



*This  
MONTH in  
military  
history ...*

1763: French and Indian War ends

1783: Preliminary articles of peace signed by British and American representatives

1789: George Washington unanimously elected president

1862: Union forces capture Fort Henry

1918: First WWI US Army troopship torpedoed & sunk by Germany

1944: General Eisenhower assumes supreme command of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe

1967: Launch pad fire during Apollo program tests kills three astronauts

1968: U.S. intelligence-gathering ship seized by North Korea and charged with spying

1973: Paris Peace Accords signed by United States and North Vietnam

2007: Operation Imposing Law began

2013: U.S. Armed Forces overturns ban on women serving in combat

# The ASC History Newsletter

100th Anniversary of World War I:

## U.S. Army on the Mexico Border



When World War I began in August 1914, Mexico was in the midst of domestic, political and military upheaval. The overthrow of the regime of General Huerta in July 1914 precipitated a civil war from 1914-1916 in which different revolutionary factions vied for control. As Mexico was one of the world's leading oil producers and exporters, its affairs were of great interest to the warring powers in Europe.

The United States was greatly concerned over what it viewed as a German threat in Mexico, particularly along the long U.S.-Mexican border. U.S. concern was justified, because Germany sought to keep Mexico in turmoil, hoping thereby to provoke a large-scale U.S. intervention that would prevent or at least severely limit potential U.S. involvement in the European war.

Germany made a financial commitment of almost \$12 million in a failed 1915 effort to restore ousted dictator General Huerta to power. The Germans then turned their attention to Francisco "Pancho" Villa, a leading revolutionary general who had lost out in the struggle for power in 1914-1915. The Germans supplied Villa with arms and equipment in late 1915 and early 1916.

On March 9, 1916, Villa's forces attacked Columbus, New Mexico, killing 17 Americans. There was no evidence linking the Germans to the decision to attack Columbus, but the incident produced the major U.S. military intervention hoped for by the Germans. By June 1916, most of the U.S. Army's combat forces were tied down in the Punitive Expedition into Mexico, headed by Brigadier General John J. Pershing. In addition, Presi-

dent Woodrow Wilson federalized all the state National Guards (more than 100,000 troops) and sent them to the border.

While war between the United States and Mexico was avoided, the last U.S. troops did not leave Mexico until February 1917. The intervention revealed weaknesses in the U.S. military establishment and provided much useful training but also caused German leaders to downplay U.S. military effectiveness. Having failed to use Huerta and Villa to overthrow the regime of Venustiano Carranza, the Germans decided to work with Carranza to achieve their designs.

The highly nationalist Carranza was feuding regularly with the U.S. government over border security issues and oil policy. It was in this context that the Zimmermann Telegram incident occurred. In that secret January 1917 telegram, German foreign secretary Arthur Zimmermann instructed ambassador to Mexico Heinrich J. F. von Eckhardt to offer Mexico a military alliance.

Under its terms, if the United States went to war against Germany and Mexico were to go to war against the United States, Germany would extend to Mexico substantial assistance, and once Germany was victorious, Mexico would receive back the territory it had lost as a consequence in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). After the telegram became public knowledge on March 1, 1917, Carranza publicly denied that Germany had ever offered Mexico an alliance, but he privately indicated to the German ambassador that an alliance might be feasible should war break out between the United States and Mexico.

U.S.-Mexican relations continued to be problematic after U.S. entry into World War I in April 1917. Several Latin American nations showed their solidarity with the United States by breaking relations with Germany or even declaring war. The Carranza government, however, maintained strict neutrality throughout the conflict, despite U.S. pressure. The German secret service moved its North American headquarters to Mexico City after U.S. entry and even prepared a submarine base on Mexico's Gulf coast, although it was never used.

The Wilson administration remained convinced throughout the war that Carranza's supposed neutrality was only a disguise for a pro-German policy. Despite wartime personnel demands, the Wilson administration would maintain some 30,000 troops on the U.S.-Mexican border throughout the war.

The photos in this article are of the Iowa National Guard when they were federalized and sent to the Mexican border. The photos were found by family members in a dusty box after one of their elderly relatives passed away. For everyone reading this article, we all have dusty boxes in our attics or in our parents or grandparent's homes. Take a look. What will you find?

