

The Communists did not want a marriage with an American soldier, the woman fled in an armored personnel transporter.

This was the case with the 8th Armored Division, which had been operating in Czechoslovakia since June 5, 1945.



The wedding of Libuše Hrdonková and Leonard Cloud in 1949 in Pilsen. | Photo: Leoly Miller's archive

With the arrival of their soldiers, new stories began to be written again. One of them was the acquaintance of Leonard Cloud with Libuše Hrdonková at a dance party in Stod.

The Eighth Armored Division landed in France in early January 1945. It was deployed to the Netherlands the following month as part of the US Ninth Army. Towards the end of March, it crossed the Rhine and in the second half of April reached the Harz Mountains in central Germany. Here the division celebrated the end of the war in Europe and during May it worked in the occupation service and continued to clean up the last outbreaks of resistance.

At the end of May, the division was attached to Patton's Third Army and began preparing to move to Czechoslovakia. Its main task here was to take care of prisoners of war, run camps for homeless and displaced people and guard important objects. The division was also in charge of the operation of the airport in Pilsen.

But since it was already after the war, it was time to rest, so the division set up a recreation center in Babylon and built several clubs in Pilsen. The soldiers also attended entertainment shows run by the USO (United Service Organizations). Sports games such as softball, volleyball, football and competition were also popular. The division's softball team even won the XXII Corps Championship.

They negotiated thanks to the pictures

The individual units of the division were deployed in various municipalities in the region. The HQ Company 53rd Armored Engineer Battalion reached Stod. Corporal Leonard Cloud, a 20-year-old, also served as a truck driver. At a dance party, he met Miss Libuše Hrdonková, who lived in Stod. They

immediately took a liking to each other and started dating. Nor was it prevented from them that they only agreed through German words, gestures and drawing pictures.

The division, nicknamed the "Thundering Herd", left our republic on September 19, 1945 and headed to the French port of Le Havre. It arrived in the US in November and was deactivated shortly thereafter. Leonard Cloud was discharged from the military with honor in early December 1945 and headed to Sioux City, Iowa. Miss Libuše began learning English and they remained in lively written contact with each other.

The correspondence culminated in Leonard's arrival in the republic and their wedding on November 26, 1949 in the Cathedral of St. Bartholomew in Pilsen. However, the communist regime did not extend Leonard's visas and did not issue passport to his wife. Shortly after the wedding, the newlywed couple had to split up again. And after a few years of futile passport applications, Mrs. Libuše found that if she ever wanted to see her husband again, she had no choice but to cross the border illegally.

Her friend introduced her to the family of Václav Uhlík from Líně, who at that time worked in the forest in the border zone and was also about to flee abroad. The first idea to take Mrs. Libuše under the truck did not come out in 1950. Mr. Uhlík then found the wreck of an armored personnel carrier in the forest after the German Wehrmacht, decided to repair it and cross the Iron Curtain in it. The first attempt with the transporter in October 1952 failed. There was successful the second attempt on July 24, 1953. The transporter could move both on wheels and on belts. In the end, eight people took part in the escape, two of them children. They crossed the border in the forest behind Klenčí and reached Bavaria.

She was greeted by crowds in the United States

Mrs. Libuše finally flew from Munich to New York in September 1953 on her 31st birthday. During the transfer in New York and Chicago, journalists and cameras were always waiting for her. And when she finally reached her husband in Sioux City after four days, a welcome ceremony awaited her at the airport, she received a key from the mayor, followed by a parade through the city among the welcoming crowds. This interest lasted for some time, she received invitations from associations, clubs, schools or churches to be their guest. Here she tried to give a picture of life in a totalitarian country, to warn against communism and to appeal to the belief in freedom. Eventually, they had three children, but her husband developed lung disease, stopped working at the age of 55 and died in 1983. It was almost a day exactly 30 years after her arrival in the United States.

Mrs. Libuše first worked in an optical workshop for the production of glasses and then until her retirement in a company for office supplies.

She visited Czechoslovakia for the first time after her escape in 1972 and then several more times, including the Liberation Festival in Pilsen in 1991. She kept an eye on the situation in our country and always hurt when she heard that it was better under the Communists. She has always been proud of her origins, so it is no wonder that when she died at the age of 90 in December 2012, her family placed a container with Czech soil and a flag in her coffin and sang the Czech anthem.

Author: Jiří Frýbert

Translation: Scott Thorpe

Published in Czech langure on June 2, 2022 there:

https://plzensky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/komuniste-manzelstvi-s-americkym-vojakem-neprali-zena-prchla-v-transporteru-2022.html