

Marcus Jacquez Jr.

U.S. Army, Sergeant

1919 - 2004

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Marcus Jacquez Jr. was born in El Paso, Texas, November 20, 1919, to Mexican immigrants Marcus and Patrocinio (Juarez) Jacquez. As the third child of ten, Marcus spent his early years in Texas and Colorado before his family moved to Marion County, West Virginia, around 1926.

By 1930, the Jacquez family was living in the unincorporated community of Paw Paw in Marion County with Marcus's father working as a coal miner. Although Marcus Sr. had no formal schooling and learned English as a second language, he likely gained important knowledge that assisted him as a coal loader in West Virginia from when the family lived in Morley, Colorado, in the 1920s.



Coal miners' barracks in Dakota, West Virginia, where Marcus Jacquez worked before being drafted. WVU Libraries

Like the Appalachian region, the coal mines of Morley produced hundreds of tons of coal a day, which was used to make steel and power the trains that operated on the Santa Fe Railroad. While in Paw Paw, the Jacquez family had three lodgers living in their rented property. Although this was most likely a way to acquire extra money amid the Great Depression, the family may have also sought lodgers to maintain a sense of community—as all three of their roomers were Spanish-speaking men born in Mexico. The family continued to lodge Mexican immigrants when they moved to Fairmont, West Virginia, as well.

As the oldest son, Marcus likely attained a job at a young age to assist his family economically. After completing only two years of high school, Marcus continued to live with his family while working full time as a semi-skilled coal miner in machine operations at the Industrial Collieries Corporation in Dakota, Marion County, West Virginia. Approximately two miles north of the family's home in Fairmont, the Industrial Collieries Corporation was a subsidiary of Bethlehem Steel. When the Second World War broke out, the mine supplied coal to the Baltimore shipyards. Although already supporting the war effort through his work as a coal miner, Marcus was drafted into the United States Army. While coal miners often received draft deferments, the fact Marcus was single and without dependents likely led to him being selected for service. He enlisted on January 23, 1942, at Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio.

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**The unit patch of the 3rd Armored
“Spearhead” Division. US Holocaust
Memorial Museum collections**

Now a private in the U.S. Army, Marcus was sent to the newly constructed Camp Polk, located in the Kisatchie National Forest in West Louisiana. Camp Polk was the training home of various armored units including the Third Armored Division, which Marcus belonged to. At Camp Polk, the enlisted men learned how to shoot and drive the United States Army’s growing arsenal of armored weapons and vehicles. In June 1942, Marcus was admitted to the military hospital at Camp Polk for cholangitis. He was one of many soldiers hospitalized for this illness, which swept through the Third Armored Division and much of the army during this time. Although a common ailment among soldiers during times of war and often coded as “cholangitis” or “spirochetal jaundice,” this outbreak was related to the yellow fever vaccination

World War II soldiers received. The vaccine was made with human blood serum contaminated with hepatitis B, which caused many of the infected soldiers to fall ill with a fever, chills, abdominal pain, and a change in skin color before their symptoms eventually subsided.

Marcus returned to duty after 25 days in the hospital and likely accompanied the division to Camp Young, California, where they took part in training maneuvers in the Mojave Desert. Various soldiers of the division noted that the hot and arid desert atmosphere—vastly different from the humid swamps of Louisiana—did more to toughen the men for combat than all their previous training. The Third Armored Division also received training at Camp Pickett, Virginia, and Indiantown Gap Military Reservation in Pennsylvania from January to August 1943 before departing for Europe on September 4. Once the division arrived in England on September 15, they spent the next nine months completing road marches, army drill, range firing, and pre-invasion training near Somerset, Liverpool, and Bristol. By this point, Marcus had been in the service of the United States Army for over two years, spending all his time training without seeing the enemy or participating in combat.

After their extensive training, the Third Armored Division landed at Omaha Beach and began combat operations on June 24, 1944. Marcus’s first taste of combat came at the small town of Villiers Fossard before the division advanced toward the strategic crossroads town of Saint-Lô. Under German occupation, Saint-Lô was surrounded by a patchwork of small fields encompassed by thick earthen embankments with large shrubs called hedgerows growing on top. These hedgerows stood four to 15 feet high and created a natural fortification system and strong defensive position for the Germans. Armored support was limited by the difficult terrain, and troops were often forced into close-quarters combat. The slow but steady push toward Saint-Lô ended on July 18, 1944, when American troops occupied the town. This battle and their continued advance across France and Belgium earned the division their famed nickname of “Spearhead” due to them leading the First Army throughout the Normandy Campaign.

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American troops fight their way through Aachen, near the 3rd Armored Division's area of operations.
US Army Signal Corps photo, NARA

With Saint-Lô behind them, the Third Armored Division continued eastward, reaching the rugged and muddy Hürtgen Forest along the Belgian-German border by mid-September 1944. Located between the Rur River and the city of Aachen, the Third Armored Division engaged the Germans in a series of battles along the Siegfried Line from September to November. Also known as the West Wall, the Siegfried Line was a network of fortified towns containing pillboxes, tank traps, and minefields that made combat difficult and bloody. This defensive line, along with the dense conifer forest, protected the German's industrial centers in the Ruhr and Saar regions. To crack this redoubt, the Americans launched Operation Queen on November 16, 1944. As part of this operation, the Third Armored Division was tasked with taking the four villages of Werth, Koettenich, Scherpenseel, and Hastenrath. Their capture would give control of the Stolberg Corridor to the Allies, which was one of the few places in the thick Hürtgen Forest armored vehicles could pass to reach the Roer River and Cologne. Met with concealed minefields, intense German fire, deep mud, and debris, the Spearhead Division took heavy casualties before securing their objectives.

Likely during this battle for the Stolberg Corridor on November 16, Marcus received a bullet wound below his ribcage. Although the bullet missed vital organs, the wound caused a cavity in his chest that filled with fluid and caused intense pain and difficulty breathing. Perhaps due to the heroism of combat medics in the division who set up a forward receiving station amid battle, Marcus received immediate attention and was later evacuated from the Hürtgen Forest due to the severity of his wounds. He was admitted to a long-term convalescent hospital and spent 233 days recuperating. Between this wound and the 25 days in the hospital at Camp Polk, Marcus spent

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more time in the hospital than in combat. Missing the Battle of the Bulge, the liberation of the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp, and the Battle of Dessau, Marcus received a Purple Heart and ended his military service on July 7, 1945, holding the rank of sergeant. His heroic efforts during World War II may have inspired his younger brothers Joseph, Anthony, and Angelo to serve as well. Joseph enlisted in the Navy in August 1943, Anthony enlisted in the Army Air Force in December 1945, and Angelo served in the Army during the Korean Conflict.

Jacquez returned home from the war and married Betty Jean Sapp. The couple lived in Fairmont, West Virginia, and had one son, Michael. Betty worked as a telephone operator, while Marcus continued his pre-war job in the coal mines. With years of personal experience in the mines, as well as the generational knowledge that came from his father, Marcus helped improve the workplace safety conditions for miners through his job for the Safety Department of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation until his retirement in 1982. Marcus was also a member of Fairmont's Faith United Methodist Church, as well as the Masonic Lodge No. 157 Scottish Rite Osiris Temple. At the age of 84, Marcus Jacquez Jr. passed away at Fairmont General Hospital March 20, 2004, and was interred with full military honors in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown four days later.



A column of 3rd Armored Division troops cross through the Siegfried Line in September 1944. *Wikimedia Commons*

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section 7
Site 1026

Date of Interment: March 24, 2004

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
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