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Christmas in Egerland

A Homeland Story about the Lipizzaner Horses

Provided by Stefan Stippler

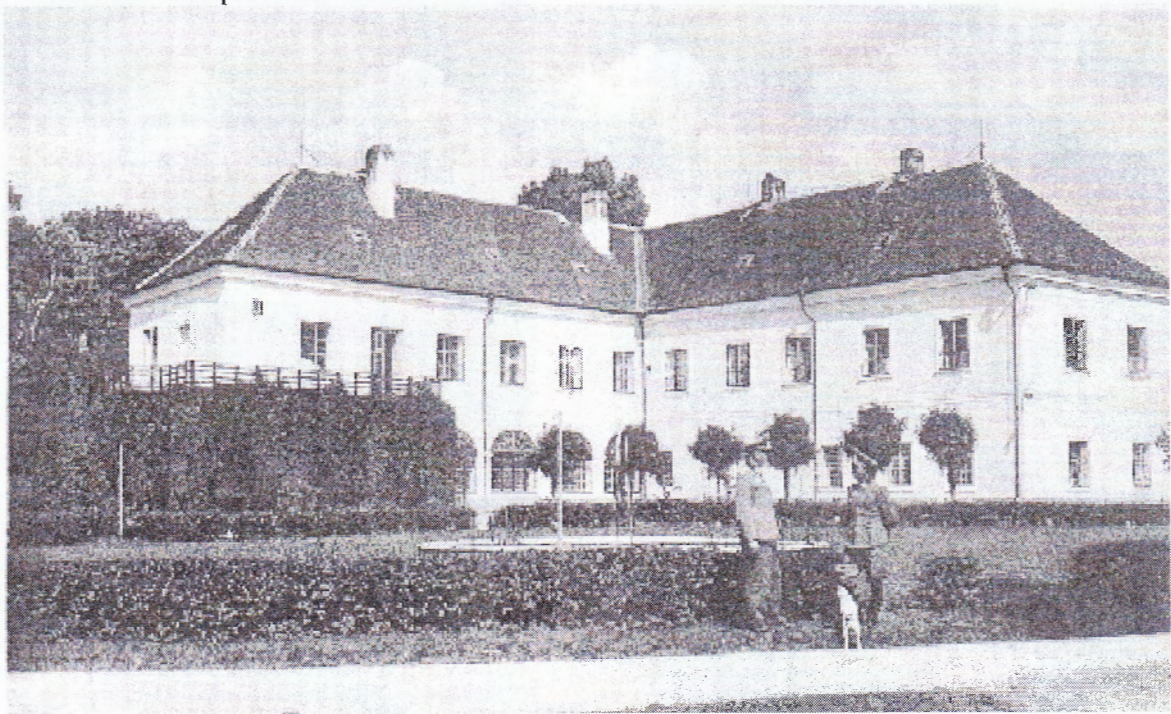
The establishment of the stud farm in Hostau with its three external farmyards Zwirschen, Hassalitz and Taschlowitz has its origin in the results of the First World War, when studs in Savatka (Galicia) and Radautz (Bukowina) had to be evacuated because of the approaching enemy.

The yards of the Prince Karl of Trauttmansdorff-Weinsberg (1845-1921) were leased by the Austrian-Hungarian Agricultural Ministry and the horses were accommodated there after the troublesome journey. After 1916 all military studs were dissolved by the government at that time and the military stud of Hostau was converted into a regular stud farm. Three stallions were assigned to Hostau: an Arab half-breed, an English half-breed and a Hanoverian. The main stud with 200 mares and three stallions was placed at the farmyard in Zwirschen.

After the end of the war, the horses were transferred to Klattau, but as soon as normal conditions were gained again, the remaining horses returned back to Hostau. Some years later the leasehold became property of the Czechoslovakian state.

After 1918 the majority of the fields were converted into pastures. The area of 1200 acres was reduced to 250 acres for husbandry. The number of horses was 500 at this time. The stud farm increased. Some thoroughbred mares and thoroughbred and half-breed stallions were purchased abroad.

Among the horses born and raised in Hostau, and there were scores, could be seen on international horse exhibitions. Exclusively there were three horses doffed with the seal Hostau at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. They achieved good results in competition with world-class horses of 35 nations. In late summer 1938 the whole stud farm was shifted to Horni Moteschice next to Trentschin in Slovakia, where since 1927 a sister stud had existed. By martial effects in the year 1945 the whole population of all breed horses in these two studs was lost up to small remnants.



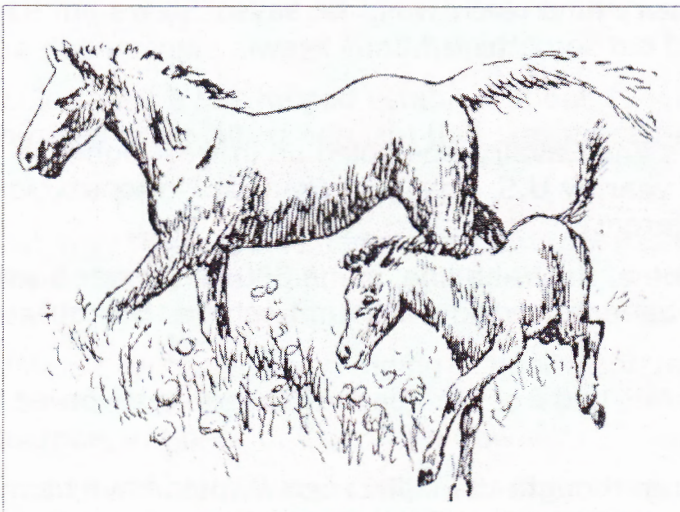
Castle in Hostau used by the Nazis during World War II

After the invasion of the German troops in October 1938 the army administration took over the stud in Hostau, which was again at the beginning a military stud farm. The horses were purchased in East Prussia,

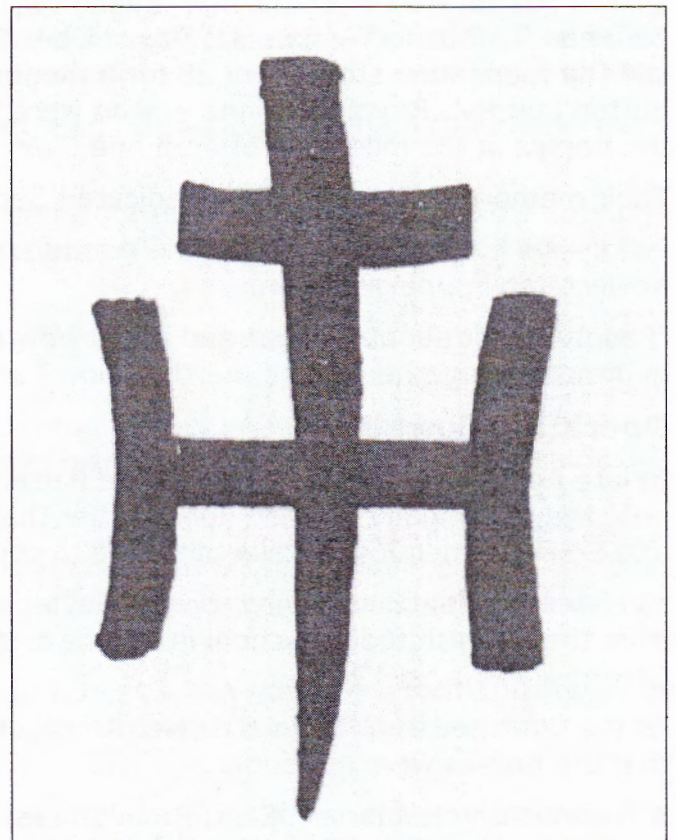
Hanover, Holstein, Oldenburg and East Frisia, raised up to two years and then assigned to cavalry regiments. In 1942 the military stud became a regular stud.

Due to war activities in 1942 the Lipizzaner horses of the studs of Demir Kapja (Macedonia), Stancic (Croatia), Lipizza (Italy) and Piber (Austria) were evacuated to Hostau. Additionally Lipizzaner mares were transferred, too, who had been purchased by the Countess Eltz (Haid) and Vukovar (Croatia). The whole population of the Lipizzaner horses existed of 15 stallions, 150 mares and 200 foals of all ages except Lipizzaners from Babolna (Hungary), Topoltschianky (Slovakia) and Fogaras (Transylvania) the whole Lipizzaner breeding material of the world was present at Hostau. In the last months of the war, in 1945, 200 horses from Don and the Caucasus found a new home in Hostau and on the farmyards of the stud.

Regarding the whole Lipizzaner breeding, the first task of the stud in Hostau during the Second World War was to breed stallions for the Imperial Spanish Riding School in Vienna. In the last war days several projectiles hit the neighborhood of Hostau, and the collapse of the Reich was soon to come, the stud under control of Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Rudofsky decided to get in touch with American troops in order to protect the town and stud against destruction. By a daring act of the veterinarians, Dr. Rudolf Lessing and Dr. Wolfgang Kroll, the entire stud material without any losses could be handed over to the armor division, which was marching in afterwards closely. On May 15th, 1945 the transport of all Lipizzaner horses and Arabs took place across the Bohemian Forest to Kötzing in Bavaria, in order to be returned to their home studs.



Sketch of Lipizzaners



Hostauer Brandzeichen (brand)

The seal of the stud in Hostau consisted of the letter "H", whose crossbar was halved by the blade of a short, easily bent, upward arranged sword.

See also the topic of Lipizzaners on our Hostau homepage. <http://www.hostau.org/htmlen/lipizzaners.html>
END

They Saved Horses

the Casualties of "Operation Cowboy" Finally Get Their Due

by Brandon Swanson Staff Writer, *the Prague Post*
May 10, 2006

Disney was clearly more interested in tugging heartstrings than in recounting history when it released the 1963 action movie *Miracle of the White Stallions*, about the Allied effort to save hundreds of famed Lipizzaner horses from the Nazis in Czechoslovakia during the last days of World War II.

Now, 61 years after the event, the mayor of a small west Bohemian town and a handful of war veterans want to reframe the conventional version of the mission to honor the soldiers who lost their lives to save a piece of European culture.

"It's a very nice movie," says Gaylord Jerry Toole, a Plzen resident, Vietnam veteran and member of the Military Car Club. "But they don't say anything about the people that died. They Disney-fied the bad parts."

Belá nad Radbuzou(Weissensulz) Mayor Libor Picka and a delegation of U.S. military veterans laid the foundation stone April 28 for a monument to the two U.S. soldiers — Sgt. Owen Sutton and Pvt. Raymond Manz — who were killed outside of the town while trying to save the horses in the mild cusp of April and May, 1945.

Their memorial will be officially dedicated Sept. 16.

Picka says it is important to set the record straight and give credit to those who've been neglected by popular culture.

"People forgot about the war and about how everything really was," he says. "So we put the information together, found out the names and did something."

Operation Cowboy

In late April 1945 U.S. General George Patton's 2nd Cavalry was holed up in west Bohemia near the dividing line agreed upon earlier that year by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Soviet leader Josef Stalin at the Yalta conference.

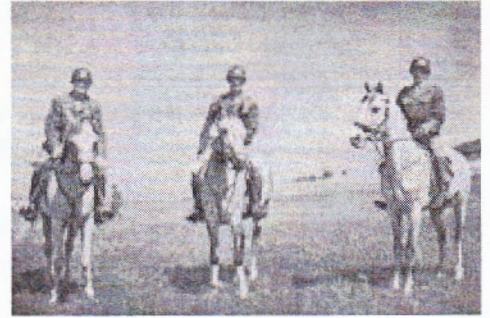
Meanwhile, a few miles away, on the Soviet side of the Yalta line, some 300 Lipizzaner horses from the Spanish Riding School in Vienna had been moved to a farm in Hostoun (Hostau), Czechoslovakia, in 1942.

As the famished and fatigued Soviet Army approached from the east, the Germans worried that the horses were in danger.

A Wermacht veterinarian, Capt. Rudolph Lessing, thought the Lipizzaners "would have been horse burgers for the Russian soldiers," as he put it at a 2nd Cavalry reunion years later.

Knowing that the Americans were near, Lessing sneaked behind enemy lines to the U.S. side with two Lipizzaners to convince the Army to rescue them from what he feared was certain death.

U.S. Col. Charles Reed, an equestrian aficionado, immediately recognized the significance of the horses.



Leaders of the great horse raid, whose sacrifice has finally been recognized: Left, Lt. Col. Walter J. Easton, Commander, 2nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Group. Right, Col. Charles H. Reed, Commander, 2nd Cavalry Group.

Austrian rulers began breeding Spanish horses in the mid-16th century. Within a few decades, they established a royal stud farm in Lipica, in present-day Slovenia, from which the breed gets its name. In that mountainous region, the white horse gained its reputation as a sturdy and highly trainable animal.

The breed became the exclusive stock of the nobility, and was used for battle and transportation by the Habsburg elite for centuries.

Reed realized that if the horses died, the famous breed would go with it. Lessing convinced Reed to launch Operation Cowboy in response.

Reed sent Alpha Troop, 42nd Cavalry Squadron, to Hostoun to gather the horses and herd them to Bavaria. Soldiers put foals, which would not have been able to walk that distance, in trucks.

Only later did Col. Alois Podhajsky, the head of the Spanish Riding School, officially ask for protection by Patton's army, which was granted. The Army returned the horses to the stables a few months later.

Sutton and Manz

Records of just how Sutton and Manz died during Operation Cowboy are muddled — the memoirs of Patton himself make no reference to casualties during the operation.

According to the 2nd Cavalry Association Historical Archive, Sutton, 28, was wounded during a German attack on the farm while the soldiers were trying to take the horses. He died a few days later at an Army field hospital in Nuremberg.

Archive records show Manz was killed while attempting to destroy a German roadblock. He died two weeks short of his 20th birthday.

Toole and several others here have created and cared for memorials throughout the country similar to the one being built for Sutton and Manz, with the help of organizations such as the Military Car Club in Plzen.

"It's my baby, so I'm going to spank it," he says. "We need to make sure the memories of the dead people always continue on."

Toole says he has helped establish about 22 such monuments in west Bohemia to commemorate Allied heroism that was erased from history books by the pre-1989 regime.

Patton pending

Last year, Plzen dedicated a museum to Patton in recognition for his army liberating the city May 6, 1945. The grandson of "Old Blood and Guts," George Patton Waters, returned this year to donate some family artifacts to the museum.

Waters saw the Spanish Riding School's Lipizzaner horses when they were toured through the U.S. recently. He was reminded of a book that Podhajsky dedicated to Patton's wife, Beatrice, in honor of Operation Cowboy.

Later this month, Waters will embark on a mission of his own: to return the book to the Spanish Riding School. "It really belongs in their archives," he says.

*Sylvie Dejmková contributed to this report. Brandon Swanson can be reached at bswanson@praguepost.com

