

The Millionth Yank

by Linda Hebdige

I responded to a post from the Maritime Archaeology Trust asking for volunteers to help search the archives at The Civic Centre, looking for any info on the American D Day wall. While searching, I found some interesting photos and articles on 'The Millionth Yank,' and I became intrigued.

On a chilly day in Oct 1944, Private Paul S Shimer Jr was in a line of men walking up the gangplank of a troop ship headed for Normandy, which was harboured in Southampton docks. The Mayor of Southampton, Rex Stranger, was waiting to meet the millionth American soldier to embark from the boat, who was Private Paul S Shimer Jr (15th Infantry, 3rd Division, Seventh Army) from Pennsylvania. Greetings were exchanged between the men. There was no time for much more, but the GI showed the mayor a photo of his wife and 3-year-old daughter, and they did promise to meet after the war was over.



Southern Railway Photograph dated 25th October 1944 No 966/3 (Southampton City Archives D/Z 472)

Private Shimer went to Cherbourg next and was promoted to sergeant, then within days, was on his way to the front. His bravery, when he was wounded in combat, resulted in him being decorated with the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for meritorious achievement. Just three months later, at the age of 27, Sgt. Shimer was killed by two German land mines. He died on the 14th April 1945, just twenty four days from the cessation of hostilities. He is buried in St. Avold in France. Mayor Stranger never forgot his promise, and in 1947, he and his wife visited Sgt. Shimer's widow Marian and young daughter Patricia Ann. They visited Chambersburg a few times over the years, and even helped to set up a college trust fund for Paul's daughter.

I soon became intrigued by this story, and wondered what had become of little Patricia Ann. I offered to do some more searching. I researched online, looked at obituaries and even contacted the newspaper in Pennsylvania, The Public Opinion. The same newspaper that had published the original article in 1944. Public Opinion printed my article asking for any info on the Shimer family. It had quite a good response. I discovered that his widow remarried and moved to Maryland. Patricia went to college there. Eventually, I received an email from Sgt Shimer's niece and good news. Patricia is alive and well and lives in Idaho. What started off as an offer to help research for the American Wall became a very rewarding search.



Mr and Mrs Stranger meeting officials in Chambersburg. Southampton City Archives ref SRO D/Z 472

A Transcription of the broadcast made by R J Stranger C.B.E at the Empire Broadcasting Corporation Studios, New York on Sunday June 1st, 1947 'We the People' Programme. (held at Southampton City Archives ref D/Z 428 Acc 3925)

Mr Bolton

Here at our Gulf Oil microphone is a distinguished visitor from across the sea. He arrived here just one week ago and tonight we have asked him here to tell us of the special mission that brought him here – his Honour the wartime Mayor of Southampton – England. Me R J Stranger. Welcome to America Mayor Stranger.

R J Stranger

Thank you, Mr Bolton. I'm beginning to feel I quite at home, during the war you know millions of Yanks passed through or were stationed in Southampton. I got to know a lot of them and more that once while we'd be talking, your boys would ask if someday my wife and I could come to America and visit them and their families. Well Mr Bolton, that is why I'm here, to see many of my old friends and see the places they talked about so much. But there is one soldier's family I specially wanted to visit, and he is the Yank I would like to tell you about.

Mr Bolton

Please go right ahead Mr Stranger.

R J Stranger:

"I was down at the docks at Southampton one morning to watch the ships, the ships that took the Americans and the British into the fighting across the channel, I always tried to be around to wish the men good luck, but this particular morning I was waiting for the man who would be the millionth Yank to leave Southampton for the Battle of Europe. The olive drab line marched past me up the gang plank and then one man, a sergeant was called out. He was the millionth Yank. We had our picture taken together, it all happened so quickly that we didn't have much time to talk, I didn't even get his name, but I do remember he said he had a wife and a baby girl at home. I told him to come back and visit my wife and me and I would help him to start his daughter in life, he said he would and then he was gone. I never saw that man again.

Army headquarters told me that he was Sergeant Paul Shimer of Chambersburg Pennsylvania and that he had been killed in action advancing into Germany. My wife and I talked about Sergeant Shimer and his family in the United States. We knew we wanted to visit them, but we wanted to do more than that, to help show what we in England thought of the millionth Yank and all his gallant comrades in arms, so in Southampton I started a trust fund for his little girl, and now tonight this little girl, Patricia, six years old, and her mother are here with me.

Mrs Shimer

Three years ago, I was just like millions of other American wives left at home alone. I had Paul's picture in the Sergeant's uniform and the letters that didn't come often enough. It was the same day that the war department released the telegram saying our local newspaper would be printing a picture of Mayor Stranger and my husband as the one millionth Yank to sail from Southampton, but it wasn't till this Memorial Day that I discovered how very kind Mayor Stranger is. The trust fund for Pat \$4,000 will give her the education I want her to have so much. I couldn't possibly have done it myself.

R J Stranger

Then some day you and Pat will come to Southampton to stay with my wife and me for a while, won't you? You will make the visit your husband Sergeant Shimer planned. We will be waiting to welcome

you warmly, for its sergeant Shimer, the millionth Yank and men like him, of many nationalities, that made our lives and peace today possible. We in Great Britain will never forget them.

PROMISE to a Child

GI'S WERE marching through a floral arch at Southampton, England, when a man thing about the size of a hand grenade, suddenly raised his arm as if to throw.

He did not throw, however, because the thing he held was a counting machine. As his arm went up, an officer commanded: "Halt!"

Sergeant Paul S. Shimer of Chambersburg, Pa., found himself standing under the arch.

Just why were all eyes and cameras focused on him?

What had he done? Why was the Honorable Rex Stranger, mayor of the city, striding toward him with a look as if his sergeant's stripes were as important as brass?

Because, as they soon told him, he was one in a million, literally—the millionth Yank to pass through Southampton, since D-Day, on his way to the front.

"What luck!" thought the boys, just in front and just in back of their millionth buddy, as the mayor led him away for a private conversation while they had to stand listening to the many long speeches which, it seems, must always go with such occasions.

Mayor Stranger asked his guest many questions, learning among other things, that he was 26 years old, married and the father of a three-year-old daughter, Patricia Ann Shimer.

"She's kind of pretty," said the sergeant and proved it with a picture.

"Lovely child. You are indeed a lucky man," was the mayor's comment but, as he spoke, he felt a



There Were Ceremonies—and a Promise—When Sergeant Shimer Passed Through the Southampton Arch. The Millionth Yank Since D-Day Is Shown Here With Mayor Rex Stranger of the English City.



millionth Yank, but to her, the only one in the world, had been killed in action by the explosion of two land mines, as he led a charge against a strategic hill.

The widow would not be coming back home.

She had to support herself and child by working in a beauty parlor, making other wives beautiful for husbands who would come back, as most of them eventually did.

All this time Mrs. Shimer knew nothing of Mayor Stranger's promise because the mayor himself had not kept in touch with the sergeant.

Why hadn't he?

The answer is 50 bombings to which his city had been subjected. After the bombing and shooting stopped, he took time to inquire where his millionth Yank was to be found and learned that he was under a little white cross.

But that verbal promise was as good as if Paul had appeared to him with a promissory note. So it happened that Mrs. Shimer was notified by the British Information Service that Southampton's wartime mayor, with Mrs. Stranger, were to visit her and her daughter, at the Mahaffey residence in Chambersburg.

He did not come empty-handed. He flew in from Washington with the certificate of a trust fund amounting to 1,000 English pounds, equivalent to about \$4,000 in American money, all for little Pat, now six years old.

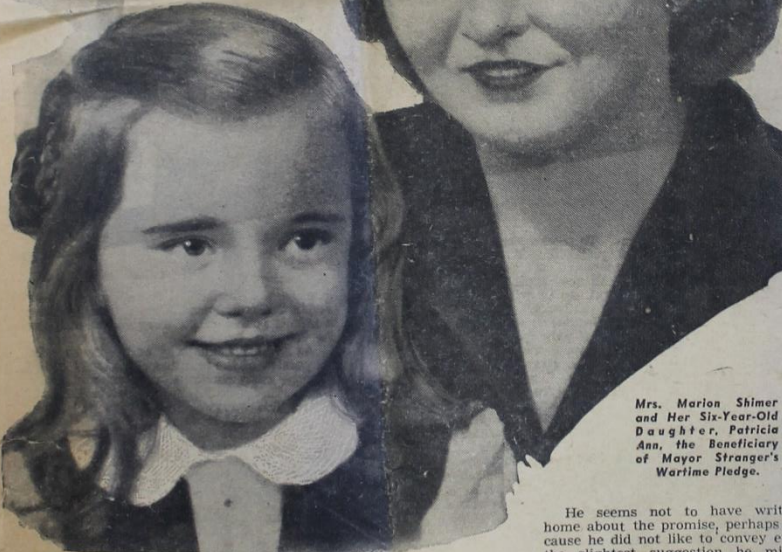
He could not deliver the cash itself on account of restrictions against exporting money from England, but these would surely be lifted long before the girl reaches college age, when it is to be used.

He did not return empty-handed either. The citizens of Chambersburg gave their distinguished visitors a worthy welcome, including something better than speeches, namely a certified check for \$3,000 collected from the townspeople and to be followed by a carload of apples donated by surrounding apple-growers and timed for distribution just before Christmas.

According to their dog-eared and somewhat antiquated geographies, Chambersburg had only 13,000 population in 1915 but every Southampton youngster can tell you that it produces shoes, woolsens, silk and stockings also, though the big, flat book does not say so, some very nice people, and apples.

May an English child would walk a mile for one crisp, juicy apple.

THE AMERICAN WEEKLY 25



Mrs. Marion Shimer and Her Six-Year-Old Daughter, Patricia Ann, the Beneficiary of Mayor Stranger's Wartime Pledge.

twinge of premonition.

Also he learned that Paul had just worked his way up to be assistant manager of a chain store when the draft board of his home town of McConnellsburg, 25 miles from Chambersburg, sent him his papers. He and his wife, Marion Mahaffey Shimer, who had been childhood sweethearts, were married in 1938.

"Both my father and Marion's father are barbers," Paul volunteered.

"Funny coincidence, isn't it?"

"Yes," the mayor agreed, and then, because he liked this young man, he added:

"You know, when the war's over I shall probably visit America, and

if I do, I'll look you up."

"I may not be there," the sergeant replied, as if he too suddenly had a premonition.

"Oh, you will be around, all right," the mayor assured in a hearty voice, "but whether you are not, I will see to it that your daughter gets a start in life."

Mayor Stranger does not remember the exact words of thanks but he will never forget the flash of gratitude in the soldier's eyes as, just then, the millionth man was dragged away for more pictures and the agony of an impromptu speech.

After that, to the front and into action went Sergeant Shimer.

He seems not to have written home about the promise, perhaps because he did not like to convey even the slightest suggestion he might not come back, and anyhow it was only a verbal promise.

On April 28, 1945, Mrs. Shimer picked up a paper with a picture of her husband being greeted by the mayor as the millionth Yank.

Proudly she showed it to her parents with whom she was then living. Then she tried to make little Pat understand that it was a nice thing for her father to be, even if not quite the same as becoming a millionaire.

One hour later she was showing it to a neighbor when there came that dread apparition of the war, a messenger carrying a telegram.

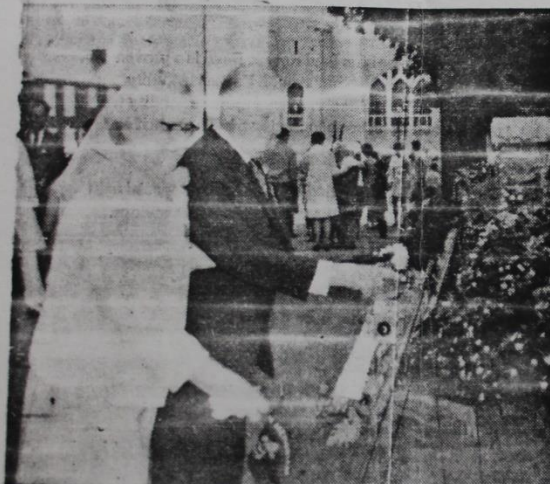
It was just what she feared. The

September 14, 1947

Britons Honor Dead Soldier

PLEASE RETURN

MAY 1941



LAY WREATH — Rex Stranger, right, Southampton, England, lays wreath at McConnellsburg Memorial Day services. With him is Mrs. Paul Shimer, mother of the late Sgt. Paul Shimer. The sergeant was the millionth Yank to ~~land~~ at Southampton. (Public Opinion Photo by Cecyl Shimer) *EMBARK FROM*

McCONNELLSBURG — Mr. and Mrs. Rex Stranger, Southampton, England, were Memorial Day guests in McConnellsburg of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shimer, Lincoln Way East. They participated in Memorial Day services on the courthouse steps Sunday afternoon.

Stranger is a former mayor and counselor of Southampton. In that capacity, he greeted the late Sgt. Paul Shimer Jr. on Oct. 25, 1944, when he became the Millionth Yank to pass through the port of Southampton to the battlefield of mainland Europe. During this greeting, the former mayor recalled, they planned to meet when the war was ended for a celebration.

Their meeting never materialized, as Sgt. Shimer was killed in action in Germany April 14, 1945. Since that time, the Strangers have made three trips to Chambersburg and McConnellsburg, where they visited Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shimer, parents of the late Sgt. Shimer. Each year, the local American Legion Post has received the British Legion wreath from the

former mayor in memory of Sgt. Shimer.

In 1960, the Strangers recalled, they made their last visit here over the Memorial Day holiday. Mrs. Stranger commented this visit was in celebration of their golden wedding anniversary. Mrs. Stranger said their anniversary really ^{was} in October, but she told her family what she really wanted for an anniversary celebration was another trip to the United States.

The Strangers said they "love Pennsylvania, particularly the McConnellsburg and Chambersburg area," adding, "It is just so beautiful and the people are so wonderful."

The Strangers arrived in McConnellsburg Sunday morning to attend church services at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, with Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shimer, their children and families. (See additional picture page 4).

Following the church services, Mr. and Mrs. Shimer entertained at dinner at Tuscarora Summit Inn in honor of the Strangers, preceding the Memorial Day services.

TOPICS OF THE HOUR

Remember when Southampton was almost an American port?



A WREATH of laurel and Flanders poppies, four feet by five, will be aboard the Queen Mary outward bound from Southampton for the United States tomorrow.

Taking it to America, where he will renew links forged when Southampton was the jumping off point for the assault on Europe, is one of the town's war-time mayors, Mr. R. J. Stranger, CBE, MC.

And in Chambersburg, Penn., Mr. Stranger, on behalf of the Town branch of the British Legion, will lay the wreath on Memorial Day, in memory of the late Sgt. Paul S. Shimer—the "millionth Yank" to pass through the port of Southampton in October, 1944. Sgt. Shimer was killed in action in Germany.

Mr. Stranger, a past-president of the branch, will be on a six-week stay with his wife, Mrs. "Trule" Stranger, JP.

There will be another Hampshire link with the wreath-laying, for Lieut.-Col. H. W. Le Patourel, The Royal Hampshire Regiment VC, who is with a military mission in Washington, will be attending the ceremony in Chambersburg.

Mr. and Mrs. Stranger will be visiting the parents and family of Sgt. Shimer.

They will invite Sgt. Shimer's wife, now re-married, and his daughter Patricia to come to stay with them in England.

Visiting Chambersburg in 1947, Mr. Stranger presented Patricia, then aged six, with a £1,000 trust fund.

Mr. Stranger, telling me of plans for his visit, recalled an amazing war-time coincidence.

When Mr. Stranger stood on the dockside to greet the "two millionth Yank" as he had met the "one millionth Yank" (Sgt. Shimer) before, the "two millionth Yank" nearly proved to be Sgt. Shimer's brother, also a GI.

He was on the gangplank a few feet away as Mr. Stranger shook the hand of the "two millionth Yank."

Old friends

Mr. and Mrs. Stranger are looking forward to meeting many old friends.

In New Jersey they will visit Admiral Howard E. Orem. When Admiral Orem commanded the cruiser Houston, Mr. Stranger (as Mayor and Admiral of the Port) flew his flag in the ship and took it to the liberated Channel Islands.

In Florida they will visit Col. Sherman L. Kiser, OBE, who was 14th Major Port commander at Southampton; in New Jersey, too, Col. Leo J. Meyer, OBE, deputy port commander; in Washington, Mrs.

Beck, widow of the former US Consul-General in Southampton, Mr. William Beck.

Mr. Stranger has the Freedom of Chambersburg, and he also has the Freedom of New Orleans. There he will meet once more an old friend, the Mayor, Col. de Lesseps Morrison.

Mr. Stranger recalls the many tributes that were paid by Chambersburg to Southampton as a front-line port during his 1947 visit to Chambersburg.

On that occasion the growers of the district presented a big gift of apples for Southampton children.

He remembered Soton's millionth war-time American

WHenever they talk of the late Sgt. Paul Shimer in the Central Pennsylvania community of Chambersburg in the United States—he was the millionth Yank who passed through the port of Southampton in October, 1944, on embarkation for the battlegrounds of Europe and who died a soldier's death in 1945—the name of a Briton he knew is not forgotten.

For when the 27-year-old US infantryman passed through Southampton the man who officially greeted him on behalf of Sotonians—the town's Chief Citizen—made a promise that he would himself visit Shimer's own home town when the world was at peace again.

And in 1947 Mr. R. J. Rex Stranger, who became a Parliamentary candidate after being a war-time mayor and a council member for two decades, fulfilled his promise to visit Chambersburg.

He did so, with Mrs. Stranger, and at the Pennsylvania town met Paul Shimer's widow and her six-year-old daughter, Patricia. The youngster was given a £1,000 trust fund by Mr. Stranger.

Wreath of Flanders poppies

Earlier this summer Mr. and Mrs. Stranger paid their second visit to Chambersburg where they again met Patricia Shimer—now 19—and her mother, and other friends. They took with them, on their voyage in the Queen Mary, a wreath of laurel and Flanders poppies which was ceremonially presented to the town in memory of Sgt. Shimer.

While there, Mr. Stranger received a Certificate of Honour from the Chambersburg Rotary Club and it was again officially presented to him on this side of the Atlantic at yesterday's luncheon meeting of the Southampton Rotary Club.

Mr. Stranger, introduced by the Southampton Club president, Mr. G. C. Alliston, received the certificate from the American Consul in charge at Southampton, Mr. James F. Grady—also a Southampton Rotarian.

In making the presentation Rotarian Grady said he was honoured to pay tribute to Mr. Stranger who, in his capacity, endeavoured to further the relationships between the United States and Great Britain. Mr. Stranger had contributed much in linking the bonds of friendship between his own countrymen and Americans.

Mr. Grady read a telegram of greetings and congratulations from the Rotary International president, Harold Thomas, of Auckland, New Zealand. He said that the certificate was

for his furthering one of the highest ideals of Rotary and as a dedication to the memory of Paul Shimer.

In his reply, Mr. Stranger thanked the American Consul and said he was deeply touched and appreciative of the Chambersburg Rotary Club's gesture.

Dollars for tinned foodstuffs

Mr. Stranger recalled the days when he first met Paul Shimer and the occasion when, in 1947, the people of Chambersburg sent 3,000 dollars to the children of Southampton for tinned foodstuffs, followed by a large consignment of apples from the growers of the district.

Mr. Stranger is a former member of the Southampton Rotary Club.



The US Consul at Southampton, Mr. James F. Grady (left), presents the certificate to Mr. Rex Stranger. —"Echo" photo.

Visit of Rex Stranger Recalls 'Millionth Yank' Wartime Compact

(Editor's Note: Rex Stranger, who as mayor of Southampton, England, greeted Sgt. Paul S. Shimer of Chambersburg as the Millionth Yank to embark for Normandy from that British port during World War II, is returning for a second visit here. Accompanied by Mrs. Stranger, he will participate in the Memorial Day program Monday, and he will be honored by the Rotary Club at a testimonial dinner Monday evening at Hitching Post Inn.)

By JOSEPH A. CR...
There was the chill of...
the mist that swept in from...

sea at the port of Southampton Oct. 25, 1944, as Mayor Reginald J. Stranger and Sgt. Paul S. Shimer talked privately.

A few minutes before the mayor had presented the American soldier with a plaque designating him the Millionth Yank to pass through the British portal to Normandy after D-Day.

The pier was filled with American troops and British well-wishers, and as other speakers took the rostrum to formally commemorate the occasion, the mayor and the 27-year-old uniformed American sheltered themselves against the fog beside a waterfront shed. For security reasons, Sergeant Shimer's name had not been mentioned when he was recognized as the Millionth Yank.

Now that they were alone, Stranger asked the sergeant who he was. He learned also that the American had a wife and six-year-old daughter waiting for him in Chambersburg.

"Let's celebrate together when the war is over," the mayor suggested. "You come to me or I'll come to you. . . ."

Six months later Sergeant Shimer was dead. He was killed in action April 14, 1945, in Germany while serving with the 15th Infantry, Third Division of the Seventh Army. Subsequently his body was reinterred in the Avon U. S. military cemetery in France.

Rex Stranger remembered the compact with the American. He resolved to come to America to visit the family of Sergeant Shimer and to fulfill his promise to the Yank. The then councillor of Southampton and Mrs. Stranger arrived here May 30, 1947, and the community received them with heartfelt warmth. For two days the visitors received the hospitality of new-found friends and they in return radiated graciousness that bespoke the gratitude of the British people to their American allies.

Some 4,000 persons crowded

Some 4,000 persons crowded into Memorial Square that Memorial Day thirteen years ago to formally welcome the Strangers. The councillor presented to Mrs. Marion Mehaffey Shimer, the Millionth Yank's widow, and her daughter, Patricia Ann, token gifts to symbolize the gratitude of his people for the sacrifices of Sergeant Shimer and other Americans in the common cause of the allies.

Southampton, b o m b e d fifty times between August 1940 and August 1941, still felt the privations of wartime in 1947. In behalf of the children of the British city, the community raised \$3,000 for foodstuffs, and the orchardists of Franklin County donated a carload of apples. On Dec. 15, 1957, a ship docked at Southampton with 600 bushels of apples from the orchards of Franklin County and large quantities of lard and corned beef purchased with the \$3,000 given at the time of the Strangers' visit to Chambersburg.

bersburg.
Now 19, Patricia Ann Shimer makes her home in Beaufort, S. C., with her mother, since remarried. She was enrolled this year as a Freshman at Columbia (S. C.) College. Pat, winding up her term exams, is coming to Chambersburg to see the Strangers while they are here for their second visit.

Sergeant Shimer was a son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shimer Sr., who still make their home in McConnellsburg. A former employe of the J. C. Penney Co. store here, he was assistant manager of the company's store at Salisbury, Md., when he was inducted into the military service April 19, 1944, through the McConnellsburg draft board. After basic training at Camp Walter, Tex., he left for overseas duty in October.

The obscure soldier who was destined to be memorialized as the Millionth Yank met death five days before the first anniversary of his induction when two land mines exploded as he led his men in an assault upon a strategic hill.

Censorship delayed publication of pictures taken at Southampton on Oct. 25, 1944. The photograph of the Millionth Yank was printed in the PUBLIC OPINION April 28, 1945. An hour after Mrs. Shimer saw the published picture, she received a telegram that Sergeant Shimer had been killed in action.

Englishman's friendship lasting one

By MONICA STINE
Staff Writer

Rex Stranger is no stranger to Chambersburg. For years he has either visited or corresponded with residents of the Chambersburg area from his home in Southampton, England.

The way he became acquainted with Chambersburg was unusual to say the least and the fact that this friend-

ship with a town and its people has lasted for 30 years is even more unusual.

It all started on a chilly day in October of 1944.

World War II had reared its ugly head and families were torn apart as husbands and fathers went off to war, while mothers and children felt the desolation of waiting and worrying.

Paul S. Shimer, Chambersburg, was one of those men

who went off to war, to make this world a better place to live in. On that chilly day in October of 1944, he was just one in a line of soldiers, walking up a troop ship gangplank, headed for Normandy shortly after the D-Day invasion. The troop ship was harbored in Southampton, England.

The Mayor of Southampton, Rex Stranger, was waiting to greet the millionth Yank to embark from the English port

for the European battlefield. Sgt. Paul S. Shimer, Chambersburg, was the millionth Yank.

Brief greetings were exchanged between the Yank and the English mayor because there wasn't time for more. But they did promise to visit each other.

A short six months later, 27-year-old Sgt. Shimer was dead, killed by two land mines as he led his men in an assault

up a hill in Germany. He was serving in the 15th Infantry Third Division of the Seventh Army, and was buried in the St. Amand Military Cemetery in France.

But the promise the two men made to each other was kept by the Southampton mayor in the only way he could keep it.

Stranger and his wife journeyed to the United States in 1947, to visit Shimer's

widow, Mrs. Marion Mehaffey Shimer, and daughter Patricia Ann, in Chambersburg, his parents Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shimer Sr., McConnellsburg, and to participate in Memorial Day services for Sgt. Shimer and all the other servicemen killed fighting for their country.

Since that first visit, a friendship has grown between residents of Chambersburg and Southampton. The mayor visited Chambersburg on Memorial Day in 1960 and again in 1971.

On his first visit he set up a trust fund of \$4,000 for the six-year-old daughter of the Millionth Yank. Chambersburg and its neighboring communities in turn presented gifts for the children in bombed-out Southampton, the first of which was a certified check for \$3,000 collected by public subscription. The second was a letter from the Franklin County Horticultural Society pledging a shipment of a carload of apples to Southampton at Christmas time.

But time changes everything. Everything but the friendship between the two communities. Mrs. Shimer has since remarried, becoming Mrs. John Smith, Beaufort, South Carolina. And the little daughter, Patricia Ann, also married, becoming Mrs. Wallace Boeck, at last report in Honolulu, Hawaii, with a young daughter of her own.