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 harbouried 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.

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 Chamersburg. Southampton City Archives ref SRO D/Z 472
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 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 soldiers 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:
“1 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 wide 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 through 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 along. I had Paul’s picture in the Sergeants 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 me 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

GIANT WWII marching through a street next to London, England, called out for a man in the crowd. When the man turned around, the giant suddenly raised his arm as if to strike him. The man did not flinch, however, because the thing he held was a large, ornate mirror. As he raised it, another hand emerged from behind the mirror, and the man exclaimed, "Hold it!"

Mayor George Shimer of Champaign, Illinois, ordered the mirror to be presented to the mayor of Southampton, England.

The mirror was a symbol of the city's promise to its citizens. Mayor Shimer's daughter, Mary, had recently graduated from college and was starting her career as a nurse. She had always dreamed of traveling to England to see the city where her ancestors had lived.

Mary was elated when she heard the news. She quickly packed her bags and set off for London. As she stepped off the plane, she was greeted by a cheering crowd.

Mayor Shimer's daughter gave a speech, expressing her gratitude to the city of Southampton for its hospitable reception. She promised to return to England someday to pay her respects to the city and its people.

The crowd was thunderous with applause as Mary delivered her speech. Mayor Shimer smiled proudly, knowing that his daughter had made a great impression on the city.

Mary had always been fascinated by the city's history and culture. She spent the next few days exploring the city, visiting museums and historical sites. She was overwhelmed by the beauty and richness of the city and its people.

Mary returned to Champaign with a renewed appreciation for her home city. She had found a new love for the city of Southampton, and she knew that she would return someday to pay her respects to the city and its people.

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Britons Honor Dead Soldier

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

Strager 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 Stragers 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. Strager commented the visit was in celebration of their golden wedding anniversary. Mrs. Strager said their anniversary really is 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 41.

Following the church services, Mr. and Mrs. Shimer entertained at dinner at Tuscarora Summit Inn in honor of the Strangers, providing the Memorial Day services.
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 Chamburg, Penn., Mr. Stranger, on behalf of the Chamburg branch of the British Legion, will lay the wreath on Memorial Day in memory of the late Sgt. Paul B. Shimer—the "millionth Yank" to pass through the port of Southamp-ton in October, 1944. Sgt. Shimer was killed in action in Germany. Mr. Stranger, a past-president of the branch, will be in on a six-week stay with his wife, Mrs. "True" Stranger, JP.

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

Mr. and Mrs. Stranger will be visiting the parents and family of Sgt. Shimer. They will invite Sgt. Shimer's wife, now remarried, and his daughter Patricia to come to stay with them in England.

Visiting Chamburg in 1941 Mr. Stranger protected Patricia, then aged six, with £1,000 (then $2,000) 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 "first millionth Yank" as he had met the "one millionth Yank" (Sgt. Shimer) before, the "second 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 R. Orem. When Admiral Orem commanded the cruiser Houston, Mr. Stranger was 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 Mayor Port commander at Southampton; in New Jersey, too, Col. Leo J. Meyer, OBE, deputy port commander, in Washington, Mrs. Beck, widow of the former CB Censor-General in Southampton, Mr. William Beck. Mr. Stranger has the Freedom of Chamburg and he also has the Freedom of New Orleans. He is due here once more as an old friend of the Mayor. Col. de Lapeyroniere will also visit.

Mr. Stranger recalls the many tributes that were paid by Chamburg to Southampton at a Frankie Peg during his 1947 visit to Chamburg.

On that occasion the governors of the district presented a big gift of apples for Southampton children.
He remembered Soton's millionth war-time American

When 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 21-year-old US infantryman passed through Southampton, the man who officially greeted him was Cllr. W. S. Chalmers, the town's Chief Commissioner, whose president 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 major 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 21-year-old daughter, Patricia. The younger 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 26—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 at yesterday's meeting of the Southampton Rotary Club.

Mr. Stranger, introduced by the Southampton Club president, Mr. O. C. Allerton, received the certificate from the American Consul in charge at Southampton. Mr. James F. Grady—also a Southampton Rotarian—was in making the presentation.

Mabean Grady said he was honoured to pay tribute to Mr. Stranger whom, in his careful, endeavoured to further the relationships between the United States and Great Britain. Mr. Stranger had contributed much in linking the hands of friendship between his own country and ours.

Mr. Grady read a telegram from the Rotary International Headquarters, President of the Rotary International Headquarters, President of the rotary International Headquarters, which said that the certificate was given to Mr. Stranger in respect of his outstanding service in strengthening American and British relationships in the Second World War, as an acknowledgment.
Visit of Rex Strangers 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.

There was the chill of the mist that swept in from the 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 37-year-old unarmored American sheltered against the fog beside 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 major 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 Avoil 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, bombed 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.
Now 19, Patricia Ann Shimer makes her home in Beaufort, S. C., with her mother, since re-married. 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 employee 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 STONE

Ron Stronger is a stranger to Chichester. For years he has either visited or corresponded with residents of the Chichester area from his home in Southampton, England.

The way he became acquainted with Chichester was unusual to say the least and the fact that this friendship, with a town and its people lasted for 20 years is even more unusual.

It started on a chilly day in October of 1934. WWII had ended and families were just starting to reunite. White stars and children felt the desolation of waiting and worrying. Paul S. Stronger, Chichester, 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 1934, he wrote one in a line of soldiers, waiting in a troop ship to depart, bound for Normandy on June 6th after the D-Day invasion. The troop ship was anchored in Southampton, England.

The Mayor of Southampton, Ron Stronger, was writing to greet the millenium Year as the English part of 1999. While there was no mention of his arrival, Paul was able to keep up with the happenings in the city by the letters he kept to keep it.

Six months later, St. Valentine’s Day, Stronger was killed by two land mines. He had been in an open area in Germany. He was serving in the 506th Parachute Infantry, Third Division of the 101st Airborne, and was killed near Erfurt, Germany, on April 9th, 1945.

But now let's come back to the year 1934, the year of our friendship. Paul Stronger was serving in the 506th Parachute Infantry, Third Division of the 101st Airborne, and was killed near Erfurt, Germany, on April 9th, 1945.

Since that first visit, a friendship has grown between residents of Chichester and Southampton. The mayor visited Chichester in November of 1999 and again in 1997.

On his first visit he set up a box on the front lawn of N. 5, 9th St. to raise funds for the Millenium Year project. The box was full of tickets sold for $1.00 each. The second was a letter from the Franklin County Historical Society asking for a shipment of corn for the cows and pigs in Southampton at Christmas time.

But time changes everything. Everything but the friendship between the two communities. Mrs. Stronger has since remarried, becoming Mrs. John Smith, Bradford, South Carolina. He had one daughter, Patricia Ann, also married, becoming Mrs. William Beck, at last report in Honolulu, Hawaii, with a young daughter of her own.

Southampton City Archives ref SRO D/Z 472