

Day by Day in the Mexican Refugee Camp at Fort Bliss

The Mexican Refugees At Close Range - Why They Are Held By the United States Government, and How They Live At the Big Army Post of the Southwest.

WHILE the battle of Ojinaga was in progress early in January about thirty-five hundred Mexican Federal soldiers under the command of Gen. Mercado stamped across the Rio Grande into the United States and surrendered to the border patrol. By an express provision of the Convention of the Hague belligerent troops received by a neutral power are to be interned, consequently, after they had been admitted the United States Government could not allow them to leave without violating the laws of neutrality.

Motley Crowd Of Men, Women And Children.

The Mexican soldiers were followed by about fifteen hundred women and children, many of whom had been widowed and orphaned during the battle. They were a motley, helpless crowd of human beings, ill clad and half starved. A number of the soldiers were suffering from serious wounds and the majority of the women and children were ill from fright and exhaustion. By order of President Wilson the refugee soldiers were disarmed and interned, and arrangements were made to send them to Fort Bliss, the big army post near El Paso, Texas. After a day or two on the border orders were given for a march to Marfa, Texas, a town on the line of the Southern Pacific railroad. Then the Mexicans began their journey to the promised land of food and shelter. Nearly every family had a dog, for the animals, terror stricken by the noise of the battle, followed their owners across the river. Those who saw the march will never forget the long train of human beings plodding over the dusty roads of the Lone Star State. Several stops were made for rest and meals, and finally Marfa came in sight. There special trains were in waiting, and after a ride of several hours they arrived at Fort Bliss, where the refugee soldiers, at least, are likely to remain until peace is declared in Mexico.

The Twentieth United States Infantry, which had been doing border patrol for several months, accompanied the refugees and have been in charge of the camp ever since. A space of twenty-seven hundred by nine hundred feet was set apart for this camp—unique in the annals of history. It was laid out in streets like the regulation army camp and two thousand



Inside and Outside the Wire Fence which Encloses the Camp



Making Tortillas Over the Hole in the Ground Stove



One of the "Little Mothers" of the Camp



All the "Fighting" Men Received New Shoes



Gen. Castro one of the Hardest Workers in the Camp



Gen. Mercado Ranking Officer of the Camp



John T. Axton, Chaplain of the 20th U.S. Infantry, The Good Angel of the Camp



Some of the Wounded Mexican Federals

army tents were set up to house the refugees. A barbed wire fence thirteen feet in height encloses the camp. During the first few days the number of refugees increased and the sentries were at a loss to know just how they had obtained entrance to the camp. It was finally discovered that they had rolled under the fence during the night—more than one hundred rolling in during a single evening. It was then decided to charge the fence with electricity, which at once put a stop to intruders. The entire camp is lighted by electricity and patrolled both inside and outside the fence by men of the Twentieth Infantry under the command of Colonel Frederick Perkins.

Brought Smallpox. The refugees brought smallpox with them, and almost before the camp hospital was in working order one man died of the disease. The surgeon at once saw the danger of an epidemic and set about to avert it by vaccinating everybody in camp and putting on a quarantine which has only recently been lifted. During this quarantine the writer was one of the few persons allowed to visit the refugees. While the vaccination scars were still fresh the refugees were compelled to submit to the typhoid inoculation as well. The result has been only one death from smallpox and no other contagious diseases were re-

ported. Naturally in a crowd so large sickness and death are sure to occur, but when everything is taken into consideration the health of the camp has been remarkable. The surgeons have insisted on real sanitation and several Mexican officers were placed in charge of the streets and held accountable for the cleanliness of these thoroughfares. About fifty babies were born in camp, and Major Manly, the chief surgeon, established a maternity hospital. Only two of the babies died. Both of these had come into the world while their mothers were on the way from the border to Fort Bliss.

A Good Chaplain. For a time the condition of the women and children was pitiable for they were almost entirely without underwear and their dresses were in rags. Owing to the high altitude of Fort Bliss the nights and early mornings were very cold, and coming as they did from a much warmer climate their suffering from cold was pathetic. Chaplain John T. Axton, of the Twentieth Infantry, soon dis-

covered their plight and set about to make them comfortable. He enlisted the sympathy of several good women in the South and East and inside of a week donations of wearing apparel for women and children began to arrive by the wagon load. Chaplain Axton is an indefatigable worker, and he did not rest until he saw that every woman and child in camp had warm clothing. Whenever money was sent he used it to buy milk and eggs for the children, with the result that the poor little emaciated creatures who came over from Mexico are now as sturdy and strong as the typical American child. Huerta has from time to time sent a little money to his interned soldiers, and while the greater part of it has been used to purchase clothing they always manage to have a little spending money. Knowing this and the Mexican's love of "sweet things," Chaplain Axton set up a post exchange in camp and pressed several of the refugees into service as clerks. Pies, fruit, tobacco, candy, eggs, cakes, canned goods, blankets and clothing are on sale and the exchange has done a thriving business

sometimes selling as many as one thousand pies a day. The profits are used by the chaplain to fix the women's quarters, especially the maternity hospital, and recently he has opened a milk station for the children. Indeed, an entire story might be written on the splendid work of the camp "sandy pilot," who is the very best type of American manhood.

U. S. Feeds Well. It must not be understood, however, that the refugees lacked food, for such is not the case, as every morning a plentiful supply is given out by Captain B. P. Nicklin, the good-natured commissary officer of the camp. These rations consist of flour, bread, rice, bacon, beef, sugar, coffee, Mexican beans, pepper and salt. Many of the refugees prefer to do their own cooking as the tortillas (shortcake minus the shortening) are more to their taste than American bread. The Mexican woman is resourceful as to her household affairs, as she builds or rather digs her stove. It consists of two holes in the ground—one for fire and the other to act as a sort of

chimney. The wood is put into one of these holes, and as soon as it begins to burn she covers it with a piece of tin or sheet iron which serves as the cake pan for the tortillas or a stove plate for the few cooking utensils that go to make up her kitchen. She does her laundry work in the most primitive fashion, making an old board or box top take the place of the modern washboard. Nor does she require a tub as she merely pours the water on the clothing. The tent ropes serve as clotheslines and the warm sun of Texas does the drying. Very little ironing is done as the clothing is pulled into shape while it is drying. About twenty thousand pounds of soap has been given out by the Commissary Department. Cleanliness of body is insisted upon by the surgeons, and during the early days of the camp before the shower baths were completed all sorts of vessels were pressed into service as bath tubs, and it was no uncommon sight to see a youthful "September Morn" rise suddenly out of a kettle which also served as the family dinner pot.

Many of the women did not know what had become of their husbands and brothers and had no way of finding out. The cheapness of life in Mexico is appalling, and relatives of soldiers killed in battle never seem to learn anything about even the disposition of the bodies of their loved ones. The women have come to take these things as the fortune of war and bear their sorrow with a stoicism which the American woman cannot understand.

Water was piped to the camp from the main supply at the reservation, and it is absolutely pure—in fact, everything about the camp tends to deter sickness.

Now that the quarantine has been lifted the women are at liberty to return to Mexico, yet only a few have gone. Several of the Mexican officers' wives have taken up a residence in El Paso and may come out to the camp to visit their husbands who are, of course, compelled to remain. General Mercado is, perhaps, the most restless man inside the fence. He is unpopular with his men, many of whom blame him for their plight, and

only the other day he went to General Hugh Scott, the Commander at Fort Bliss, with a long story of threatened assassination by his own men. General Castro, who was the Governor General at Juarez under the Federals, is of an entirely different stamp, and is one of the hardest workers as well as the most popular man in camp. When the clothing arrived for the soldiers General Castro took full charge of the distribution, while General Mercado sulked in his tent in the hope that he might be released. Recently he got out a writ of habeas corpus, but as proceedings of the same character have been denied by the California courts to the men interned at Fort Rosecranz, California, it is not likely that the Texas judiciary will have anything to do with the matter. Wild stories of the refugees, attempting to tunnel out, came to General Scott recently, and he at once caused the ground of each tent to be examined but no evidence of a tunnel could be found.

The camp is orderly in every way. Gambling with Monte cards, which by the way are manufactured in the United States, goes on but the stakes are small and there is rarely a dispute. After the cooking and washing is done for the day the women sit about and gossip and the children play in the sunshine. The "little mother" is present, the child who tugs her baby brother or sister about the camp in real New York East Side fashion, and cares for her charge with all the tenderness of the big mother. Several of these little girls carried their dolls all the way from Mexico and display them with no little pride. Many of the men are at work about the camp digging ditches, putting in water pipes, and sawing and splitting wood for the camp fires.

It is costing Uncle Sam about \$700 per day to feed and house these unfortunate people from our sister Republic over the river, and there are grave doubts as to whether the money will ever be repaid. It is merely an "incident" in the history of our great nation in its care and aid to the people of a weaker country where unalterable suffering seems to be the principal heritage.

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BY FREIGHT

Jack—I was born on the 2nd of April.
Maude—Late, as usual.

INFERENCE OBVIOUS

Knickerbockered and resplendent in dazzling tartan stockings, Algernon sauntered from the club house to the golf links, and there, on the first tee, having carefully adjusted his monocle and "addressed" the ball for a prodigious length of time, began his game.

"By the way, caddie," he remarked, pleasantly, "what sort of a game does Mr. McJones play?"

The diminutive young Scotsman screwed up his weather-beaten face. "Mr. McJones? He cannot play at all."

"Ah!" said Algernon. "You see, I am playing a match with him tomorrow. Suppose I shall beat him easily—what?"

The caddie shook his head wisely. "Na," he replied, "that ye will not."

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