



Lavaca County and The Spanish American War

By Brenda Lincke Fisseler

The next several issues of this newsletter will share the story of Lavaca County during the Spanish-American War and later the Philippine-American War. While both military actions were short term conflicts, Lavaca County men were involved in both and this newsletter will endeavor to share information about these men and their commitments to service. This newsletter series will also highlight some of the individuals whose stories are unique and those who lost their lives in service to their county.



Volunteers in the Spanish American War

The next issues of this newsletter will focus on the individuals who served from Lavaca County in the Spanish-American War. Many times, the stories will be brief, but there will be instances where the story can be quite unusual.

John Winters Willeford
1st Texas Cavalry Co. A
Enlisted: June 27, 1898
Discharged: November 14, 1898

John Winter (J.B.) Willeford was born on January 18, 1878 in Texas. He enlisted in the 1st Texas Cavalry Co. A on June 27, 1898 and was discharged on November 14, 1898.

Unlike other men in previous newsletters, what is most remarkable about John is not so much how he lived, but how he died! Willeford married Theresie Buschermihle Zbitowski Dufner on October 10, 1936. He previously had been married to Claude Shoemake and Theresie had previously been married to Frank Zbitowski and James Dufner.

On Tuesday evening, March 16, 1937, the union of John and Theresie came to a bitter and violent conclusion.



*Please share this newsletter
with any one who might be
interested!*

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Tuesday night, March 16, 1937, Willeford shot and killed his wife, Theresie and stepdaughter, Lillie Dufner. He drove to the house where his estranged wife lived with her daughter in south Hallettsville and sent his friend, Joe Matejek, to call her out. First, she refused, but then she came out, joined by her daughter, Mrs. Lillie Dufner, and a visitor, Mrs. F. Jurek. A bitter quarrel ensued until Mrs. Willeford screamed "He's got a gun!" The two women began to run. Willeford shot Lillie five times, four in the back and one in the arm. Mrs. Willeford was hit once, the bullet entering her heart. Both women ran around their house and fell dead.

After the shooting, a neighbor, Jim Dufner, Mrs. Willeford's second husband, attempted to detain Willeford, but he was pushed into a barbed wire fence, but not until he wrestled the empty gun from Willeford. Willeford jumped into his car and fled the scene. Dufner told police that "Willeford threatened to kill the whole family. He had went to Lillie's home looking for Theresie.

It was later learned that the gun belonged to Joe Matejek, who had accompanied Williford on the scene.

A neighbor, Fred Vollentine, had sensed trouble before the shooting began, and sent one of Mrs. Dufner's boys to call the officers, but the boy had barely reached town when the shooting began.

Willeford had planned the deed. At his home near Gerdes gin, a suitcase of clothes along with a rifle were found. Earlier that evening he had drinks with friends and filled his car up with gas at Leopold's Service Station and asked for directions to Del Rio.

Mrs. Willeford was in the process of obtaining a divorce from Willeford when the shooting happened.

The funerals of Theresie Willeford and Lillie Dufner were held on Wednesday afternoon, March 17, 1937.

To be continued....



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