

folk of the white magician. Thus began the Marine's reputation as a sorcerer as well as a sharpshooter.

As military chief of Perodin, Wirkus commanded native vigilantes who volunteered to ferret out the small bands that were still looting their people. At odd hours of the day or night these scouts dropped into Wirkus' office to report. They never produced any bodies, however, to back up their claims. Wirkus finally demanded proof from one vigilante leader. The black left in high indignation. Several weeks later he returned and put a package of banana leaves on the Marine's desk. When Faustin opened the bundle, to his horror he saw six human left ears!

In 1920 Wirkus was transferred to a more tranquil Haitian neighborhood to give his frayed nerves a rest. A sub-district commander of Arcahaie, he was also nominally in charge of La Gonave. At last he was to find out about the isle whose evil reputation had fascinated him. He could learn nothing from the white officers who had formerly been stationed there, for none of them had ever dared venture into the interior.

Nevertheless, Wirkus applied for duty on the island. In preparation, he mixed with the natives on the mainland and learned a lot about them. Because he was reputed to be a master of magic, he even succeeded in getting initiated into the closely guarded voodoo rituals. Staining his face yellow, he passed himself off as a Jamaica Negro. In the full of the moon he was escorted into an eerie voodoo temple where a spirit voice summoned from Africa gruffly called him a stupid fellow and snubbed him.

At last, in 1925, Wirkus was appointed resident commander of La Gonave. Where others had found a hell hole, he found a Negro garden of Eden. He arrived on the isle with a huge box of bonbons. These he dispatched post haste, with his compliments, to the queen, Ti Memenne. Enormously pleased with the sweets, her dusky majesty called on him in her garb of state, a cotton store dress, gay bandana and shiny patent leather shoes.

In the first few months of his residency, Wirkus explored the jungle trails alone and unarmed. Hidden signal drums warned the villagers of his approach so that wherever he went, he was expected. He got to know the people, visited their huts, shared their food, listened to their troubles.

In no time at all, the islanders adored him. He, in turn, fell in love with them completely. He treated them with courtesy and never belittled their voodoo beliefs. He took them as he found them and didn't try to make them over.

As a token of their love, the natives made him a member of their 12 Congo Societies. These were unique labor unions — each ruled by a queen of the blacks' choosing. Ti Memenne, as the queen mother, ruled over the sub-queens. In this primitive co-operative, to the constant beat of the Congo drums, the natives swung their machetes and hoes in their neighbor's garden to plant the crops en masse. Each member got the benefit of one full day's work from all his fellow members. The work cycle was repeated until the end of harvest.

In this simple, orderly way Wirkus got seemingly impossible things done. At the risk of his own job, he exposed the local graft in the collection of taxes. He didn't rest until the island farmers got a square deal on assessments. Incidentally he also saved the Haitian government taxes amounting to \$40,000.

**HE BUILT** a landing field to show off the beauty of his island to officials from the mainland. He took the first census, a difficult job because of the local belief that only the devil kept track of his children. He wheedled seeds and blooded sows from the mainland government for his islanders. He taught them to plant in rows, instead of scattering seeds at random as they had been doing.

These practical reforms and his "magic" endeared him still more to the natives. It was said that although his skin was white, he had the sympathetic heart of a Negro.

The final attribute was his peculiar Christian name. A former native emperor of Haiti had been named Faustin I. He had vanished in 1848, promising that his namesake would some day return to take his throne. To the naive, mystic blacks of La Gonave, the friendly Marine seemed certainly to be the emperor, reincarnated.

In a highly constitutional manner Wirkus was nominated king in a secret conclave. His nomination was ratified at a convention of the 12 sub-queens. The final seal of approval came from a blind seer who confirmed the belief that he was indeed the reincarnation of Faustin I.

The Marine's coronation was celebrated with pomp before his 12,000 black subjects. A voodoo

priest smeared the blood of a white rooster on his wrists. Then, to the muffled roll of ceremonial drums, a crown made of sea-shells, hummingbird feathers and slivers of a broken mirror was jammed on his head.

Faustin II's royal status brought with it a fresh batch of responsibilities. As a medicine man, he was called upon for everything from delivering a baby to curing a hog with cholera. His most vexing problem was sick infants. Fortunately he got hold of a book on pediatrics. This he thumbed earnestly as he made his rounds through the jungle.

Accessible to everyone, Wirkus was hailed on the trails to settle boundary disputes and fishing concessions. The major items on his itinerant judicial docket, however, were love triangles. Although polygamy was accepted, all too often wives battled for exclusive possession of their common husband. When these marital mix-ups were dumped into his lap, Wirkus made the husband do the choosing. He insisted, however, that the discarded lady get a settlement of pots and pans.

**T**HE only problems the king dodged were those involving religion. One day a native policeman named Charlemonde appeared before his majesty. He was deeply troubled. It seems the fellow had been impressed by a Baptist missionary at a revival meeting he attended on the mainland. He was ready to be converted. The stickler was that first he would have to give up seven of his eight wives if he were to become a good Christian. Wirkus refused to advise the burly Negro. He did point out that, along with the seven wives, Charlemonde would also have to relinquish the seven plantations these women hoed and tended for him. It didn't take long, then, for the native to choose between his gardens and his immortal soul.

Where his knowledge fell short, the Marine king relied on his common sense. In one case, his know-how put him on a level with the local gods. An islander named Constant Polynice had a passion for cockfighting, but his gamecocks were so lazy that they constantly lost every bet their hopeful master placed on them.

Faustin II mapped out a training schedule for the indifferent roosters. He covered their food with gravel so they would have to dig for it. He threw them into the air in a dark room to make them exercise their wings. He tied a pullet just out of their reach.

A month later Polynice reported gleefully that now his "Marine Corps roosters" had muscle and a fighting heart. They had, in fact, beaten every single opponent. Only someone close to the gods, the native was convinced, could have thus transformed his miserable gladiators.

For four happy years Faustin II ruled his "Black children" by working with them. Whatever he taught them — whether it was building a house, breeding pigs, planting a field or comforting a colic baby — they listened eagerly. For in their simple, childlike way, they had given him their love.

Ironically enough, it was their very love which doomed the benevolent monarch's rule. The government of Haiti had begun to take an active interest in the island, now that the Marine had redeemed it from its ugly reputation. In 1928 the president of Haiti decided to visit La Gonave. This was the first inspection by a high dignitary from the mainland in the history of the island. Not long after Wirkus was relieved of his post. Rumor had it that the president couldn't tolerate the idea of a king — not even a jungle king — in any part of his republic.

Wirkus left without telling his subjects that the very honor they had bestowed upon him was responsible for his forced abdication. He knew it would make them miserable and he loved them too much for that. He finished his hitch at other stations in Haiti and left the service in 1931 to write a book about his amazing adventures. His fame soon circled the globe. From Iceland to Japan, newspapers carried the strange story of his tropical kingdom.

From a poor miner, the ex-Marine became a celebrity. After his book was published he lectured for a while. Then he became a customer's man on Wall Street. In 1939, when war clouds threatened, he ditched his prosaic job and enlisted in the Marines. This time his ability to understand and handle people landed him a public relations post.

Several years later, tragedy struck. The tough soldier who had withstood bullets, ambush and disease was stricken with a fatal disease. After a long and gallant fight, he died in 1945 at the age of 48.

If he has realized his dearest wish, his soul has joined the dark-skinned hosts he loved so well, to pick heavenly bananas in God's jungle garden. **END**

Atlantic City took it on the beach last year



## miami beach invasion

**G**AY and sun-blached Miami Beach will get it this year when the Marine Corps League gathers its forces in that fabulous town. Last year Atlantic City was given a boardwalk view of how a Marine landing must have looked to the pillboxed Japanese. This fall's assault against the Florida sands and candy-striped parasols may be still more impressive, for the man who handled the real thing from Tulagi to Okinawa, will be the convention chairman. We speak of General Holland M. Smith, whose Marines called him "Howling Mad" when he was out of earshot.

The League's 24th annual convention will run for five days, beginning on October 7. It's impressive title will be National Victory Assembly. The League, whose sole purpose is to promote the Corps and help Marines and former Marines who need help, has drawn the interest of a number of well known persons in this country. Many of these are on its 52-member national committee. They include Bernie Bierman, Milton Caniff, Attorney General Tom Clark, Bing Crosby, Jim Farley, Herbert Hoover, Eric Johnston, Tyrone Power, Eddie Rickenbacker and Gene Tunney. All are expected to be on hand when the gavel of League Commandant Joseph Alvarez opens the proceedings.

High spots of the convention, sandwiched between 18 solid hours of business meetings, will be a military show in the Orange Bowl; the mock invasion; a parade depicting significant historical Marine Corps events since 1776; the selection and crowning of a Miss Semper Fidelis, and miscellaneous social activities including a moonlight boat ride and the annual dinner, at which General A. A. Vandegrift, Marine Corps Commandant, will be the principal speaker.

In a message concerning the League meeting, General Vandegrift wrote:

"I am personally interested and wholeheartedly indorse the success of the Assembly. In the true spirit of Marines, I am sure it will be none other."

When the shouting is over and Leaguers are packing for a reluctant leave-taking they hope they will have collected enough money to finance a permanent tribute to the Corps. This would be an international Marine memorial club to be erected near the site of the mock landing Marines will make there on the afternoon of Thursday, October 9. **END**

