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# Sickly boy became adventurous man

Francis Murray Mack (1887-1979), a Fort Mill native, was descended from a large number of Presbyterian ministers and educators on both his mother's and father's sides.

Mack was sickly as a boy and didn't start school until he was 8. When he was 14, he was sent to a preparatory school in Georgia. His older sister was at nearby Agnes Scott College planning to become a teacher.

With his sister's help he mastered French, Latin and math so well that at both Davidson College and Cornell University he ranked highest in those subjects. To the end of his life, Mack maintained he was not as bright as his classmates, he just worked harder.

After college he came home to work at the Fort Mill Manufacturing Co. (the first Springs Industries plant). Like all manager trainees, he worked in various departments: weaving, spinning, shipping and

dye.

Around 1910 Mack joined the Fort Mill National Guard. In 1914 the Guard was sent to the Mexican border.

More than 60 years later Mack recalled a week's hike from the Rio Grande to Las Cruces, N.M. He said the major thing soldiers in his company learned was how to care for their feet and clothes.

Fred Nims was the company's song leader, and no matter how tired they were, he kept them singing. Later, when the Fort Mill National Guard under Col. Thomas Spratt entered World War I as part of the famed Old Hickory Division they became known as "the singing company."

Other companies took it up, and it was soon "the singing battalion." Before long marching to song became a characteristic of the whole regiment.

Mack sang a verse from a favorite song:

*Keep your head down, Jerry Boy,  
We will catch the Kaiser by the tail,*

*Ride him home on a rail.*

*For we're from Carolina — CAR-O-LI-NA!*

When Mack was in basic train-

ing at what was then Camp Jackson in Columbia, he competed for the rank of lieutenant.

Most of the other candidates were graduates of military schools, but Mack had committed the manual to memory and had practiced all the drill orders using small sticks to represent the various officer levels. He placed fourth. However, there was one thing he knew nothing about: the use of the saber.

Mack recalled, "Tom Spratt told me I had done well except that I handled the saber as if it were a pitchfork." Mack was made second lieutenant.

Mack had been on Cornell's wrestling squad and had taken boxing lessons. He had also studied jujitsu.

He was in charge of 80 to 90 men, many of them gifted athletes. He was expected to drill the men, but he figured that was for open fields and wouldn't help in the trenches. Instead, Mack taught his men the athletic skills he knew. All the time he feared he would be court-martialed for disobeying orders.

Unexpectedly, he was appointed first lieutenant and ordered to train the men for close combat. He said

he fell back on things he had learned as a Boy Scout troop leader, and they worked.

Mack and his men had a number of narrow escapes. He was gassed. This made him so nauseated that he had to get out of a convoy truck and vomit. He got back in with a splitting headache.

Another soldier was in his seat. He told Mack to sit at his feet and he would rub Mack's head to relieve the headache. A shell struck, and Mack was covered with blood. The soldier sitting in Mack's old seat had been killed instantly.

From 1921 to 1938, Mack served as Fort Mill superintendent of schools. He fought in World War II and in 1946-47 served as military governor of Taegu, Korea.

Mack came back to Fort Mill in 1948 and took up farming with great enthusiasm; he had studied agriculture at Cornell. This occupied him until 1976, when he retired because of health problems.

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