Stein reaps honors from Czech homeland

Professor Eric Stein, '42, returned to his Czech homeland last fall like a conquering hero. In the capital of Prague, Czech Republic President Václav Havel presented Stein, the Hessel E. Yntema Professor Emeritus of Law, with a First Degree Medal of Merit "for outstanding scientific achievements."

The presentation came on October 28, the Czech National Independence Day. Two days earlier, Stein was made an honorary citizen of his birthplace of Holice, a centuries-old town two hours drive from Prague that Stein had left in his early teens.

Stein fled the rising power of Nazism in Czechoslovakia in 1939 and earned a doctorate of laws at the University of Michigan in 1942. He previously had earned a similar degree at Charles University in Prague. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Subsequently, he worked with the U.S. State Department and was involved with formation of the United Nations before he shifted to teaching and joined the Law School faculty in 1956.
A pioneer in development of the academic discipline of comparative and international law, Stein has been instrumental in making study of the European Union part of American international law programs. He was called into service for his native country as an advisor in developing the proposed new federal Czecho-Slovak constitution after the 1989 “Velvet Revolution,” and he consulted on the Czech Republic’s constitution following the breakup of the Czecho-Slovak federation.

Havel presented Stein with the Medal of Merit in ceremonies in the Castle in Prague. The Castle, whose magnificence was retained during the Communist regime, is considered one of the jewels of Europe and a significant contributor to Prague’s reputation as one of the continent’s most beautiful cities.

In the earlier ceremonies at Holice, Mayor Ladislav Effenberk presented Stein with a replica of the city’s coat of arms. During his visit there, Stein also reminisced about his life in Czechoslovakia and his many years in the United States during a talk to students at the recently inaugurated state-of-the-art Holub Gymnasium high school.

The Czech ceremonies followed two other honors Stein received last fall closer to home:

- Attachment of his name to the university-wide professorship awarded to his colleague and former student Richard O. Lempert, ’68. Lempert, a law professor and founding director of the University of Michigan’s Life Sciences, Values, and Society Program, asked that his new university professorship be named for Stein. Lempert also is a professor of sociology and former chairman of the sociology department.

- Being named winner of the 2001 University of Michigan Press Book Award for “his literary accomplishments, particularly Thoughts From a Bridge: A Retrospective of Writings on New Europe and American Federalism [University of Michigan Press, 2000], and the breadth and depth of his scholarly contributions to international law.” This was Stein’s second time to win the award; the first was for Diplomats, Scientists and Politicians: The United States and the Nuclear Test Ban Negotiations (1966), co-written with the late Harold K. Jacobson.

Holub Gymnasium students in Holice, Czech Republic, listen as Eric Stein, ’42, reminisces about his life in Czechoslovakia and his career in the United States after being made an honorary citizen of Holice, his birthplace.