

Ivona Mišterová

The Reception of the Presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen in 1945 in Local Periodicals

## The Reception of the Presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen in 1945 in Local Periodicals<sup>1</sup>

IVONA MIŠTEROVÁ

**This is Pilsen, the free Pilsen is calling. Long live our freedom, long live our Allies!**

During the Nazi occupation, Pilsen was an important industrial pillar in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Given the political and economic circumstances, it also played a central part in the development (or rather preservation) of the cultural dimension of the city. Positive developmental trends, which had commenced during the period of the First Republic, were, however, halted. The city, moreover, faced a growing pressure of Germanization policy, leading to the establishment of German schools and reorganized schooling. Consolation was found in the national history, which offered hope for a better future. The theatre also sought inspiration in the national past.<sup>2</sup>

The long-awaited liberation finally came on 6 May 1945. Then, Dr Šindler's<sup>3</sup> legendary words, excited by the atmosphere of joy, could be heard on the radio: *"This is Pilsen, the free Pilsen is calling. Long live our freedom, long live our Allies! Hereby I announce to all inhabitants of the Czechoslovak Republic that the tanks of the sixteenth division are on Republic Square. I saw them coming from the west with my own eyes. I heard the thrumming*

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<sup>1</sup> The article constitutes a part of solution of the project SGS-2013-042 (*Perspektivy výzkumu přítomnosti americké armády v západních Čechách v roce 1945 I*) of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

<sup>2</sup> During the Nazi occupation, the theatre attempted to deal with contemporary problems and strengthen national awareness by staging national plays (by Jirásek, Foglar, Čapek, Tyl, and Vrchlický). It is conceivable that despite severe censorship, stage productions of the time (e.g. *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1944) contained some topical allusions, but there is no direct evidence of that. In the autumn of 1944, all Czech theatres were closed by the Nazis.

<sup>3</sup> The future director of the Czech Broadcasting Company in Pilsen [Český rozhlas Plzeň].

*of tank engines. I shook hands with an American officer. I heard an American conversation. (I heard the Americans talking.) After six years of the Nazi rule of terror, we are free. American armed forces are on Republic Square. Pilsen is talking, the free Pilsen is talking [...]"*<sup>4</sup>

On 6 May, newspaper headlines announced that *Plzeň je svobodná*,<sup>5</sup> In addition to greetings to Czech and Slovak people and the government, led by President Beneš, articles celebrated the approaching Allied armies. A unique account of the first moments of liberation was provided by American eyewitnesses, Captain McDonald and Lieutenant Colonel Smith from Company G, stationed in Křimice, who recalled that: *“the city [Pilsen] was the same cheering, enthusiastic, grateful mass of liberated people as the small towns on the route, only on a larger scale. The streets were packed. Civilians clambered over all the big armored [sic] vehicles, and soldiers hugged and kissed beautiful girls while old men and women roared in approval [...]"*<sup>6</sup>

Although problems were far from being over, the days of Nazi occupation were numbered.<sup>7</sup>

## Post-war Pilsen

After World War II, Pilsen was the administrative and civic centre of the region. Despite serious damage caused by the war, it remained an important transportation junction and a significant industrial agglomeration. Given its strategic position and industrial accumulation, the city government, or rather the newly established Revolutionary National Committee, laid emphasis on the reconstruction and renewal of the city destroyed during bombing raids.

<sup>4</sup> I. MARTINOVSKÝ et al., *Dějiny Plzně v datech*, Plzeň 2004, p. 367. Although the broadcasting was interrupted, the patriots continued to spread information, and soon shared the broadcasting with the Americans.

<sup>5</sup> *Nová svoboda*, May 6, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> P. R. FULLER, *Last Shots for Patton's Third Army*, Portland 2003, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> The Pilsen Revolution has been dealt with in many sources, thus, for the purpose of this article, the post-war situation is primarily discussed.

The bombardment caused considerable damage to the Škoda works, one of the most important ammunition factories, which formerly worked for the Third Reich. The factory was heavily bombed shortly before the liberation, i.e. on 25 April 1945.<sup>8</sup> In addition, outskirt areas, such as Skvrňany, Karlov, and in part Bory, the former Reich Suburb, were hit in the bombing raid. Although the city needed stability and rapid reconstruction, the post-war period was, in fact, marked by stagnation of urban development and infrastructure. In contrast, it experienced substantial population growth as demobilized soldiers, prisoners, and those working for the Third Reich (Totaleinsatz) returned home. As Dalibor Holda and Antonín Matějovský observe, the increase in population “reflected both the great number of marriages and families which had been postponed until after the end of the war, the return of young men to their families, and mainly the general optimistic atmosphere of life in peace”.<sup>9</sup>

The termination of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the occupation regime caused fundamental changes in the cultural life of the city. The Municipal Theatre, informally called the Great Theatre, reopened on 12 May 1945 with a performance of Smetana’s opera *The Bartered Bride*, which was staged for American military officers. The first performance intended for public viewing was a “dramatic show” entitled *The Pendulum of Time*. A new theatrical season, 1945/46, began on 15 May with Smetana’s opera *Libuše*. The former German Theatre [Deutsches Theater], renamed the Workers’ Theatre, opened on 23 May with a complex choral recitation of *Step forward with your left foot!*, which was performed by a group of young intellectuals and directed by Miroslav Horníček.<sup>10</sup> Both theatres, which institutionally merged into the

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<sup>8</sup> According to eyewitness testimonies, the Škoda works received 500 well-placed tons. Thanks to the warning sent in advance, however, the workers managed to escape, except for five people. H. ZINN, *Pasionate Declarations*, New York 2003, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> D. HOLDA – A. MATĚJOVSKÝ, *Youth in Socialist Czechoslovakia*, in: Y. C. SIMHADRI (Ed.), *Youth in the Contemporary World*, Delhi 1989, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> The earliest Czech performance we have a record of took place in 1818. As there was no theatre building, local historical halls in the town centre were used for performances. The first theatre, built in 1832, was alternately used by Czech and German travelling troupes. However, when Pavel Švanda took over in 1865, he, in fact initiated the establishment of the *Deutsches*

Municipal Theatres in Pilsen, were operated and managed by the national committee, or more precisely, a ten-member board of intendants, headed by an administrative director, Marie Loulová-Hezká. Pavel Dědeček was appointed artistic director and Zdeněk Hofbauer took the lead of the drama company. Shortly afterwards, Dědeček was replaced by Jarmil Škrdlant, who served as managing director from 1946 to 1948.<sup>11</sup>

The light and mass forms of entertainment preferred after the liberation, such as film, dance, and jazz, coincided with the presence of American military forces in the city. The day-to-day life in Pilsen was accelerated, and the city became, at least for a short period, Americanized.

### **The Reception of the U.S. Army in Local Newspapers – Terminus a Quo**

Applying a chronological approach, this article attempts to trace the reception of the presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen in the local newspapers the *Nový den* and the *Svobodný směr* between May and November 1945. It furthermore aims to examine the relationship between the presence of the U.S. Army in the city and Anglo-American productions staged during the period under research.

For this purpose, it is first necessary to pose basic research questions, the answers to which will help clarify the issue:

1. How much space was devoted to the presence of the U.S. Army in the city in comparison with economic, political, and cultural events?

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*Theater* (a separate German language theatre), which was opened in 1869 with a performance of Gioachino Rossini's opera *William Tell*. The construction of the building was co-sponsored by the government and the German community in Pilsen. The theatre was renovated during World War II and became the centre of Nazi meetings and propaganda. Unfortunately, all the German theatre archives were destroyed in May 1945, so presently there is no record of the productions staged there. Renamed the Small Theatre [Malé divadlo] in 1945, it served as the second Pilsen stage. It was demolished in 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Jarmil Škrdlant worked in the Pilsen theatre as an actor and director under the directorship of Bedřich Jeřábek (1922–1926) and Ota Zítek (1931–1943).

2. What sort of information on the U.S. Army did the newspapers provide?
3. Did the Pilsen theatre's repertoire show any parallel with the presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen?
4. Did theatrical reviews make any direct or indirect connection to the liberation or the U.S. Army?

The third and fourth questions are closely connected with the methodological assumption that there exists a correlation (in fact, more or less directly proportional) between period events, theatrical productions, and critical reviews. Together with Wolfgang Iser,<sup>12</sup> we may argue that each interpretation given in the past is a reflection of both historically conditioned attitudes and reactions to antecedent assessments. This duality characterizes the history of interpretation in general. The individual work is set off from previous readings (productions) and read (perceived) in accordance with the prevailing cultural code, which was in this case influenced by the atmosphere of liberation. A theatrical production can thus function as a mirror in which social and political events are reflected. The concept of interpretation thereby emerges as a highly sophisticated process rooted in a given time period, while being simultaneously conditioned by the history of interpretation and critical response. The function of reviews and period newspaper articles, in general, is thus essential as a source of information about the perception of the U.S. Army and the Americans, though in some cases the messages delivered may be regarded as subjective due to gratitude towards the American soldiers or, even, excessive enthusiasm for the Americans. For example, on 16 May, the *Nový den* reported its observations on the first moments of liberation: “*Today, after a week of exciting events, the inhabitants of Pilsen got used to the exotic spectacle, provided by the troops of the U.S. Army, which entered Pilsen on 6 May. Yet only now, when we look at it from a distance of several days, can we fully remember that historical moment when the first Americans stood in*

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<sup>12</sup> W. ISER, *Staging Politics*, New York 1993, p. 2.

*front of the Water Tower. Looking at their huge tanks and perfect armaments, we have understood that the German war machine [sic] could not rival them. [...] We were delighted by the boys, sitting in them [the tanks and jeeps]. They were all shortish in height, with round, tanned faces, cheerful and full of life. Our girls did not, however, kiss them out of gratitude only [...]*<sup>13</sup>

The anonymous author [K.H.] further drew a comparison between American soldiers, characterized by their kindness, communicativeness, armaments, and “well-fed faces” and emaciated Russian prisoners, who reminded him of Russian soldiers and guerrillas that, in his view, “*had done even more for our freedom and therefore should not be forgotten*”.<sup>14</sup> Particularly important for this discussion is his comment on public opinion: “*A few days later, the inhabitants of Pilsen showed that they thought the same thing [of the merits of the Red army]. On Friday, 11 May, they gave the Red Army an even warmer and more rapturous welcome.*” Although the author’s words probably express nothing more than sincere gratitude towards the Allied armies (and do not have to be suspected of a political/ideological flavour),<sup>15</sup> they resonate with the comment on the Russian soldiers made by A. W. Klieforth, Chargé d’affaires, who accompanied President Beneš on his visit to Pilsen on 15 June and observed that the Russians looked “*so miserable and dejected that when they are not feared they are pitied*”.<sup>16</sup>

The first meeting of the U.S. and Red armies’ officials took place on 11 May after the arrival of the Red Army in Pilsen. Similar meetings were then held several times until the withdrawal of the military troops from Pilsen in the autumn 1945. The second meeting was held on 14 May at the Second Infantry Division’s headquarters. On that occasion, the Russians presented medals to

<sup>13</sup> *Nový den*, May 16, 1945.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> The article, entitled *Američané v Plzni*, was published in the newspaper the *Nový den*, which was the Social Democratic daily.

<sup>16</sup> I. LUKEŠ, *On the Edge of the Cold War: American Diplomats and Spies in Postwar Prague*, Oxford 2012, p. 61.

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officers and soldiers from Major General Robertson's Division.<sup>17</sup> On 18 May, a dinner was held in the attendance of Major General Robertson and General Ivan Garbochov. Important ceremonies were performed on 22 and 23 May at which officers and soldiers of both armies, the Fifth Division of the U.S. Army and the 252nd Guard Rifle Division of the Red Army respectively, were reciprocally decorated. The most noteworthy event, however, was a state visit by President Beneš on 15 June. It was preceded by thorough preparations, which had started a week ahead: "*Yesterday evening [6 June], long lines of heavy and light American tanks and armoured units of all kinds were arriving in Pilsen from the west through Přemyslova and Leninova streets. They came in order to take part in a ceremonial parade of the U.S. Army before the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Dr Beneš, who is to come next Wednesday as an official guest of the U.S. Army Fifth Division. The newly arrived troops are to reinforce the current garrison. Approximately 8,000 soldiers are to parade before the President.*"<sup>18</sup>

President Beneš's visit made headlines on the front pages of the (not only local) newspapers. In the *Nový den*, the headlines read: *Zítřa uvítáme presidenta republiky v Plzni*<sup>19</sup> and *Pane presidente, vítejte nám!*<sup>20</sup> The *Svobodný směr* was even more expressive in its comments regarding the visit. The headlines and articles adopted an enthusiastic tone, e.g. *President Beneš promluví na plzeňském náměstí*,<sup>21</sup> *Plzeň vítá osvoboditele národa dra E. Beneše*,<sup>22</sup> and *Triumfální osoba dr. E. Beneš*.<sup>23</sup> The city's inhabitants also responded to the presidential visit enthusiastically. They expressed their respect for the President and gratitude to their liberators. The description of the event, published in the *Svobodný směr*, abounded in metaphors, such as

<sup>17</sup> FULLER, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup> *Nový den*, June 7, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> *Nový den*, June 14, 1945.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, June 15, 1945.

<sup>21</sup> *Svobodný směr*, June 13, 1945.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, June 15, 1945.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, June 16, 1945.

“the sea of colours, flags, and pennants”, “giant iron mountains” [tanks], “the sun of freedom, joy, and colours”, and “a new spirit [of liberty]”.<sup>24</sup>

By all accounts, the visit was a resounding success. After greetings in the city hall, the President watched one of the greatest military parades in Europe. Almost 9,500 soldiers marched through the decorated city. After the parade, which took nearly ninety minutes, the President decorated eight American generals and six Fifth Division (V Corps) officers with the Order of the White Lion and the Czechoslovakian War Cross 1939. Another thirty-five officers received the Czechoslovakian War Cross 1939.<sup>25</sup>

### The Portrayal of the U.S. Army in Regional Newspapers

The presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen affected various aspects of public life, including the sport and cultural spheres. The Second Infantry Band played on Republic Square on various occasions, and the brisk military marches were particularly popular with the Pilseners. On the eve of Independence Day, the performance of Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* was staged for American officers and soldiers, Czech soldiers, and representatives of Pilsen authorities. The performance was opened with the national anthems of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia, and according to newspapers received a rapturous ovation.<sup>26</sup> Independence Day celebrations started at 10.30am with an impressive military parade, which was organized by the 22<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Division and attended by the representatives of the Red Army (Colonel Zadov and General Lebedenko), the U.S. and British embassies, and Pilsen authorities. The official opening of the parade was announced by a 48-gun salute, fired in honour of Czech inhabitants. The celebration began with a performance of a traditional Czech round dance by a group of women dressed

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Z. ROUČKA et al., *Američané a Západní Čechy 1945*, Plzeň 2000, not numbered; *Defilé amerických vojenských útvarů, Svobodný směr*, June 16, 1945.

<sup>26</sup> *Slavnostní představení v předvečer Dne americké nezávislosti, Nový den*, July 7, 1945.



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in national costumes. The parade was led by the American and Czech infantry, and then followed by the artillery. Two F47 Air Force units also took part. The parade ended with a convoy of American and Czech units. Two military bands accompanied the infantrymen while they were marching in the parade. A large display of weapons, machine guns, guns, jeeps, and armoured vehicles was then held on the square. In the afternoon, sport skill demonstrations, particularly baseball, took place in Bory. It is conceivable that the atmosphere in the afternoon was more casual, with some interaction taking place between visitors and soldiers. A primary aim of this event was probably to bring the soldiers “closer to people”, while highlighting their role as liberators and heroes. In addition, all officers’ clubs, dance clubs, and cinemas were opened to both soldiers and civilians till late at night.<sup>27</sup> The *Svobodný směr* concluded its editorial with an emotional oratory: “*The inhabitants of Pilsen gratefully accepted this occasion [...] to show their respect and love for the nation which came to help us at the moment of crisis to liberate the whole nation and prepare a better future for us.*”<sup>28</sup>

The newspaper moreover provided its readers with a detailed description of the history of Independence Day and its significance for Americans. Both 4 July and 5 July observances may be seen as celebrating the freedom of the Czechoslovak Republic and the United States as well.

Another military parade, as reported, was held a month later, on 4 August, on the occasion of the official visit of the new American ambassador, Laurence Steinhardt, to the Czechoslovak Republic, i.e. Pilsen.<sup>29</sup> The ambassador arrived at the demarcation line where he was given a warm welcome by General Harmon. Then he attended a military parade of the Czech and U.S. honorary troops and made a speech on Republic Square. On that

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<sup>27</sup> *Američané oslavují svůj národní svátek v Plzni, Svobodný směr*, July 1, 1945.

<sup>28</sup> *Američané v Československu slaví den nezávislosti*, ibidem, July 4, 1945.

<sup>29</sup> In the afternoon the ambassador visited the Škoda Works and the Pilsen Brewery. He promised to help to find solutions to the housing problem in Pilsen, and expressed his hope for future business relationships between both countries.

occasion the *Svobodný směr* recalled that: “*Only the [U.S.] army’s timely intervention prevented the city from heavy blows, which the Germans, armed to the teeth, aimed to deliver.*”<sup>30</sup>

On 18 August, an impressive military parade was held to celebrate the termination of war against Japan. The whole city of Pilsen seemed to have come to watch. Prominent military representatives observed the parade from the official stand. Three U.S. corps marched at the head of the parade, followed by the Russian infantry corps, Czechoslovak brigades, the U.S. armoured vehicles and artillery, and then Czechoslovak armoured vehicles. At the end of the ceremony, General Harmon proclaimed that the war must not be repeated. In his view, the new war could destroy mankind, and therefore “*it is our sacred duty to destroy any germ of the slightest conflict before it could threaten our peace and freedom*”.<sup>31</sup> After the parade, the U.S. Army 22<sup>nd</sup> Division held an official lunch attended by General Harmon, General Boček, the U.S. Ambassador Steinhardt, General Zhdanov, General Lebedenko, City Mayor Ullrich, and others.

On 4 September, the mayor of the city decorated eight officers and non-commissioned officers of the Second Infantry Division with badges of honour entitled the Free Pilsen.<sup>32</sup> The decorated officers were originally members of Military Government, Security Guard, which was an organization searching for war criminals. They then joined Civil Affairs in Pilsen.<sup>33</sup>

The presence of the Americans was also seen, literally speaking, on the football field. On 24 May, the first international football match in Pilsen

<sup>30</sup> *Americký velvyslanec navštíví Plzeň, Svobodný směr*, July 31, 1945.

<sup>31</sup> *Plzeň v záplavě spojeneckých vlajek, Svobodný směr*, August 19, 1945. It should not go unmentioned that Pilsen journalists complained of unjust treatment by the U.S. Army during that particular celebration, claiming that they were banished from their official seats in the stand, which had been allocated to them. *Plzeňští novináři protestují*, *ibidem*, August 19, 1945. No further mention of correction or a similar misunderstanding has been found.

<sup>32</sup> Major B. Hamilton, 1st Lieutenant Ivan B. Oppenheimer, 1st Lieutenant Herman E. Wren, 1st Lieutenant Stanley B. Marcus, Technical Sergeant Henry F. Hirshman, Corporal Werner von Minden, Corporal Herbert St Goar, and Private First Class Steve R. Martinat.

<sup>33</sup> *Odznaky Svobodná Plzeň americkým důstojníkům, Svobodný směr*, September 9, 1945.

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– between Viktoria Pilsen and the team of the U.S. Army Second Infantry Division – took place. It opened with a concert by the Second Infantry Band, followed by the national anthems. Although the American visitors “turned out not to favour association football so much” and were defeated 11–1,<sup>34</sup> the match attracted almost 10,000 Czech and American spectators, and was generally perceived as an important sporting and social event.<sup>35</sup> The rematch was held on 31 May during the American Sports Day hosted by the local sport’s club in Pilsen-Bory. The event opened, as usual, with a military concert, followed by a display of baseball and athletic skills. The football match between Slavia Pilsen and the Second Infantry Division was regarded as more interesting than the previous one [against Viktoria] and seen as a success, though Slavia defeated the guest team 11–5: “[...] *the performance of the guest team improved in a considerable way, though only three positions were changed. A very good performance was delivered by the courageous goalkeeper Landon [...].*” The findings show that American sportsmen were depicted positively, particularly in terms of their sporting performances and physical and technical abilities. They were praised as skilled baseball players and athletes. Moreover, no significant difference in the number and nature of comments made about Czech and American football players, and sportsmen in general, was found.

Other newspaper reports and comments also draw a positive portrayal of the Americans, even in the field of medicine. In an article entitled *Američané zachránili českému dítěti život*,<sup>36</sup> informed its readers of the first treatment with penicillin, which saved the life of a seriously ill child, who would otherwise die from cerebral meningitis. A one-year-old girl suffered a severe case of meningoencephalitic infection, preceded by bronchitis. She was near death when penicillin therapy was started on 11 July, and within four days she made a striking recovery. Thanks to the supply of the rare medicament by the

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<sup>34</sup> The match was interrupted in the eighth minute of the second half due to heavy rain.

<sup>35</sup> *Viktoria Pilsen – XI. amer. armády 11:1*, *Nový den*, May 25, 1945.

<sup>36</sup> *Nový den*, July 25, 1945.

Americans, the baby's life was saved. *"It [penicillin] is not yet available in Czechoslovakia. If it is accessible in our country, it is in the U.S. Army's hands (owned by the U.S. Army). Yet, it is in short supply, must be saved and is not distributed to civilians at all. [...] Despite that, the nursing staff, Dr Čech and Dr Mathesius, decided to ask the U.S. Army for penicillin to help them save the baby's life. On 11 May, Dr Mathesius saw the Commander of the U.S. tent hospital, Dr Prazak, and explained his plea for help to him [...] [Then] Colonel Prazak helpfully provided Dr Mathesius with two vials of penicillin for free."*<sup>37</sup> Colonel Prazak further offered his assistance, claiming that it was his duty to help.<sup>38</sup>

Another example of American help was reported on by the *Svobodný směr*. This time, a blood transfusion helped to save the life of a young boy. The following extract illustrates the willingness and helpfulness of American soldiers. In order to accelerate the process, the American radio station broadcast the surgeons' plea for help, which evoked an immediate response from soldiers: *"The American radio station in Pilsen, Tricolor, received a call for help – a young Czech inpatient urgently needed a blood transfusion, if his life was to be saved. The radio programme was interrupted immediately, and the appeal was announced on air. Twenty-five American soldiers responded to the request. And the result? The boy's life was saved [...]"*<sup>39</sup>

Another instance of American help was with extensive assistance in milk supplies at the beginning of September. Due to a lack of milk tanks and milk containers, the dairy<sup>40</sup> in Pilsen found itself in a difficult situation, and was not able to ensure delivery of milk from the the milk distribution centre in Stříbro. The U.S. Army provided the dairy with three trucks, which brought 10,000 litres of milk daily from Stříbro to Pilsen.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> *Pěkný čin amerických hochů, Svobodný směr*, August 30, 1945.

<sup>40</sup> The Dairy of the West Bohemian Consumers Association in Pilsen.

<sup>41</sup> *Mlékárna ZKD děkuje Američanům, Nový den*, September 7, 1945.

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In July, the U.S. Army organized three weeks of training on how to work with heavy machinery, particularly excavators and cleaning machinery (such as large cultivators, clamshell excavators, and belt conveyors), which was attended by several Czech engineers and experts from the Ministry of Transportation. The city of Pilsen provided the trainees with an unfinished road above the Škoda brickyard in Doudlevice. The training was monitored with unusual public interest due to the use of innovative and economical means of moving large quantities of bulk materials.

At the end of August, the mayor and other Czech representatives visited the military airport at Bory used by the U.S. Army.<sup>42</sup> The Czech guests were shown the reconstructed and newly equipped airport building and the airport was used particularly by large cargo aircraft to provide a regular air service to Nuremberg and Munich. They were also shown light two-seater aircraft originally used to transport wounded soldiers from battlefields, and could enjoy the views of Pilsen when they made a sightseeing flight from the airport.<sup>43</sup> It is important to mention here that after the withdrawal of the U.S. Army, the new and modern equipment of the airport building remained in the Czech Army's possession.

The presence of the U.S. Army also influenced social life and commerce. In June, a shop for soldiers of Allied armies was set up under the auspices of the national committee. Although the project faced difficulties from the very beginning, the shop was finally opened on 14 June. It was established on the third floor of the famous Pilsen department store "Brouk and Babka", and was equipped with all necessary furniture.<sup>44</sup> The communication with customers was facilitated by female interpreters dressed in national costumes. Given the great interest in traditional giftware, such as folk art from Klenčí

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<sup>42</sup> The airport was established in 1937 and finished by the Germans during WWII, when it was used by the German Luftwaffe.

<sup>43</sup> *Primátor Ullrich hostem americké armády na Plzeňském letišti, Svobodný směr*, August 31, 1945.

<sup>44</sup> The department store was situated on the corner of the former Andělská (today Bezručova) and Fodermayerova (today Bedřicha Smetany) streets.

and Domažlice, ceramics, resort glassware, and toys, the shop only sold to the military.<sup>45</sup>

On 28 June, a social get-together was held at the Měšťanská beseda restaurant. It was attended by representatives of the U.S. Army (General Harmon, General Sam Williams, General John Fye, General Thomas L. Crystal, and other senior officers) and representatives of the city's authorities (František Ullrich, Jindra Krejčík, and others). The purpose was to get acquainted with each other and discuss significant political issues in a friendly atmosphere.<sup>46</sup>

Dance formed an important part of the social life of young people. American soldiers often invited Czech girls to dance evenings. One such dance evening took place on 30 June at the Na Zastávce restaurant in Pilsen's suburb Bílá Hora. The journey to the restaurant was made comfortable thanks to buses used to transport the dancers there and back.<sup>47</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Czech-American marriages came into being as a result of war (or rather, the liberation). A Czech-American marriage took place on Saturday 23 August at the Chapel, Leninova street, between Mr William Paul Myers and Ms Běla Dlesková.<sup>48</sup>

Of special importance was a visit by the U.S. military band to the children's sanatorium in Konstantinovy Lázně in July 1945. Colonel A.W. Roffe opened the concert with the American national anthem, which was warmly received, followed by a varied repertoire of music, and it closed with the Czech national anthem. In the afternoon, the colonel invited children to the cinema. In his introductory speech, which was interpreted by the Czech American Frank Zeman, he laid emphasis on the fact that in the United States every capable man/woman has an opportunity to obtain an excellent position. Good examples of diligence and talent were Věra Hrubá, the Czech

<sup>45</sup> *Dárkový obchod pro spojenecká vojska v Plzni, Svobodný směr*, June, 13, 1945

<sup>46</sup> *Přátelský večírek s americkou armádou, Svobodný směr*, July 1, 1945.

<sup>47</sup> *Američtí vojáci 8. divize zvou české dívky na taneční zábavu*, *ibidem*, July 5, 1945.

<sup>48</sup> *A opět americká svatba v Plzni*, *ibidem*, August 23, 1945.

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figure skater and actress, and Anton Čermák, the former mayor of Chicago. The Americans were particularly interested in the food, accommodation and sanitary conditions in the sanatorium, and promised their help.<sup>49</sup>

On 13 September, the *Nový den*<sup>50</sup> announced that new traffic rules were going to be introduced to improve road safety. Another announcement concerned a 50% discount on admission to films, which the Allied soldiers, but not officers, were allowed. The discounts probably served to motivate more frequent ticket purchases. On 27 October, the newspaper announced the issuance of an extra ration of American tobacco, i.e. sixty tobacco packets, for Pilsen consumers.<sup>51</sup>

Occasionally, the *New Day* drew its inspiration from the U.S. Army's daily newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. The newspaper first appeared during World War I but ceased to exist at the end of the war. It resumed publication in April 1942, and quickly became popular among soldier-readers due to its impressive reports written by war correspondents who shared the hardships of the soldiers throughout the war. As Maurice Isserman notes,<sup>52</sup> the reports thereby adopted the viewpoint of common soldiers. In addition to war news, the newspaper also included sports news, letters columns, and cartoons. *Nový den*, however, provided its readers with a description of a photograph of the Hiroshima bombing, published in the American military daily. Moreover, it announced the publication of a Czech-English booklet entitled *Dead or Alive*, containing detailed descriptions of the SS guards from Pankrác prison, members of the firing squad, and photographs of them. The booklet was to be distributed to Czech and American soldiers so that they could actively look for war criminals.<sup>53</sup> On 13 September, the *Nový den*<sup>54</sup> wrote about the photographs of Republic Square and the Pilsen streets published in *Stars and Stripes*. With respect to local news coverage, the *Svobodný směr*

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<sup>49</sup> *Děti Škodováků a Američané*, ibidem, August 2, 1945.

<sup>50</sup> *Nové dopravní předpisy*, *Nový den*, September 13, 1945.

<sup>51</sup> *Americký tabák pro plzeňské spotřebitele*, ibidem, October 27, 1945.

<sup>52</sup> M. ISSERMAN, *America at War. World War II*, New York 2003, p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> *Americké zajímavosti*, *Nový den*, September 5, 1945.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, September 13, 1945.

wrote about the 16<sup>th</sup> Division's new weekly, which started publication on 9 June. In addition to the news from the military background, the weekly wrote about sightseeing places in Western Bohemia, such as a large library in Teplá.<sup>55</sup>

Special attention should also be paid to the *Svobodný směr*'s portrayal of Pilsen as an important centre of Western Bohemia in terms of industrial development and the (at least temporarily) associated social and cultural adjustments to the American way of life. *“Four months after the revolution, Pilsen, which lived a provincial life before the war, has quickly grown into a vibrant city, bustling with unusual industry and traffic, and social and cultural life. The new city's appearance was not, however, caused only by the war, revolution, and a new political orientation, but mainly by the fact that our city has become a centre of allied armies and particularly the U.S. Army. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that Pilsen has been declared a recreational centre for the U.S. Army soldiers.”*<sup>56</sup>

The U.S. Army brought to Pilsen its own way of life, marked by a different language, habits, and standard of living, and its own historical, cultural, and institutional views of democracy and a new post-war development. Despite a great deal of respect on both sides, a temporary coexistence of the Czechs and the Americans certainly required a great deal of patience too.

On 29 September a brass wall plate commemorating the liberation of Pilsen by the U.S. Army was placed on the city hall. It was presented by the 16<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division to the inhabitants of Pilsen for their help in the liberation. It was unveiled by Colonel Noble, who was the first U.S. Army officer in Pilsen, and General Harmon. The plate was cordially received as *“a proud symbol of gratitude to the U.S. Army and its friendly relationship with us [the Pilseners]”*.<sup>57</sup> The inscription read: *“Presented by the 16<sup>th</sup> Armored Division U.S. Army of*

<sup>55</sup> *Americký časopis z Plzně, Svobodný směr*, June 9, 1945. At that time, the name of the journal was not yet settled. A competition was held among readers, who were supposed to submit an attractive name. The winner was promised to receive a seven-day stay on the Riviera.

<sup>56</sup> *Plzeň or Texas?*, *Svobodný směr*, September 7, 1945.

<sup>57</sup> *Pamětní deska od Američanů odhalena, Svobodný směr*, September 30, 1945.



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*Plzen C.S.R. in commemoration of their assistance in the liberation of Plzen 6th May 1945.*<sup>58</sup>

Shortly before the withdrawal of the U.S. military troops from Czechoslovakia, newspapers discussed the idea of building a memorial for the U.S. Army in Pilsen.<sup>59</sup> It was initiated by the American Institute in Czechoslovakia in order to commemorate the liberation of Western Bohemia and to express thanks to the American liberators. The institute, moreover, promised to arrange for appropriate design for and payment of the memorial, without the city's financial support. *"The memorial is not and will not be only an honest act of gratitude by the Czechoslovak people, but also a document of historical events as well as an artistic monument, decorating the city."*<sup>60</sup>

Although the effort to build the memorial was apparent,<sup>61</sup> it was only in 1995 that the granite memorial, known as *Thank You, America*, was finally erected on today's Americká street and unveiled in the presence of Madelaine Allbright, the Czech-born American Secretary of State. The design of the

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<sup>58</sup> The plate was, however, removed and subsequently melted in 1951.

<sup>59</sup> Almost identical articles were published in both the *Nový den* (*Kde bude stát památník Američanů*, *Nový den*, November 17, 1945) and the *Svobodný směr* (*Pomník americké armády v Plzni*, *Svobodný směr*, October 23, 1945). Both texts laid emphasis on the initiative of the American Institute in Czechoslovakia, and discussed a possible position for the memorial. In both articles, three locations were mentioned: in Nejedlý Park, on Stalinova Street in front of the County National Committee's building, and on Stalinova Street, next to Benešova Street. It is, however, important to note that the *Svobodný směr* had briefly written about the memorial even earlier, on 23 October.

<sup>60</sup> *Americký ústav, Památník Američanům v Plzni*, 1945. Only a few years later, schoolchildren were taught that Pilsen was liberated by the Red Army, whose soldiers were disguised as the Americans. The Afro-American soldiers were identified as "escaped slaves", who had immigrated to the Soviet Union (eyewitness memories).

<sup>61</sup> The *Svobodný směr* regularly reported on the financial status of the project. The first financial gift in the amount of CZK 500 was donated by Jan Fiala. The newspaper also noted the efforts of students who expressed their interest in the memorial and started to raise funds in schools. Additionally, there were opportunities for the collection of financial gifts at the Pilsen branch of the Prague Loan Office and at the headquarters of *Svobodný směr* and *Nový den*. The newspapers, moreover, encouraged the inhabitants of Pilsen to join in co-sponsoring the memorial (*Pomník americké armády v Plzni*, *Svobodný směr*, October 23, 1945). The foundation stone was laid by Karel Křepinský on May 1947. A year later, the Pilseners celebrated the liberation for the last time.

memorial is a simple one. A bronze plaque on the front of the monument reads: *Thank you America! On May 6th 1945 the City of Pilsen Was Liberated by the U. S. Army.*

The American departure ceremonies started at the beginning of November when General Harmon and General Noble were made honorary citizens of Pilsen. They were followed by a military parade on 20 November. On the reviewing stand, General Harmon, the commanding officer of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Corps, welcomed the U.S. ambassador Laurence Steinhardt and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk, who spoke before the crowd on Republic Square. On behalf of the President, General Ludvík Svoboda decorated fifteen American officers with the Order of the White Lion IV Class. Captain Edmund N. Nixon, in memoriam, and fifty-one American and Czechoslovakian officers received the Czechoslovakian War Cross, and another eight American officers were awarded the Czechoslovakian Medal of Honour. *“Today, the superb American units are leaving our country and we shall never forget. The events of the six years of war are still vivid in our memories; at this moment, we realize what America has done for us and what an important asset for our political conception the American political structure has signified. [...] Today, bidding goodbye to these Americans, who personify our liberty, we renew the glory of recent times, although we are feeling the unvanishable picture of a true humane comradeship which has become a symbol. For that, we are to them truly thankful!”*<sup>62</sup>

The *New Day* recapitulated the liberation in a similar way: *“[...] The vengeful hand [of the Nazis] was stopped by the coming Americans. Pilsen knows it and will never forget! At the moment of the official parting with the U.S. Army, the memory of the conditions, under which the arrival of the U.S. soldiers meant a liberation from the hell of horrors, was revived. Many people remembered that the Americans opened the gates of prisons, concentration camps, and of other places of torture. Thus, a mark of gratitude towards and love for the liberators was shown on Republic Square.”*<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *On the Way Home*, Svobodný směr, November 20, 1945.

<sup>63</sup> *Přátelství krví posvěcené zůstane trvalé*, Nový den, November 20, 1945.

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*Svobodný směr* reprinted a poem composed in honour of American soldiers – *To the Banners and Soldiers of the USA* [Praporům a vojákům USA].

*“To you,  
the Star Spangled Banners of democracy and liberty,  
and sons of yours who brought them  
from distances far away beyond the ocean.  
To you,  
Banners of the victors which turned red by  
suppressing the bloodyclaws of the German  
eagle.  
To you,  
parading in the harmony of triumph and a  
hail of thanks from all of us – freed from  
the catacombs of misery.  
To you,  
As a farewell from all of us pledging you a  
remembrance of love and heartfelt handshake.  
We,  
Freed and resurrected – thank you and God  
bless you all!”<sup>64</sup>*

This poem expresses intense feelings of gratefulness to the liberators, underscored by the use of the second-person pronoun to directly address the American soldiers. In the final stanza of the poem, the author uses the pronoun “we” in order to openly and sincerely thank the U.S. Army. The poem’s culminating image is, thus, the final one.

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<sup>64</sup> *To you, Svobodný směr*, November 20, 1945.

The U.S. and the Red armies left Czechoslovakia before the beginning of December 1945.

Although the newspapers promised not to forget the merits of the U.S. Army, all discussions on the liberation by the Americans were silenced for more than forty years. In this respect it should be mentioned that the U.S. Army served (at least in Pilsen) as a symbol of justice and hope in times of hardship. The demonstration against the establishment that took place in Pilsen on 1 May 1953<sup>65</sup> is a good example. Then, thousands of discontented Škoda factory workers protested against the political establishment, or rather the draconian currency reform. Having been repeatedly assured of a stable currency, they demanded an explanation of the situation, but the factory management was not able to provide a satisfactory answer. Disillusioned by a cagey avoidance of response, they decided to march to the city centre. Still on the premises of the factory, they were confronted by the Company's Patrol, then outside, by the People's Militia and Border Patrol. Due to the large amount of participants as well as onlookers, the armed forces, however, did not eventually intervene. The protesters thus set off on their way to Republic Square. They were headed by a jeep [from WWII] decorated with Czechoslovak and American flags.

Appeals initially directed against the reform gradually developed into anti-establishment slogans such as “[the] Black Pilsen is faithful to [President] Beneš” [Plzeň černá, Benešovi věrná] and “We shall have good times again, the boys from the USA will come again” [Bude zase hej, přijdou hoši z USA].<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The draconian currency reform spawned a wave of violent protests in many Czech cities, e.g. Rokycany, Liberec, Hradec Králové, etc. However, the most serious public reaction erupted on 1 May 1953 in Pilsen.

<sup>66</sup> In the original Czech version both slogans rhyme, which adds impact to the message. For more information, see I. MIŠTEROVÁ, *Angloamerické drama na plzeňských scénách*, (forthcoming 2013).

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the reception of the presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen after World War II in articles published in the local newspapers the *Nový den* and the *Svobodný směr* from May 1945 to December 1945. All articles were identified using the keyword U.S. Army and related words. First, it is necessary to point out that the patterns of coverage in both newspapers were almost identical. The research indicates that a well-balanced amount of space was given to reports and articles about the U.S. Army, in contrast to contemporary social, cultural, and political events. The newspapers kept their readers well informed about various events associated with the American military presence in Pilsen, ranging from military parades to sports competitions and Czech-American marriages.

The main coverage in the newspapers first dealt with the liberation of the city. Newspapers expressed gratitude towards the liberators and recapitulated the excited atmosphere of the liberation, when flowers were thrown along the roads and into vehicles, and the Pilseners ran to hug and kiss the soldiers. In one case (*New Time*, number 13), the high quality of the military equipment and the good physical condition of the U.S. soldiers served as a basis for comparison with the Russian soldiers, whose equipment, or more precisely clothing, was, in the author's view, in poor condition, as they most probably had only one set of uniform at their disposal. This article also contains the only reference made to the alleged warmer welcome afforded to the Red Army throughout the whole research. The liberation was reported in later issues too, with no less gratitude and enthusiasm. Given the number of reports, it reached its climax in November 1945, shortly before the withdrawal of the U.S. Army from the Czech Republic. Even the poem published in the *Svobodný směr* underscores the gratitude towards the liberators.

The majority of the articles were devoted to military parades, which were quite common during the researched period. The largest reported celebrations took place on 15 June, 4 July, and 20 November. The *Svobodný směr* devoted

whole issues (number 12 and number 13) to President Beneš's visit to Pilsen and his participation in the military parade, which attracted large crowds of people and was perceived as an expression of national values and unity between both nations. One issue (number 28) was composed largely of articles reporting on the Independence Day celebration, in terms of its historical context and its significance for the Americans. Other issues (numbers 141, 142, and 143) consisted of articles discussing the withdrawal of the U.S. Army from the Czechoslovak Republic. The local reports included detailed descriptions of ceremonies and banners, photographs and patriotic poems, and stressed the joyful atmosphere of parades celebrating the liberation of Pilsen. Significant editorials (*The Americans in Czechoslovakia Celebrate Independence Day*, number 27 and *On the Way Home*, number 142), concerning the liberation and farewell to the U.S. Army, were translated into English. As the articles demonstrate, military parades served to mark the U.S. Army's role in the liberation of Bohemia and the city of Pilsen, and made it into a valuable and respected *pro-Czech* actor. They were, moreover, occasions to demonstrate modern military equipment and mastery of military skills.

The local newspapers were also filled with articles that thanked the American soldiers for their help, whether in the area of medicine, food supply, or reconstruction. The provision of penicillin is a good example of such help. Although the limited supplies of penicillin were reserved for military use only, the Americans willingly provided occasional medicine to Czech doctors, and saved the life of a one-year-old Czech girl. Another instance of American help was a blood transfusion, which saved the life of a young man. The U.S. Army, moreover, ensured milk deliveries from the milk distribution centre in Střibro to Pilsen, and helped to launch new engineering technologies into practice.

Social events, such as military concerts, dancing, and sports competitions, were also of interest. The newspapers told of football matches between local sports teams Viktoria and Slavia and the U.S. Army football team and also noted the displays of American sports, such as baseball.

In this respect it is perhaps not so surprising, then, that the inhabitants of Pilsen wanted to express their gratitude towards the Americans. The first initiative for a permanent memorial began in September when the American Institute proposed a memorial to be located in Pilsen. Before construction could begin, however, the U.S. Army was withdrawn and the political situation changed considerably. The memorial was finally completed only in 1995.<sup>67</sup> It reflects the gratitude of Pilsen's inhabitants towards the American soldiers who fought for their freedom.

With respect to the third and fourth research questions, the first and the only post-war "Anglo-American" production during the presence of the U.S. Army in Pilsen was Shaw's play *The Devil's Disciple*, staged in Karel Mušek's translation under the directorship of Zdeněk Hofbauer. On 17 November 1945, it was most probably meant as a reflection of the horrors of World War II, as indicated by the reviewer who drew a parallel between Dick Dudgeon's intended self-sacrifice and his words on the necessity to "*stand by one another to the death [which] is the only force that can...make America a nation*"<sup>68</sup> and the silent, anonymous heroes who died for the Czech nation during the Nazi occupation.<sup>69</sup> The reception of the production was favourable. Thematically speaking,<sup>70</sup> certain references to the U.S. Army and its presence in Pilsen may have been included in the production, though direct evidence is virtually non-existent in the reviews.

Based on articles from the researched period, one may claim that during the period analysed, both newspapers regularly featured the presence of the U.S. Army in Western Bohemia, of which they held an overtly positive and admiring view.

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<sup>67</sup> The foundation stone was laid in 1990 on the occasion of Shirley Temple-Black's and President Havel's visit to Pilsen.

<sup>68</sup> G. B. SHAW, *The Devil's Disciple*. A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2004. Accessed September 20, 2013. <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/gbshaw/devil-disciple.pdf>, p. 46

<sup>69</sup> *Ďáblův žák, Svobodný směr*, November 22, 1945.

<sup>70</sup> The play takes place in America during the War of Independence.

**Abstract**

The article deals with the reception of the liberation of Pilsen in local periodical. The liberation of Pilsen and the end of the World War II was celebrated in the whole region. This event and the following stay of U.S. Army in Czechoslovakia was closely followed by Czechoslovakian press – especially local periodicals. The newspapers concentrated not only on the military and political consequences of this process but also on the relations between the soldiers and the common civilian population. They also reflected the celebrations of the liberation and the cultural events connected with the presence of the Americans in Pilsen.

**Keywords**

Czechoslovakia, United States of America, Pilsen, U.S. Army, World War II, Culture



