

A Personal Connection with A World War I Stein

by Jim Gasowski

This is a story about how one of the steins in my collection brought history to life for me in a most unusual and surprising way. I was not aware that there were steins related to US Army units from World War I made for individual soldiers until I came across a Collectors Handbook of WW I dealing with uniforms, insignias, equipment, weapons and souvenirs... and, yes, beer steins. Now you would think that since I'd been in the US Army in Vietnam I would have realized that GIs love souvenirs of all kinds, like my Zippo lighter the Engineer Platoon gave me when I left, and the many pieces of legal and maybe not-so-legal weapons and equipment from WW II, Korea and Vietnam that I have seen displayed in different VFWs over the years.

Well, after my discovery I embarked on a quest to find one of these steins to add to my collection. I began by writing a letter to one of the authors of the WW I handbook to find out if any of the steins in the book might be for sale. He wrote back indicating that he didn't have any, but that once in a while they show up for sale on the internet. I hunted the usual sites on the web for six months before one finally was listed that I was lucky enough to purchase. Little did I know when I added this stein to my collection that it would have a connection to someone I had met.

Now if you look at figure 1 you will see that the stein belonged to PFC Elmore Shull. According to a book on the History of the 66th Field Artillery Brigade 1917, 1918, 1919, Elmer B. Shull of Challis, Idaho, served at the front in Battery C of the 146th Field Artillery, 66th Field Artillery Brigade, Third Army.

Also seen in figure one is the name of the city of Grenzhause, Germany, where the unit was relocated right after the war as part of the Army of Occupation. I guess now I know why the GIs had steins made, since Marzi & Remy, Reinhold Merkelbach, Dümmler & Breiden, Simon Peter Gerz and many other factories were all in this area.

Figures 2 and 3 show the battles the unit took part in.

In figure 4 you can see the capacity mark and by matching it up to the pictures from Stein College it appears it may have been made by Dümmler & Breiden, but with no markings and only a mold number of 779

it's a crap shoot, because of my limited knowledge in this area of expertise.

Now this is the part of the story that gets really interesting. It took place in the Battle of Saint-Mihiel, France, September 12, 1918 on the battlefield where the 146th Field Artillery and the 148th, its sister unit, were supporting 101st Infantry of the 26th Division, better known as the Yankee Division since its soldiers mainly came from the New England area. The 146th tried to blow a hole in the barbed wire entanglement in front of the German positions so the 101st could get through, but it was too dense and intricate for them to clear a path. The 101st Infantry men then tried wire cutters to no avail and then they even tried to blow up the mess with Bangalore torpedoes, but still no success.

figure 1



The 101st troops didn't give up that easily, and decided to use a little Yankee Ingenuity to accomplish a feat never before attempted during the War—they walked over the wire entanglement. After the battle when the French officers heard this, they didn't believe it since they and the British had been fighting for over four years and had never been able to do this themselves.



figure 2

They went out to the battlefield to investigate what had really happened, but when they found that there was no path cut through the wire they were totally amazed and decided that the only reason the Americans were able to do this was because they all had long legs and large feet. This was such an unusual and noteworthy feat that General Pershing mentioned it in his book about his experiences in WW I.

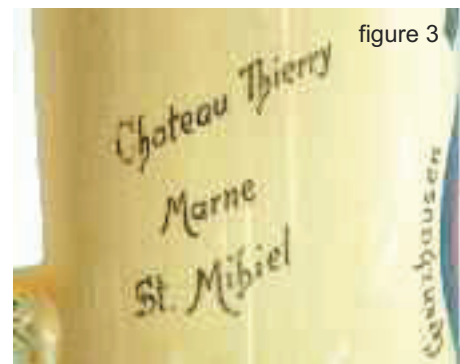


figure 3

Now, as I said, little did I know that this stein I had only recently purchased would be connected to someone I have had the pleasure of listening to as he recounted many a WW I story in great detail. I have for the last 21 years had the honor to work at the James A. Haley Veteran's Center in Tampa, Florida, and I have met some of the bravest and most honorable people this country has to offer. One of those gentlemen was Mr. Daniel Kelliher of Medford, Massachusetts, who was a WW I veteran and 103 years old at the time. He had told me he served in the 101st Infantry as a foot soldier. So after reading the history of the unit on the stein, I asked to speak to him about the Battle of St. Mihiel and the barbed wire story. His nurse came into his

room with me when he started to tell me about the battle and that he was in the 26th Division. He even drew a picture of the patch for me, a Y over a D for the Yankee Division. I then ask him if he had been in no man's land during the battle and he answered, "Yes." So enticed by this revelation, I then asked him how his fellow soldiers and he had gotten over the wire and he answered, "With the stuff you put on a chicken coop." Under intense fire, they rolled chicken wire out over the barbed wire entanglement during the battle and then walked over it. Now, for anyone who has never been in combat, this really takes some inner courage to accomplish and also requires a part of the human anatomy to be made of brass.

figure 4



During this conversation, an even greater moment was to come when the nurse said to Mr. Kelliher, "Take your sweater off and which arm do you have the scar on? Isn't this the battle that you told me about that you fell into the barbed wire?" To my further surprise, he answered, "Yes." That is when the purchase of the stein and my research into its history had come full circle—standing there in the presence of a man who had lived those awesome moments in history. This was surely a time when all I can say is it's a moment in my life I will never forget and if I ever needed a reason to explain why I love collecting steins this would be it. God bless this country and its veterans for all they have done and continue to do, and may one of the steins my fellow collectors find bring history to life as much as this one did for me.

