

# Faustin Wirkus Dies; Marine King of Island

**As Sergeant He Ruled 10,000 Natives in West Indies Group From 1925 to '31**

Warrant Officer Faustin E. Wirkus, U. S. M. C., soldier, author and lecturer, who, as a Marine Corps sergeant, ruled from 1925 to 1931 as king of 10,000 natives on the West Indian island of LaGonave, off Haiti, died yesterday at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital after an illness of several months. He was forty-nine.

Mr. Wirkus, who was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1931 after sixteen years of service, re-enlisted in 1939 as a recruiting sergeant in Newark, N. J., after a brief period in the rum importing business and as a bond salesman in Wall Street. When the war came, he became a training officer in this country.

Born in Pittston, Pa., the son of a coal miner, he was christened Faustin by a Paris priest who was asked by the child's mother to give him a name. Twenty-eight years later natives of LaGonave, believing the marine a reincarnation of the King Faustin who had ruled them eighty years before, designated him King Faustin II and accepted his rule.

## Ran Away To Join Marines

Mr. Wirkus joined the marines in 1914 after running away from home when he was seventeen because, he said, his parents wanted him to be a coal miner. Discharged in 1931, he explained how he came to be "king" of LaGonave.

In 1920, while he was stationed on Haiti, he made a sailboat trip to LaGonave, a dolphin-shaped piece of land forty miles long, which was thirty miles northwest of Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti. The island aroused his curiosity.

Later, on Haiti, he met a woman who had been arrested by Haitian authorities on trifling charge. He mentioned his name was Faustin. The woman told him there was a tradition on the island of "one who is to come," and told him "we will meet again."

In 1925, when the Marine Corps assigned him to LaGonave as a sub-district administrator, Sergeant Wirkus met the woman again and discovered she was Ti Meminne, queen of the island and ruler of the natives who long had resisted the Haitian government.

Soon after Wirkus took over his duties, the Queen crowned him King Faustin II. Immediately the natives banded together under their new ruler and a harmonious government on the island commenced to exist.

In his first year, Wirkus collected \$10,000 in taxes where the Haitian government had collected only \$2,000 in twenty years. He taught them to plant seeds and to doctor sick children, sat as domestic judge of family quarrels, got alimony for deserted mothers for the first time in the island's history.

## Viewed Voodoo Rites

Mr. Wirkus was also the first white man to view voodoo ceremonies on the island. At first, he blackened his face and hid in the brush during the rites. After his coronation he was taken into the inner sanctum.

During his reign he made several trips to the United States and always brought back shoes, men's

*Ruled West Indies Island*



Associated Press

*Warrant Officer Faustin E. Wirkus, as a marine recruiting sergeant at Newark, N. J., in 1939*

suits and dresses for the women and other items which had never been seen on the island.

His fame as King of LaGonave apparently cost him his kingdom. His story was published by the late William Seabrook in his book "White Magic" and widely circulated in syndicated newspaper articles. He was removed from the island in 1931, and although the official reason was that his health would suffer if he stayed any longer, he suspected that President Borno of Haiti objected to a "king" in his domain.

After his discharge, Mr. Wirkus and Taney Dudley, wife of Bide Dudley, a drama critic, collaborated in writing "The White King of LaGonave." Mr. Wirkus also lectured on his experiences.

In March, 1937, when he was a bond salesman with F. A. Eberstadt & Co., investment brokers, 39 Broadway, Mr. Wirkus married Mrs. Yula Fuller. Mrs. Wirkus and her adopted ten-year-old son had been living in Brooklyn since her husband's confinement in the hospital.

A brief service will be held today at 1:30 p. m. in the Brooklyn Naval Hospital chapel. Burial will take place tomorrow at the National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.