

MORE ON EUROPE - by Ye Editor

Last week we were telling you about Vienna. Some day we hope to return and see more of it.

On July 29th we set out for Prague. At the Czechoslovakia border we sat in our busses for four hours in the hot sun, waiting for official okay. Passports were checked and re-checked. Each tourist is asked to change at least \$3.00 into Czech money. You can spend more of course but you are not allowed to take any money out of the country and must re-change when you leave. Our trip took us through the Sudetenland--a controversial area during both world wars. I still feel we were held up so long at the border so that we couldn't see too much on the rest of the trip to Prague. Accommodation there was at a Student Hostel. There were about a dozen buildings each the size of a large hotel. The site also had an Olympic sized stadium. In fact it was the site of the Olympics in 1963 or 64. It was a busy spot and here again we were split up--some in building 4 and some in building 9. Our guide informed us we would have to eat in three relays. Our late arrival meant no laid on meal so we were served in a snack bar under the stadium pavilion. We were second relay and felt sorry for the third group who didn't get fed until after midnight--after going from lunch at noon. And a miserable meal it was--a slice of bread and some cold meat and the inevitable Beer. At this spot we encountered a noisy group of U.S. students who were 'having a ball'.

Toilet and shower facilities were on alternate floors for males and females but we encountered both sexes nonchalantly wandering in and out of the one labelled "Herren" (men) and those labelled "Damen" (women). One elderly lady on our bus vouchsafed a shower. There was a three-stall affair with no doors. She said she felt herself quite a curiosity as she was carefully scrutinized by both women and children. That was another day we did without a bath.

Next day the Czech government really laid it on. We spent that night at a plush hotel in Carlsbad and how we revelled in hot water and luxury. A lovely dinner was served in an adjoining restaurant and dinner music and floor show with excellent performers provided. Carlsbad is a world famous Spa. It's a lovely spot and we would have liked to spend more time there.

Our Guides accompanied us to the East German Border where we had a very short wait and where two more guides picked us up. A full day was spent in Leipzig, sightseeing, shopping etc. Czechoslovakia is a depressing country where the farms reflected indifferent care. The people are friendly or sullen - no in between. Perhaps hopeless could be applied--a look at their history will show how they have been pushed back and forward by aggressor nations for many years. The German peoples are industrious and hardworking but in East Germany too it was apparent that they are not working for love.

In Carlsbad when shopping for a piece of their crystal, the clerk told us that prices are set by the government on all items and are the same in all towns and cities, in all soviet dominated countries. Textiles were poor quality but we saw no difference in styles.

It Leipzig we visited a famous wine cellar - one dating back to the 1300's. Here we met five University students--two young men and three young ladies. All spoke some English and sang some English songs and all were very interested in our world.

One young miss has a sister (a Doctor) living in Canada and one in the U.S.A., but she can never hope to visit either. She admitted they would all like to get out of Europe. We asked if there was an underground and she said "Yes" but she didn't know how to make contact. We left our address and hope some of them can get out and contact us.

Back in West Germany to Hanover where we had another Luxury hotel and the itinerary said "evening at Leisure." We bathed, changed and joined friends on the outdoor dining

pavilion for dinner. While sitting having coffee a sudden gust of wind lifted table cloths and menus and a terrific deluge sent us all scurrying for shelter indoors. What a downpour! We had left our window open (along with many others) and by the time we reached the eighth floor it took two men to open the room door--the wind was so strong. The walls, lamps, beds, carpeting, clothing left around, were soaking. Our newspaper--the first English language paper we'd had on the trip, was a soggy mess. That finished the sightseeing in Hanover.

Enroute next morning to the Netherlands a stop was made at Almelo and, on behalf of Lake Superior Regiment, a wreath was laid on the monument erected in memory of those Canadians who died in Holland. Here we learned that the Govt. of Holland pays for the upkeep of the graves and Canadian war dead buried in their country and the Netherlands War Graves Committee has, since 1946, organized 40,000 family visits to these cemeteries. Last year marked their 100th group and the 1,000th Canadian Pilgrimage. From the moment the pilgrims step on European soil the Committee pays for everything.

Back to lovely Amsterdam for an all too short day. I neglected to mention that we never did acquire a taste for continental breakfasts (hard rolls--butter and jam with beverage. In Amsterdam we managed to wheedle one boiled four minute egg which took half an hour to arrive.

Lunch was a real experience. We taxied to the centre of the city and, after some shopping, decided to lunch at "The Excelsior Dining Room" which we spotted across the canal. As we strolled across the canal bridge I stopped dead on hearing a very English voice behind us. Milord, complete with Bowler hat, walking stick and mackintosh -- gave us a friendly pat on the shoulder when he learned we were from Canada -- 'Old Chappied us' and said he had been taken through the Lakehead area on a trip.

Our pre-lunch drink was served in a very "British" type room with the other patrons sitting very erect, hush-hush and decorous and the waiters in "Swallow-Tail" coats. A huge luncheon menu was presented for our inspection--this time written entirely in French. From it we chose a delicious meal. You should have seen some of the horrible stuff we picked out of a German menu. Don't ever pick headcheese -- served in breaded hot patties.

On August 5th at 11.30 p.m. we started on the flight back to Canada. A refueling stop was made at Sonderstrom in Greenland. It's a bleak spot in what appeared (at least from the air) to be a bleak country.

Some of the memories which will linger longest include the well behaved, well cared for and obviously well-loved children; the many bicycles, motorcycles and small cars. Behind the iron curtain the lack of automobiles--especially on the wide city streets. The cost of a new car is prohibitive to a working man. Of the cars we did see 99% were very old by our standards. We saw cars made with a leather body stretched over a framework and our guide said one such was at least 26 years old: The de-consecrated Jewish Synagogues in Prague where the names of 77,000 Jews who were sent to concentrations camps, from that district, are inscribed. On one wall were the names of concentration camps and there were many we had never heard of: how our guides evaded or just refused to answer some questions--they were never rude--they just didn't hear: the thousands of campers--with their bright orange, green and blue tents: the huge feather quilts and pillows on the beds--and it was so hot--but we'd love one here when the thermometer gets below zero: how good it was to get off that plane -- to be back in Canada -- to an unlimited supply of water--hot and cold -- to a three piece bathroom and FREEDOM.

P.S. At a diamond display we saw copies of famous diamonds of all colours and shapes - also one priced at over \$28,000 and for sale. Didn't know whether to be flattered or suspicious when the clerk offered to take our personal cheque and a small down payment.