

CHIEMSEE RESORT CLOSES

One of the jewels of the world-wide Armed Forces Recreation Center (AFRC) has closed. Operated by the US Army following World War II, AFRC Chiemsee was located on the shore of Germany's largest natural lake and at the edge of the Bavarian Alps. It was easily accessible as an autobahn had an exit nearby as well as an efficient rail station, though I seldom heard the sound of either.

Chiemsee was utilized exclusively by the the nazi SS both before and during World War II. Their dedicatory plaque/emblem remained on the outside entry wall. Chiemsee was my first exposure to AFRC during the Cold War. During the summer, there was wind surfing, swimming, water skiing, and parasailing. You could get a water taxi to an island, where Mad King Ludwig built a mini- Versailles Palace and gardens! In the winter, they had an outstanding snow skiing program that was complete in providing USPHS officers, their families and retirees ski equipment, lessons, transportation to snow resorts in Germany and Austria, meals were family style in the huge rustic yet elegant dining hall. It was at an affordable price, based on your rank. The official reasons given by Pete Isaacs, Chief Operating Officer at the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center for the closure was three-fold. The Iraq war, increased force protection, and declining US dollar value.

Isaacs stated,

"Because of the world situation, we've had to adjust our operations...Many of our customers in Europe are deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom and their families are taking care of business at home. Understandably, vacations are on hold. As a result, current and predicted occupancy has fallen dramatically... There were increased security concerns, which reduces vacation travel, and the value of the U.S. dollar overseas...We've had to deal with a 19 percent devaluation of the dollar against the Euro, which is the currency used to pay for 50 percent of our operating expenses."

Chiemsee and the Von Steuben Hotel in the Olympic city of Garmish, Germany. was supposed to close in October 2004, however they closed a year earlier than planned. They join the closure of my all-time favorite ARFC resort at Berchtesgaden, Germany. I also believe these closures are the result of the Peace Dividend from the Cold War cessation. USPHS commissioned officers and retirees have the benefit of utilizing AFRC facilities and I encourage their use. It is a safe and unique experience, especially overseas. If we do not use them, then they will close their doors forever.

Submitted by CAPT Lester M. Sharpton, USPHS (Ret), 2004 elected Retired Representative to the Atlanta Branch Commissioned Officers Association Executive Committee.