An Historical Commemorative Stein
by Les Paul

While the bidding was hot and heavy for the typical character steins at an auction way back in April of 1984, a silver-plated character stein made out of an actual artillery shell almost slipped by unnoticed. New highs were set for the Gentleman Fox and Dog, but the bidding for the shell, inscribed "U.S. Battleship - INDIANA - Santiago de Cuba - July 3rd, 1898", came to a halt at less than $300. Although this stein has had a place of honor among my other artillery shell character steins, it was only recently that I came to fully appreciate its history. First I had to convince a salty old seaman that he had absolutely no chance of buying the stein. Only then was Jack McGeorge eager to share with me the information found in his tattered old naval history books, worn by years of use. McGeorge, a colorful character himself, spent his life on the sea and knew where to find the information for this report. I owe this article to Jack, but ... I am still not selling him the stein.

The stein is about nine inches high to the tip. The shell used for the body of the stein was made by the Winchester Arms Company of New Haven, Connecticut, in May of 1894, as inscribed on its base. It was the current state-of-the-art smokeless powder type, a "six pounder". This name was a carryover from the days of the old cannon balls. It was fired from a quick-firing Hotchkiss six-pounder gun.

Now a little about the coastline battleship Indiana to which the stein is inscribed. She was hull number 277 and displaced 10,288 tons. Other naval specifications include: length of 348 feet, breadth of 69 feet three inches, speed of 16 knots, draft of 24 feet, and coal bunkers of 1,800 tons. The Indiana was well armed. She had four huge 13-inch and eight big 8-inch guns. There were also 20 of the smokeless powder six-pounder rapid-fire Hotchkiss guns, any one of which could have fired the shell of this character stein.

The Indiana was built at the cost of $4,000,000 at the U.S. Navy shipyard at Norfolk, Virginia. She was launched in 1893, passed her sea trials in '94, and was commissioned by the Navy in '95. On April 26th of 1898 President McKinley declared war on Spain. The Indiana was entrusted to Captain H.C. Taylor. She was part of the fleet under the command of Rear Admiral W.T. Sampson, who totally destroyed the Spanish fleet at Santiago de Cuba on July 3rd, 1898 - as inscribed on the stein.

The Spanish fleet of Admiral Cervera had been trapped in the harbor of Santiago for six weeks but they gave effective aid to their infantry by throwing shells into the ranks of the American foot soldiers. On the morning of July 3rd, Cervera tried to escape and a great naval victory was added to American history. Admiral Cervera's fleet of five armored cruisers and two torpedo-boat destroyers was sent to the bottom of the Caribbean seas off the southern coast of Cuba by the combined squadrons of Rear Admiral Sampson and Commodore Schley. The Americans saw him the moment he left the harbor and commenced their work of destruction immediately. For an hour or two they followed the fleeing Spaniards along the shore line, sending shot after shot into their blazing hulls, tearing great holes in their steel sides, and covering their decks with the blood of the killed and wounded.

The Spaniards were prepared to fight to the last. They displayed no signals to surrender even when their ships commenced to sink and the great dark clouds of smoke pouring...
from their sides showed they were on fire. The Americans ran the Spanish fleet on the beach and rocks where their destruction was completed in a short time. Admiral Cervera escaped to the shore in a boat sent by the Americans, and as soon as he touched the beach he surrendered himself and his command. The wounded Spanish admiral was received by our Lieutenant Commander Richard Wainwright, who grasped the hand of the graybearded admiral and said to him: "I congratulate you, sir, upon having made as gallant a fight as was ever witnessed on the sea".

There was no means of telling exactly what the Spanish loss was, but it was very heavy. The prisoners in custody reported their decks strewn with dead and wounded in great numbers, and many bodies could be seen fastened to pieces of wreckage floating in the sea after the fight was over. Yet history records only one American killed in this battle.

Captain H. C. Taylor, commanding the United States steamship Indiana, personally wrote of the battle as follows:

"The Spanish squadron was seen emerging from the harbor at 9:37, and in a few moments a general action ensued. The leading ship, which proved to be the Infanta Teresa flying the flag of Vice Admiral Cervera, was followed by the other vessels of the squadron as follows: Viscaya, Cristobal Colon, Oquendo, and the torpedo-boat destroyers Furor and Pluton. The enemy's vessels headed to the westward. Our Indiana fired on all of them as they came out one by one, and continued the action later by firing principally on the Spanish Maria Teresa, Oquendo, Furor, and Pluton. Several of our shells were seen to take effect on these vessels.

"Our secondary battery guns were directed principally on the destroyers, as also were the eight inch guns. The destroyers were sunk through the agency of our guns and those of the Gloucester, which vessel had come up and engaged them close aboard. The initial fire of the last two Spanish ships was directed at this vessel, and although falling very close, only struck the Indiana twice without any injury to our ship or crew. One of our 13 inch shells was seen to enter the Maria Teresa under the quarter deck and explode, and that ship was observed on fire very shortly afterwards.

"About 10:15 a.m. I observed the Maria Teresa and Oquendo on fire and heading for the beach, the fire from their guns having ceased. We then devoted our special attention to prevent the escape of the destroyers, which appeared more than a match for the Gloucester, she being the only small vessel near to engage them. They were soon seen to blow up, apparently struck by our eight inch and 6-pounders. We now fired our large guns at the Viscaya, which was at long range; she made for the shore soon after, on fire and battery silenced. These ships hauled down their colors as they made for the beach. The Spanish flagship hoisted the white flag as she grounded.

"We then ceased firing. Our flagship New York, steaming full speed to the westward as soon as the Viscaya surrendered, signaled us, 'Go back and guard entrance of harbor'. Several explosions were observed on board the burning ships. At noon turned and stood to the eastward for our station in obedience to the above signal.

During the action we used no armor piercing shells, except the smokeless powder 6-pounders, and the good effect of the common shell is shown by the fires on the enemy's ships and the short time taken to disable them without piercing their armor and with almost no injury to our ships."

I thank Captain Taylor for ending with such a fine tribute to the shell of my character stein. He certainly added to my appreciation for this stein, but he left several questions unanswered. Was the shell from which my stein was made the first shot fired in this famous sea battle? Salty old McGeorge tells me it was the naval custom of the time for the commander to save, silver plate, and inscribe it as his personal souvenir or for the ship's trophy case. But couldn't this shell have just been among the rubble cleaned up by some low ranking seaman after the battle? Did it belong to Captain Taylor, the Indiana, or just to some seaman John Doe?

Readers interested in more of the factual aspects of the Spanish American war will be directed to the naval history books collected by Jack McGeorge (see list of references, below). They are too numerous to mention and too old to easily acquire. My thanks again to Jack for providing the books and photos from which this article was written.

References:
"History of our War with Spain" by J.R. Young, 1898.
"Library of Universal History" by I.S. Clare et al., Vol. XII, 1899.
"The United States Navy -- from the Revolution to Date" by F.J. Reynolds (n.d.)
"Our New Possessions" by T. White, 1898.