



The “Bandit War” and the Porvenir Massacre

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6 Dec 2015

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The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1920

In the Mexican Election of 1910 wealthy landowner Francisco Madero of Coahuila attempted to unseat President Porfirio Díaz in a general election. Díaz had been the virtual dictator of Mexico for 34 years maintaining an authoritarian regime. In 1909 he received a nod from the US to his continued presidency when President Taft made the first presidential visit to Mexico to discuss the continued protection of US business interests in Mexico.

Díaz responded by banning Madero's political party and arresting his opponent. Madero escaped and fled to San Antonio, Texas where he issued a manifesto, the *Plan de San Luis Potosí*. It called for "free suffrage and no re-election" of Díaz and sparked the Mexican revolution.

Díaz' federal troops and Madero's rebels fought 24 battles across Mexico over a six-month period. These extended as near to Texas north as Ciudad Juarez and Agua Prieta. Leaders such as Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Venustiano Carranza emerged. US policy was vague, shifting towards the rebels and ignoring breeches of the US neutrality laws.

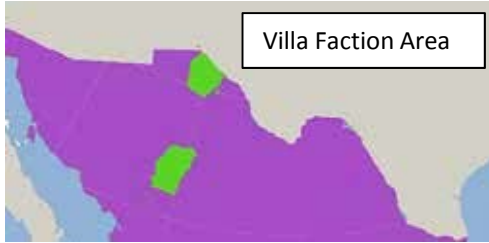
Díaz was forced to resign from office and Madero was sworn in as the 33rd President of Mexico in November of 1911. Madero was elected president in October of 1911 but was a weak leader. He had half-hearted support from the military and lost prestige. Strikes occurred; opposing political parties formed, and again rebels took up arms.

In 1913 the General Victoriano Huerta, in charge of Mexico City, staged a coup. Both President Madero and his Vice-President were executed. This led to open revolutionary warfare. Revolutionary armies under leaders such as Venustiano Carranza, Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata once again roamed the country.

America was generally opposed to General Huerta and his coup and favored the more democratic rebels. The leading military commander was Venustiano Carranza. Huerta received many of his arms shipments from Germany through the port of Veracruz. To prevent German arms shipments to Huerta, a force of 787 Marines and sailors seized and occupied Veracruz from April to November of 1914.

After military losses General/President Huerta was forced to resign in 1914 and fled to the US on a German ship loaded with gold. He was captured by the FBI and eventually died in US custody in a prison at Ft. Bliss in El Paso.

Following Huerta's ouster, Venustiano Carranza served as acting president and a political convention convened. An alliance of Pancho Villa's División del Norte (Northern Division) and Emiliano Zapata's Ejército Libertador del Sur (Liberation Army of the South) opposed Carranza continuing in power as president.



Unable to unseat Carranza, the Villa-Zapata faction left the convention in open revolt. Carranza's forces defeated Villa and Zapata at the Battle of Celaya in 1915. The groups rapidly dispersed into guerilla bands subsisting off raids. The US recognized Carranza, infuriating the revolutionary factions.

From 1915 to 1920 guerilla bands roamed northern Mexico striking into the US. In 1915-16, more than 30 incidents occurred in Texas. Some were followers of Pancho Villa, some were common bandits, and some had vague affiliations.

Adding Fuel to the Fire

Plan de San Diego (1915)

Raids into Texas

The Zimmerman Telegram (1917)

It is important to understand the mindset that existed in Texas and the US at the time of the Brite Ranch and Porvenir raids. Anglos were greatly outnumbered on the Texas border. For the most part relations had been peaceful—until the Mexican Revolution.

On January 24, 1915, a printed copy of a revolutionary manifesto called the ***Plan de San Diego*** was confiscated in McAllen, Texas. The simple paper document, and later revisions, did enormous damage by raising fears and provoking reactions. It cost the lives of both Anglos and Tejanos. In the aftermath of the discovery of the *Plan*, Governor James Ferguson instructed Ranger Captain Henry Lee Ransom, the most notorious Ranger Captain of the era and likely in all Ranger history “to go down there and clean it up if you have to kill every damn man connected with it.”

The *Plan de San Diego* was written in a jail in Monterrey, Mexico. It called for a “Liberating Army of Races and Peoples” to rise up on July 20, 1915. It was to be formed of Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, Indians and Japanese who would seize the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Colorado and form a new Republic of Texas. All Anglo males over the age of 16 were to be executed. No uprising occurred, but the *Plan de San Diego* was national news. Raiding parties, ostensibly following the *Plan de San Diego* began to hit isolated farms and ranches. The manifesto was taken even more seriously as events escalated.

On March 9, 1916, between 485 men from Pancho Villas' *División del Norte* struck Columbus, New Mexico. Seeking supplies, they attacked a 13th US Cavalry detachment, set fire to the town, stole seized 100 horses and mules and killed 18 civilians.

In retaliation, in March of 1916 the US Army launched a punitive expedition of 6,000 men into Mexico under Gen. John J. Pershing. Mexican President Carranza threatened a counter invasion of the United States even though he lacked the means to do so.

In Texas, in May of 1916, just 56 days after the Columbus raid, Villa raiders attacked the villages of Glenn Springs and Boquillas in southern Brewster County. At Glenn Springs nine soldiers of Troop A of the 14th Cavalry were attacked, losing three killed and four wounded. Twelve miles away, at Boquillas, raiders robbed the Puerto Rico Mining Company payroll and kidnapped two storekeepers.

As a result, in 1916 the Texas National Guard was federalized and 116,957 guardsmen were stationed from California to Texas and more than a dozen cavalry camps were created around the Big Bend.

The Zimmerman Telegram was just as explosive as the *Plan de San Diego* and the Border raids. It provoked national outrage and helped spark America's entry into World War I.

On January 1917 the Foreign Secretary of the German Empire, Arthur Zimmermann, sent a coded Western Union cable to German ambassador to Mexico Heinrich von Eckardt for President Carranza. It was secretly intercepted in Washington and decoded. It stated:

We make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: ... Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain ...

Mexico was technically neutral in WW I, but it was known to be pro-German as early as 1915. Early on, a German attaché transferred \$12 million to Mexico in an attempt to incite war with the US. President Carranza took the money, but rejected the idea of warfare as impractical.

A year before the Zimmerman Telegram German saboteurs attacked a munitions port in New Jersey in 1916 and the Mare Island Naval Shipyard in California. They were discovered to be based in Mexico.

The Brite Ranch Raid and the Porvenir Massacre



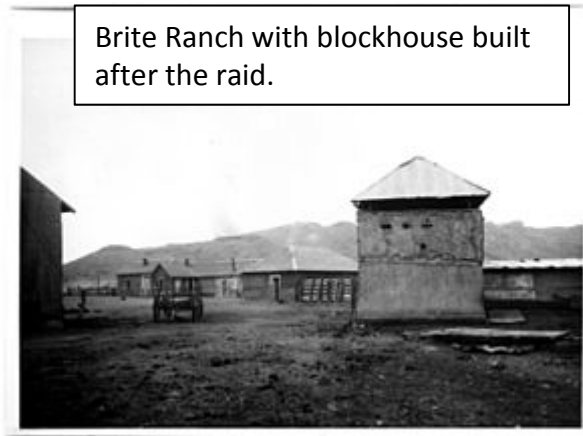
The Brite Ranch raid and Porvenir Massacre in 1917 occurred in this explosive climate. Texans were infuriated by the discovery of the *Plan de San Diego* in 1915, the 30+ raids in New Mexico

and Texas in 1915-16, and the Zimmerman telegram fomenting invasion was national news in January of 1917. They were mindful that In June of 1915 Governor James E. Ferguson had asked for Army troops and was told that combating banditry was a state responsibility. Only after the 1916 Columbus Raid in New Mexico did the Federal Government agree to a massive troop buildup on the Border. Texans felt they were largely on their own.

Initially the Ranger force had only 13 underpaid and ill-equipped men to respond. However, a massive and ill-considered mobilization added about 500 special Rangers to the enlistment roles.

The Ranger force could not absorb these men, who were usually unpaid, untrained, sometimes had criminal records and counted among them some men who “bought” their commissions. Additionally, historians consider two of the Texas Ranger commanders on the Border among the worst: Capt. Henry Lee Ransom and Captain Munroe Fox.

Brite Ranch Raid – December 25, 1917



Brite Ranch with blockhouse built after the raid.

The Brite Ranch near Marfa was owned by Lucas Charles Brite It was and 15 miles east the Rio Grande. Accounts and number of participants differ, but on Christmas morning ranch foreman Van Neill, his father Sam Neill, their family, and some Mexican-American families were at the ranch house. There may also been some guests for a Christmas party.

At a distance, Sam Neill spotted a raiding party of about 45 armed Mexicans approaching. He picked up a rifle and shot one of the raiders off

his horse. Other ranchmen joined the fight; the raiders cut the telephone lines so help could not be called. A skirmish ensued with the raiders backing off and taking two ranch hands hostage.

To keep the raiders away from their barricaded ranch house, Van Neill gave the raiders keys to the ranch general store which they robbed of clothes, saddles, shoes food and cash. These items would later figure prominently in the Porvenir Massacre. During the robbery the US Post Office coach with two passengers arrived with two Hispanic passengers. The raiders shot the two passengers and hung the postman inside the store. Later a minister and his family from Marfa arrived and were permitted to join the Neills and their guests unmolested.

Some accounts state that during the firefight some of the Neill’s guests snuck away to get help. A neighboring rancher, James L. Cobb, heard gunfire, investigated in his automobile, and drove to a telephone to summon a Sheriff’s posse and the 8th US Cavalry. The party commandeered automobiles and drove to the ranch. Upon the approach of the posse the raiders loaded up what they could carry, stole horses from the ranch as pack animals, and fled south across the Candelaria Rim into Mexico where the Americans could not pursue.

On December 26th Colonel George Langhorne, the 8th Cavalry commanding officer, assembled a punitive expedition of about 200 8th Cavalry troopers and civilians to capture or kill the raiders and recover stolen property. Troops came from Ruidosa and Marfa and crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico at Los Fresnos. About 30 raiders were cornered San Bernardino Canyon, near Pilares; in the ensuing gun battle 10 were killed and horses and property recovered.

Porvenir Massacre – January, 1917

It was suspected that the raiders who had been active around the Brite Ranch were based in Porvenir and a Mexican village across the river. Records differ, but on or about January 27, 1918, a force of eight Texas Rangers and 8th Cavalry soldiers and a few local ranchers arrived at the ranch of Manuel Morales near Porvenir.

The events of what occurred remain in dispute and are polarized because of Federal and State investigations. The accounts basically agree that a search of the town was conducted by Rangers and Cavalry. Some reports state that and shoes, equipment and clothing matching that stolen from the Brite Ranch was found.

Tensions were unquestionably high over the seven US Cavalry casualties and kidnappings at Glenn Springs and Boquillas, and the killing of the postal employee and passenger at Brite Ranch.

What is certain is that at the end 15 Mexicans allegedly aged 16 to 72 and all residents of Porvenir lay dead. There are essentially two versions: (1) the accounts of Texas Ranger Captain J. Munroe Fox and Col. George T. Langhorne of the 8th Cavalry, and (2) the accounts of local residents and 8th Cavalry Capt. Henry H. Anderson.

Texas Ranger Capt. Fox and US Cavalry Col. Langhorne accounts –

A month after the Porvenir incident Texas Ranger Capt. Fox of Co. B made a report to the Adjutant General. He claimed that he took 15 Mexicans into custody were found with pocket knives, soap, and shoes from the Brite Ranch. Fox marched the 15 suspects to the edge of town to confine them. He claimed that along the way that they were fired upon from the brush and they returned fire. During the exchange the 15 all prisoners were killed.

Col. George T. Langhorne of the US 8th Cavalry corroborated the account and stated that the ranger party was indeed fired upon from the brush by the "Mexicans," and that the Rangers fired back.

US Cavalry Capt. Henry H. Anderson Porvenir residents –

After protests by the Mexican government a federal investigation was launched into the role of the Army. Cavalry Capt. Henry H. Anderson stated that the army had nothing to do with the affair and that "a number of Mexicans sought and received protection from the military." He

stated that he sent 12 troopers with the Rangers and prisoners. The troopers waited below the place the prisoners were taken, "not knowing that the Rangers and ranchmen were going to murder the men." He called the Ranger account a "whitewash." Although this served to exonerate the Army, the statement about alleged murder was in direct contradiction to his superior officer Col. Langhorne.

About 18 months later Henry Warren, son-in-law of, Tiburcio Jáquez, who was killed in the incident, wrote an account. Warren's memoir contradicted Capt. Anderson, he stated the army troops all departed shortly after the search of the town at which time the Rangers executed their prisoners. Capt. Anderson said the Army remained they there, at a distance. Warren's account also claimed that the Brite Ranch raid was not the work of bandits, but a local Rancher, Tom Snider, who organized the Brite Ranch raid to steal horses. He then directed the Rangers and Army to Porvenir, rumored to be a bandit marshaling point, to cover his horse theft.

In the aftermath, Governor William P. Hobby disbanded Company B of the Texas Rangers and dismissed five rangers.

Firearms

Shell casings constituted one of the primary sources of evidence collected at the scenes of the Porvenir massacre, the Brite Ranch and other raids. Determining who fired what is another matter, as modern forensic techniques did not exist and each side carried examples of the same weapons.

Texas Rangers

Between 1910 and 1920 the Texas Rangers were allowed to use whatever firearms they wished. Rangers either furnished their own weapons or at their request the assistant quartermaster general, Colonel R.H. Beckham, would order the weapon for them and deduct its cost from their salary. The state would generally issue a Colt M1873 pistol with a 5" barrel and a Winchester rifle.

Most Rangers preferred to draw their ammunition free from State stocks, and so used common firearms. The Quartermaster furnished ammunition at State expense for the M1895 Winchester using .30-40 Crag (government) cartridges Colt .45. The common at this time were:

- **Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army (aka Single Action, and Model P).** Chambered commonly in .45 Colt (.45 Colt LC) ; .44-40 WCF, .45 Schofield; .38-40 WCF, .32-20 WCF, .38 Colt Usually a 5.5" barrel; many variations
- **Smith & Wesson Schofield Revolver** .44 Russian, .44 S&W American., .45 Schofield, .38 S&W
- **Winchester M1894.** .30 WCF caliber.

- **Winchester M1895.** The favorite long-gun was the Model 1895 box magazine Winchester carbine firing .30-40 Crag-Jorgensen (government) cartridges.

Some Rangers carried “exotic” weapons; for example, in 1907 Texas Ranger Captain John R. Rogers carried a German Luger. In 1912 Ranger Paul McAlister using the brand new M1911 automatic when very few were available by that date.

Were the iconic Colt M1911 Automatics carried on the Border by Rangers? In 1913 the Assistant Quartermaster for the Texas Rangers recommended State purchase of the Colts New Model Government Automatic. Some made it into hands of Rangers by 1915-1918, but many still carried Colt’s single-action revolvers well into the 1930s.

US Cavalry

During the Mexican Revolution US Cavalry and National Guard were on the Border. The US Cavalry usually carried more recent weapons while the National Guard was issued older weapons. Three types of rifles were in general use:

- **Springfield Model 1892-99 Krag-Jørgensen carbines.** .30-40 Krag cartridge
- **Springfield M1888 (and others) Trapdoor Springfield Rifles.** .45-70 caliber; used by the National guard well into the 20th century.
- **Springfield Model 1903** (*possibly* some in use; infantry weapon). .30-06 cartridge.

Pistols commonly carried by US Army and National Guard were:

- **Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army.** Chambered commonly in .45 Colt (.45 Colt LC); and the interchangeable .45 Schofield.
- **Smith & Wesson Schofield Revolver.** .44 Russian, .44 S&W American., .45 Schofield, .38 S&W.
- **Colt New Army M1889, M1892 & M1903.** .38 LC
- **Colt Model 1903 Automatic** (officers). .32 ACP
- **Colt M1911.** .45 ACP. Adopted in 1911, delivered to the US Army in very limited quantity before 1917. How many made it to the Border is unknown.

Raider/Bandit/Villa Weapons

The followers of Villa and raiders are known to have used pistols and rifles of American, German, French, Japanese, Spanish and Belgian manufacture. They were purchased by the Mexican government, smuggled over the border and privately imported, Below are some of the most common.

- **Colt .38, .40, .44, .45 cal Single Action (SA) and Double Action (DA) 6 Shot Revolvers.**
- **Colt .45 cal SA Revolvers.** Revolving cylinder; length 12.5 inches; barrel 7.5 inches; weight 2 pounds 5 ounces; sights front blade, rear groove; grips walnut. A lot of 400 Colt .45 SA revolvers were purchased by the Mexican government in 1879. They were nickel plated with one-piece walnut grips. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Colt M1902 .38 cal Automatic Pistol 8 Rounds. Weight 2 pounds 7 ounces; Length 9 inches;** Barrel length 6 inches; Cartridge .38 ACP; Action Recoil, semi-automatic; 8-round in line detachable box magazine; Sights: Front Blade & Rear Notch. first automatic pistol adopted by the Mexican army and it was included in the 1914 Mexican Army. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Colt M1911 (& 1911A1) .45 cal Automatic Pistol 7-Rounds + 1 .** Purchased by the Mexican Government began after 1918. The standard commercial pistol adopted by the United States War Department, blued, grips were checked walnut. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Colt M1879.45 cal DA Revolver:** revolving cylinder; as SA but weight 2 pounds 7 ounces; grips hard black rubber. Although not a popular military firearm, 500 were sold to Mexico in 1890; blued finish with lanyard swivel in the distinctive 'beak-shaped' butt. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Colt M1878 .45 DA Army Revolver:** Total Length: 12.5"; Barrel Length: 7.5"; Weight: 2 pounds, 7 ounces; 6 rounds; Sights: Front Blade, Rear Notch. by the Colt factory described this pistol as the Model 1878 and/or the Double Action Army revolver. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Remington M1875 (Improved) Army .45 cal 6 Shot Revolver.** Revolving cylinder; length 13.75 inches; barrel 7.5 inches; weight 44 ounces; sights front blade, rear groove; grips oiled walnut; lanyard ring on the butt; nickel plated finish. The Mexican government purchased an estimated 1,000 sometime between 1879 and 1889. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Remington M1891 .38 cal DA/SA 5 Shot Revolver.** Revolving cylinder; length 6.25 inches plus barrel, barrel unknown; weight unknown; sights front blade, rear notch; checked hard black rubber grips; unusual bronze frame. These five shot revolvers were only made for

the Mexican government, which bought 2,000. [see Blake, Mike in references below].

- **St Etienne M1873 or M1874 11mm 6 shot DA/SA Revolvers.** Obsolete black powder revolving cylinder guns.
- **St Etienne M1892 Modele d'Ordonnance 8mm 6 shot DA/SA Revolvers.** Also known as the 8mm Lebel. A smaller smokeless powder French service revolver and standard issue sidearm for French military officers. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Smith & Wesson (and Spanish & Belgian copies) Russian Model .44 cal 6 Shot SA Revolvers.** Revolving cylinder; length 12.75 inches; barrel 7 1/8 inches; weight 2.75 pounds; sights front blade, rear notch. Some were genuine USA Smith & Wesson manufactured, but most were Spanish and Belgian copies; nickel plated and the ejector was much shorter than the originals. Spanish copies produced about 1879; they were single action only, but had black rubber grips instead of plain wood. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Pieper M1893 8mm 7 Shot DA/SA Revolver.** Revolving cylinder; length 10.5 inches, barrel 5.4 inches; weight 2 pounds 4 ounces; sights front blade, rear notch; grips hard black checked rubber. Regulation Mexican army issue in 1893; 5,000 purchased. [see Blake, Mike in references below].
- **Mondragon semi-automatic rifle (Fusil Porfirio Diaz Systema Mondragón, Modelo 1908)** 7.7mm-caliber
- **Mauser Model of 1902.** 7mm
- **Mauser Model 1912 Rifle (MOSQUETON MAUSER MEXICANO MO. 1912)** 7mm.
- **Winchester M1895.** Sources differ: 7.62mm and or .30 Government.
- **M38 Arisaka Rifles (Japanese FUSIL JAPONES MO. 1913 (MEIJI 38TH YEAR TYPE))** 7mm Mauser.
- **Gewehr Karabiner (carbine) 1888.** 7.92×57mm Mauser

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