

## THE SEARCH FOR A MAN FROM HELL: Warren Jackson -- An Ordinary Man in Extraordinary Times

In 1930, Warren R. Jackson, wrote a 281 page memoir, Experiences of a Texas Soldier 1917-1919, recounting his service as a Marine in WWI. He gave the completed document to the archives at the University of Texas, instructing that it not to be opened for 50 years. Honoring his wishes, the memoir was stored and not placed in circulation until 1980, where it remained until 2001, when it was brought to the attention of retired Marine Col. George Clark.

While Warren doubted that his writings would be of interest to anyone, Clark, a noted author of Marine history, was very interested! Accounts by American enlisted men of WWI, are rare, and accounts by a Texas Marine are even rarer! While not a literary masterpiece, Clark found the memoir to be a detailed firsthand account of Warren's military experiences, from the time of enlistment until the day he came home.

No biographical information or contact information was included with the archived document. Warren was certainly deceased by 2001, and Clark set about trying to locate Warren's decedents. After an extensive investigation, Clark and his staff found no family, no photographs and no reliable biographical information. Presidio Press went ahead with the publication, titled, His Time in Hell: A Texas Marine in France.

In 2011 while doing my own research on Texas Marines in WWI, I spoke with Col. Clark and was surprised to learn, that despite the books popularity in military history circles, since its publication, no one has come forward with any additional information about Warren R. Jackson. It was as if the man's life began with his enlistment and ended with his return home to Texas. Warren was a mystery man and I became interested in trying to find him. Over the next six years, searching through military records, genealogical sites, city and county archives, newspapers, census and school records I gradually located the following bits and pieces of the man's life.

Warren Richard Jackson was born on 26 November 1896 in Runge, a small town in south central Texas. He was the youngest of seven children with older siblings Effie Gertrude, George Fred, Lucy May, Albert Page, Edgar F. and William Marvin. His father, Francis Z.T. Jackson and his mother Effie were both teachers. At that time, many small towns in Texas had no formal school system. Francis Jackson was a "subscriptionist" who advertised in newspapers for students whose parents paid tuition for their child to be educated by the "Professor". One might wonder how successful the senior Jackson was as a teacher. Throughout Warren's childhood and adolescence, the

family moved frequently, living in various Texas towns, including Sulphur Springs, Batesville, Runge, LaVernia, Blanco, Bastrop, and Floresville.

When the United States declared war on Germany in April, 1917, Warren was 20 years old and attending college at the Sam Houston Normal Institute in Huntsville, where he was living with his older sister, Lucy Robinson. With the approaching 5 June deadline to register for the selective service, Warren and his best friends Albert Ball and Jesse Palmer loaded up in a car, headed for Houston and enlisted. Colorful war posters of the time, advertising the Marines as “First to Fight” caught Warren’s attention. If they had to go into the military, they would choose their branch of service. They would be Marines! His friend, Albert Ball, summarized the spirit of the young enlistees when he said, “I’ll try anything once!”

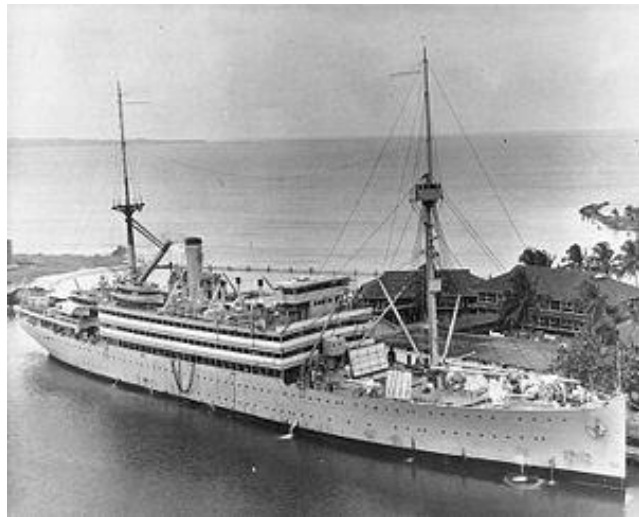


Warren mentions the colorful “First to Fight” recruitment posters as helping him and his friends to pick the Marine Corp over the Army. (Picture from public domain)

By June 5<sup>th</sup>, Warren, Albert and Jesse, some of the first recruits to enlist in 1917, were on a train heading to Port Royal, SC (now known as Parris Island) to begin their Marine training. By October 3<sup>rd</sup> with their training completed, the friends were on a troop transport ship, the USS Henderson, heading for France.



Five friends off to the Great War. Back row: Jesse Palmer, Albert Ball, Wilbourn Campbell  
Front row: Warren Jackson, Laurence Otey  
(Unpublished picture courtesy of Albert Ball's niece, Ann Staples.)



The USS Henderson that took four of these boys to France was only commissioned in May 1917. She was finally decommissioned in 1946. (Picture from public domain)

Warren's account of WWI is unique as it is one of the few memoirs written from the enlisted man's perspective. Warren survived every major Marine campaign in France, including Verdun, Belleau Woods, Soissons, St. Mihiel, Mont Blanc and finally Meuse-Argonne. Although he was often in life threatening circumstances, and he witnessed Albert Ball's serious wounding at Belleau Woods and the death of Jesse Palmer at Soissons, he writes in a matter of fact and unemotional style. He gives few hints of the impact the war had on him personally.

Warren's recall of the details of his day to day experience in France is amazing. He clearly records the battles and terrain they fought in, where they camped, what they ate, what they did in their time off, as well as the daily rumors running through the ranks. His caricatures of fellow Marines and some officers in his unit were often times humorous, but unflattering and probably the reason for the 50 year sanction put on the UT archives.

In an interview, with one of Warren's nieces I learned Warren's remarkable recall and memory had a touch of "divine intervention"! She revealed that the family had kept a Bible that Warren had carried with him throughout the war. Regulations prohibited soldiers from writing journals or diaries, in order to keep any tactical information from

falling into enemy hands. Despite these prohibitions, Warren had written notes, dates and events he was experiencing in the margins his Bible. These notes were an invaluable resource, as he wrote his memoir 20 years later.

When the war ended, November 1918, Warren remained with his unit in Germany for an additional nine months in the Army of German Occupation. Consequently it was almost a year after the war had ended before he returned home in August 1919. By that time, the country had long since finished its post war celebrations and everyone was moving on with their lives. Warren wasted no time, and immediately enrolled in classes at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). There is no record of when or why he left UT, but he had not completed his degree by the time he left.

Upon leaving the University, Warren worked briefly as a stenographer and had a position at the post office. Ultimately he decided to enter the field of education as a career and in 1925 Warren can be found living in Fentress, a small Texas town in central Texas with a population of less than 400. He is listed as the Superintendent of the district on stationary from Fentress High School. It was on this stationary, that Warren wrote several letters to Methodist Bishop Paul Kern, Dean of Theology at Southern Methodist University (SMU), expressing an interest in becoming a missionary and attending the University. Warren's letter and Kern's reply, advising Warren to first complete his Bachelor Degree before enrolling at SMU, can be found in the archives at SMU.



Warren Jackson as a young man. (Unpublished Photo courtesy of his niece, Francis Kerber.)



Warren Jackson in later life. (Unpublished photo courtesy of his niece, Francis Kerber.)

Warren did not enter the ministry but remained a very involved and active member of the Methodist Church throughout his life. He continued to follow in his father's footsteps, not only in his choice of a profession as a teacher, but also in his penchant to move frequently. A niece recalled a letter that Warren's mother, Effie, had written to him, chastising him for his frequent moves and job changes. She compared him to his father, and hoped he would settle down. Warren did seem to be following a somewhat shaky path as a teacher, primarily taking positions in schools in small rural Texas towns. Whether this was due to short comings in his resume or whether this was his preferred choice, we do not know.

In 1929 he joined the Hardin school system, northeast of Houston, a town with a population of only 80! Several newspaper articles in the Liberty Vindicator report that Warren had come to the school after the term was already under way and was the principal and fourth grade teacher. At the end of the school term, despite the newspapers report of a successful academic year for the students, Warren was once again moving on.

At the same time Warren was pursuing his career goals, he also took the time to write his memoir. We do not know how long it took him to write his remembrances but by

August, 1930 the Barker History Center at the University of Texas registered the receipt of a 281 page document from Warren Jackson in its archives. Correspondence from Warren to Winnie Allen, archivist for the Center, instructs them to seal the document until 1980. In a letter to Ms. Allen, Warren mentions that he is teaching in Harleton, which at the time was a town of 300 people, southwest of Texarkana.

When and where Warren completed his Bachelor's Degree is not known. By 1935 he had submitted his master's thesis at the University of Texas at Austin and listed Donna, in the Rio Grande valley, as his hometown. While the University retains a copy of his thesis, they have no record of his attendance and completion of either his Bachelor or his Master's degree. Warren finally took his mother's concerns to heart and seems to have settled down in the Donna/McAllen area where in 1938, as the age of 42, he married another Donna school teacher, Willie Eargle.

When WWII began, Warren was 46 years old and his military registration card lists him as a teacher, living in Donna. A 1947 McAllen city directory lists him as residing in McAllen where he was a principal in the McAllen Independent School System. By the time of the 1955 city directory The Jacksons continued to live in McAllen, but Warren was now teaching at the newly created Sharyland school system just west of McAllen. Effie would have been proud to know that her son had been a teacher and an administrator in the McAllen School System for over 30 years and from which he retired in 1969 at the age of 73.

Warren and Willie had no children, but nieces and nephews who were interviewed remember them as a loving, well matched couple, who "doted" on each other. He died on 21 January 1989 in McAllen at the age of 92, after a short illness. He and Willie had celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary just a few months before. Willie followed him in death that next October.

The family was well aware of their uncle's war experiences and reported that he had written several drafts of his memoir. They related that Warren returned to France in 1977 to revisit several of his old battlefields. He then completed a 349 page second draft of his manuscript which was typed and edited by a niece, under the title of: A Young Man Goes to War, And Finds That It Is "one weird mass of chaotic horror". It is with this title that Warren tells us just exactly what his experience in WWI was like, "a mass of chaotic horror"! Had Warren had the opportunity to put a title to the memoir published by Clark, he would probably have been in total agreement with the title His Time in Hell.

My research, led me to Warren and Willie's extended family who were extremely pleased to discover that Warren's memoirs had been published and graciously shared their remembrances and copies of his second unpublished memoir. Their photos finally

allowed me to put a face to his name and his memoir. When I found Warren, I found a pretty unremarkable guy, who spent two harrowing years, front and center during one of the defining moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Warren R. Jackson was an ordinary man, who survived extraordinary times. After living through the “chaotic horror” of the war, when so many of his friends and fellow Marines were killed or wounded, perhaps it was Warren’s plan to do just that, live an ordinary and unremarkable life. It was my honor to have found him.