

PATRIOTIC OR WHAT?

By Don Franz
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Many of you know that I collect American patriotic steins as well as American antique military and cold war regimental steins. Several months ago I came across a very unusual patriotic stein with an American shield bearing 13 stars and 13 stripes flanked by two German flags. Above the shield is the date 1916, the time of the Great War in Europe. Above the date in German are the words, *Zum Andenken an den Hilffond Bazar* and *den 24 April bis den 1 Mai 1916* (In Memory of the Hilffond Bazar) and (24 April to 1 May 1916). The top of the stein is surrounded by American red, white and blue bands. At the bottom are bands of German colors of black, white, and red. Although this was at the time of the Great War in Europe, America was not yet involved. It would appear, by the looks of the stein, that America was supporting German war effort!

In 1914 when the news of the war reached the United States the vast majority of German-Americans were American-born descendants of early immigrants. Many of them strongly sympathized with their relatives in the old "fatherland". Many identified themselves as Americans and wanted

America to stay out of the war. Most of their fellow Americans wanted, also, to stay out of the war, including President Woodrow Wilson who immediately declared neutrality. Also among those German immigrants were thousands of German Reservists who rushed to German Consulates in the U.S. in effort to return home and join the fight. Keep in mind that by 1914, 35% of the population of the east coast and the Midwest was of German descent.

Up until this time, German Americans as a group had been viewed as a well-integrated and esteemed part of American society. Between the years 1914 and 1916, many German Americans held patriotic meeting rallies and fund raisers providing war relief funds for Germany. Rallies were held in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia.

Our subscribers...
Philadelphia...
several munition plants...
of these attacks were planned, financed and carried out by officers

from the German foreign office.

The war situation continued to escalate; Americans began to hear of German atrocities committed against Belgian civilians. German Americans viewed these stories as fabrications, "the work of British propaganda." The beginning of the end of our neutrality came with the sinking of the British passenger ship, Lusitania, killing 1,200, including 124 Americans. Most Americans viewed this as an act of cold blooded murder.

Two events in February 1917 finally triggered America's decision to go to war: The first was the German government's announcement to resume submarine warfare; the second and final was a telegram that was intercepted by the British, offering the Mexican government all their lost territories in the southwest in return for their support in the event of an American war.

President Woodrow Wilson called Congress for a "war to make the world safe for democracy," and Congress voted to declare war on Germany. On December 7, 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany and entered the First World War.

Unfortunately, after war had been declared, most German Americans and

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