest-southeast line through Pilsen in large force, but could and should reconnoiter vigorously toward Prague.”

The Second Infantry Division prepared immediately to move out in the rain. It was to relieve the 97th Division in the Sudetenland, and its first assignment was a gratifying one. Before the changeover, the 97th had made arrangements to accept the surrender of the elite Nazi 11th Panzer Division. Beginning at 9:00 p.m., the well shaven, clean-uniformed Nazi group began its movement through the Second Division’s line, to the rear. It was a mass capitulation of a panzer division, virtually intact, surrendering with all its personnel and arms. In order, they laid down their weapons and walked into the Division’s prisoner-of-war enclosure. The ground was dotted with neat stacks of rifles, grenades, and other equipment meticulously placed as the troops marched into captivity. Their commander, General von Wietersheim, went into the enclosure with his men. The situation was considerably rougher in the Second

Cavalry Group's zone, to the west of Klatovy. Nazis abruptly attacked a platoon of American soldiers that had been in the process of liberating Zejbis. Forced to withdraw from the town, the men had one of their most difficult days of the war. One platoon, surrounded by the enemy, had to fight its way back from the city. Another platoon leader abandoned his jeep, returning to his command post on foot for help. That night, the platoon stayed in the woods outside Zejbis. Rescued several days later, the platoon survivors reported that two men had been killed in the fight. They were the last men of the Second Cavalry to die in action.

### **Saturday, May 5, 1945**

With Czechoslovakia now under the Third Army's massive attacks, all troops were driving eastward. In the V Corps, the First Infantry and Ninth Armored Divisions pushed toward Karlovy Vary, while the 16th Armored headed for Pilsen. Farther south, troops from XII Corps sped toward Klatovy and Prácheň (Stubenbach). The Fourth Armored Division reconnoitered routes to Prague, which it expected to attack in full force the next day. This belief was most likely due to a radio report Patton heard about partisans having taken Prague. In view of the report, Patton wrote, "it seems desirable to me to push on and help them." Pursuing that goal, an American special-services (OSS) team, headed by Captain Eugene Fodor, drove into Prague on the main road from Pilsen. On their way, they passed through a long column of Nazi soldiers, including an SS Division, marching west in search of American forces to whom they could surrender. When the adventuresome OSS team entered Prague after an uneventful trip, the Americans were immediately surrounded by joyful Czechoslovak patriots who had liberated their capital city. Fodor was taken to the patriots' headquarters in a basement on Wenceslas Square in the city's center. There, the Commander of the Prague partisans, General František Kratochvíl, "surrendered" the city to Fodor and his team. The Americans raced back west, through the lines of defeated Nazis, looking for Patton, and, they hoped, permission to guide the Third Army into Prague. Fodor found the Commanding General with Major General Huebner at V Corps headquarters near Pilsen, where they were planning for a combat team of the Ninth Armored Division to push to Prague.

Patton received Fodor's news with satisfaction, but it presented difficulties. His orders were to stop on the line through Pilsen. Phoning General Bradley, he asked for permission to liberate the capital city. Recognizing that the decision might have political implications that only the Supreme Commander could deal with, Bradley placed a call to Eisenhower. Eisenhower was strict in ordering Bradley to stop Patton. On May 4, Eisenhower had spoken to General Alexei Antonov, Chief of Staff of the Soviet Army, suggesting that after the Third Army had occupied Pilsen it be allowed to move to the western suburbs of Prague. Eisenhower waited for Antonov's reply. Antonov rejected the plan, urging Eisenhower "not to move the Allied Forces in Czechoslovakia east of the originally intended line" — to avoid, in his words, "a possible confusion of forces." Eisenhower agreed to Antonov's proposition and now ordered Bradley to inform Patton that under no circumstances was he to go beyond the Karlovy Vary-Pilsen-Ceske Budejovice line. In addition, the city of Prague was not to be touched. While Patton waited to hear from Bradley, troops of the Fifth Division moved along the southwest Czech-German border. Reaching Volary (west of Ceske Budejovice), the soldiers came upon one of the horrors of the war. It appeared that a large group of Polish and Hungarian Jewish women had been removed from concentration camps in eastern Poland by SS guards and forced to march on foot toward Austria. They had been beaten and mistreated while en route; their food had consisted of grass and rotten potatoes. The group had stopped at Volary, prevented from further movement by Allied advance. Those who died in Volary had

been dumped in shallow graves; only 60 of the women were still alive when American soldiers liberated the town. These were taken immediately to the German civilian hospital and cared for by American personnel of the Fifth Medical Battalion.

### **Sunday, May 6, 1945**

When Patton returned from church, he was called to the phone. It was Bradley, conveying Eisenhower's orders.

"The halt-line through Pilsen is mandatory for V and XII Corps, George," said Bradley. "Moreover, you must not — I repeat not — reconnoiter to a greater depth than eight kilometers northeast of Pilsen. Ike (Eisenhower) does not want any international complications at this late date."

Patton was chagrined, but he nevertheless agreed to follow Eisenhower's orders. Meanwhile, troops of the Second Infantry and 16th Armored Divisions raced to Pilsen. Lieutenant Colonel Matt Konop had been sent ahead May 4 to place an advance party near the town. The Second Division had followed him through the Sudetenland, meeting ragged columns of Nazis, some in horse-drawn wagons, on the way. The population was hostile to the Americans, and the land, as Captain Charles MacDonald reported, was strange, "neither German nor Czech". As the Second Division continued past the apathetic, sometimes sullen Nazi sympathizers and the now undefended forts of Czechoslovakia's "Little Maginot Line," the Americans felt that the end of the war could not be far away. Approaching Pilsen (which had been officially liberated on the day before by the 16th Armored Division), the troops noticed a change in attitude among the population. A scattering of red, blue, and white Czech flags appeared instead of the white flags of surrender. People waved hesitantly from behind closed windows.

And then, suddenly, the soldiers were met by a cheering, flag-waving crowd of joyful Czechs. "We had crossed from the Sudetenland into Czechoslovakia proper," MacDonald wrote, "and civilians lined the streets ten deep. It was Paris all over again, with the same jubilant faces, the same delirium of liberation." As the Americans entered Pilsen, the people screamed "nazdar, nazdar." Flowers were strewn along the paths and into the vehicles of the troops, while young girls and old men and women ran to kiss the soldiers. Then MacDonald shuddered, despite the warmth of the greetings, as he passed batteries of 88-mm flak guns that had protected Pilsen's Škoda plant.

At Second Division headquarters in the town, Matt Konop was given wonderful but still secret news. The war would be over almost immediately. As an American of Czech origin, Konop could still speak his native language. His commanding general, Walter M. Robertson, suggested that Konop invite civic leaders, artists and other survivors of the war to be the general's guests for the next night in the former Pilsen area Nazi Military Headquarters — now the Second Division's command post. It would be a significant celebration. For other troops in the Third Army, May 6 represented a day of rapid forward movement. The First Division met moderate resistance in the North as it advanced toward Karlovy Vary. Along the main road from Cheb to Falkenau (Sokolov), Nazi 88-mm anti-tank guns were deployed in depth — each one had to be destroyed by the infantry before the American tanks would be able to move. The Division liberated Sangerberg, Kynsperk and other towns, while the Ninth Armored Division reached Rudolec. In the South, XII Corps Division spread over the entire territory from Klatovy to Strakonice and east to Písek, on the halt line. Other troops drove to the Moldau line in Český Krumlov, southeast of Volary. Fighting against scattered Nazi troops continued

throughout the day, as elements of XII Corps defended bridges over the Moldau from aggressive enemy patrols seeking to detonate previously planted dynamite sticks.

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