



FEW stories in the annals of the U. S. Marine Corps are more fantastic than that of a tough, tow-headed gunnery sergeant named Faustin E. Wirkus. His childhood dream of becoming a Marine led this 20th Century Robinson Crusoe to a feather crown and an island kingdom just four days by boat from the harbor of New York. He became the only white king in the entire history of the voodoo isle of La Gonave, off the coast of Haiti. With the help of 12 dusky queens he ruled over 12,000 natives until he was forced from his throne. The blacks still wait for his return, but now it's in vain. King Faustin is dead.

Born in the grimy coal mining town of Pittston, Pa., in 1897, Wirkus was christened "Faustin" after a Polish saint. Little did his parents dream that the odd name would shape his fabulous destiny. Nor did they picture any future for him other than the mines. But at an early age Faustin decided to escape the pits. He was 11 and already at work in the collieries when he saw his first Marine recruiting poster.

At 17, by pushing his birthday ahead a year, Wirkus joined the Marines. As soon as his boot training was finished he volunteered for a hitch in

Haiti. That was in 1915 when Haiti's president, Guillaume Sam, had recently been torn to shreds and dragged around town in a burlap bag. Under the Monroe Doctrine the Marines had stepped in to take over the troubled government. Sam's successor was all for American help in straightening out Haiti's jumbled affairs. But the rival faction, beaten at the polls, took to the hills with machetes and outmoded rifles.

When the rookie Marine sailed into Port-au-Prince harbor his imagination was fired by the silent, forbidding island of La Gonave that rose out of the sea 40 miles to the west. Rumors of savagery and weird voodoo rites there went the rounds of the ship. It was said that since the time of the buccaneers, no white man had landed on La Gonave until the Marines had set up a post.

But Faustin's curiosity had to be shelved for many years. Meanwhile, in Haiti, he worked at patrolling the hostile waterfront of Port-au-Prince, where Marines were ever on the alert for revolutionist's pot-shots.

His next assignment took him over jungle trails to the bloody mountain fastness of Perodin, a ghost

village deep in the Haitian hinterland. For nine months he patrolled the seething countryside. It was honey-combed with revolutionists who were burning homes, stealing cattle and murdering every man who refused to join their cause.

In one bloody skirmish, Wirkus killed a rebel hiding behind a palm tree by estimating the height of the man's chest and sending his bullet straight through the trunk. This amazing shot so awed the other bandits that they dropped their guns and fled.

His boldness and daring in bush warfare brought him a promotion. Soon he was the only white officer in complete charge of the native troops in the Perodin outpost. The first thing he did was to build himself a mud hut befitting his new station. Later he added a fireplace and a flue. The chimney was a major miracle to the natives. As soon as they beheld the smoke actually disappear up the flue, they dispatched runners along the trails to tell the country

by Elaine Bassler Mardus

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