

GLEESON

ARIZONA

Disorder on the Border

The Mexican Revolution and its effects on the Gleeson area



Glenn Snow
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GSnow@GleesonArizona.com

Cover photograph: Mexican Revolutionary General, Pancho Villa

Order First, Progress Later.” That was the slogan adopted by Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. The Mexican Revolution began as an uprising against this dictator in 1910. In the election of that year, Díaz threw his rival, Francisco Madero, in jail and fixed the election. Madero escaped, and in October published a letter calling for a revolt against Díaz. Multiple revolutionary movements, with multiple leaders, arose as a result. Each of these leaders had a different idea of what the revolution should look like, and who should rule Mexico. Most of them had a local or regional following, but were not as strong nationally. In the north along the border with the United States, Pancho Villa was, for a time, the darling of both the Mexican and U.S. populations.

Villa was a political and military leader with a keen eye for publicity and a good grasp of the power of public opinion. For a time he sided with several different revolutionary leaders, but in the end, found that he agreed only with himself, and thereby ended up fighting almost everyone he ever allied himself with, including the United States.

Along the way, Francisco “Pancho” Villa made quite a name for himself, and became a well-known and almost romantic icon, especially in the United States. Among his more “colorful” characteristics was his tendency to use diverse and innovative sources for funding. Hostile ranch owners were taxed more heavily than friendly ones, and he took hostages from banks and banking families, holding them for ransom to raise funds. He even struck a deal with Hollywood’s legendary film director D. W. Griffith, allowing him to film Villa’s revolution in return for 50% of the profits. It is this element which brought Pancho Villa to the attention of the U.S. public, and made him a star...at least for a while.

Villa’s headquarters was in Juarez, Mexico, just across the border from El Paso Texas. His troops and escapades ranged west along the border with New Mexico and Arizona as well. Residents of these borderlands followed the newspaper stories of the revolution with a combination of financial interest, curiosity, thrill-seeking, and morbid fascination.

On the night of November 1, 1915, Villa's forces attacked the Mexican city of Agua Prieta, just across the border from Douglas, about 40 miles south of Gleeson. The Mexican government troops successfully defeated Villa, in part using searchlights powered by electricity which came from the American side. This assistance by the United States enraged Villa, who felt betrayed by his "American public." It was the beginning of the end of Pancho Villa's friendly relationship with the citizens of the United States.

During the attack on Agua Prieta, Elvin Brown, a Courtland resident, drove down to Douglas to rescue his family and bring them back up to safety away from the border fighting. Like many residents of Douglas, his family was afraid both of cross-border hostilities, and also of stray gunfire shots which respected no international boundaries.

Trip to Douglas.
Elvin Brown motored to Douglas Tuesday night, to bring away from that city, Mrs. E. W. Brown and children, who, with others, were glad to get away from that city until the matter of possession of Agua Prieta is definitely settled. Their determination to depart from the Smelter City was hastened by the suggestion of the authorities of the city and military, that all that could do so, were advised to go to some other point until the fighting between the two factions was ended.

Other Gleeson-area residents were not so intimidated by the dangers and possibilities of going to Douglas. A circus was in town on the U.S. side, and a number of Courtland and Gleeson residents took their families down to see the show. From all accounts, the children and their mothers would

Went to Douglas.
Tuesday evening, W. C. Hyde and daughter, Wilma, accompanied by Mrs. J. S. Preston and little daughter, Nettie, motored to Douglas, where the latter were to remain and attend the circus, Thursday.

go inside the tent and be treated to the spectacle of the circus, while the men of the group would wander down by the border to see a spectacle of a different nature and magnitude. For many on the U.S. side of the border, the battles

of the revolution were considered entertainment, with some going so far as to organize picnics to watch the fighting from the U.S. side of the border.

Schools in Douglas were shut down, as was the Phelps-Dodge smelter there, as it was in the direct line of fire from the border. Nine Americans were struck by stray bullets during Villa's failed

attempt on Agua Prieta. Several outings by Gleeson-area residents were a disappointment, as Villa decided to suspend his attack because the film canisters for the movie cameras had not yet arrived. As the “scheduled” battle was not going to take place, these gentlemen turned their cars around and motored back home.

Looking For Trouble.

Wednesday evening, a party of four, Messrs Bryant, Phillips, Colter and McGinnis, of the Commonwealth company at Pearce, motored to Douglas in expectation of having a chance to witness a renewal of the Agua Prieta battle, but Villa disappointed them.

In January of 1916, Villa’s forces attacked a train carrying American employees of the American Smelter and Refining Company, killing several U.S. citizens. From this point on, Pancho Villa’s reputation and popularity as a “romantic revolutionary” went downhill very quickly.

As Villa became more and more desperate and enraged at U.S. support for the Mexican government, his tactics changed, and cross-border intrusions into the United States became more common. On March 9, 1916, Villa ordered 500 of his troops to cross the border and attack the city of Columbus, New Mexico, about 120 miles east of Gleeson. He did this specifically in reprisal for defective ammunition he received from U.S. suppliers which had caused his defeat in a major battle. He was also angry that U.S. railroads were being used to transport Mexican government forces. In Columbus, eighteen U.S. citizens were killed, 100 horses and mules were taken back across the border, and the town of Columbus was set on fire. Similar attacks in Texas resulted in a strong response from the United States government.

On March 14, President Wilson ordered General John J. Pershing to cross the border into Mexico in order to capture Pancho Villa. The Mexican Expeditionary Force chased Villa around northern Mexico for almost a year, with little result. Two of Villa’s generals were killed, but Villa continued to thumb his nose at the great military prowess of the United States. His troops also continued to make cross-border raids into New Mexico and Arizona with some regularity.

All of this caused a great deal of anxiety and panic in certain areas along the border. This anxiety was fueled by rumors and false reports of Mexican bandits and army units "taking over" U.S. towns and villages. In fact, no U.S. town was ever taken over by Pancho Villa or his troops. But that did not stem the speculation, the gossip, and the panicked reactions which spread quickly across the county.

Harry Wheeler, Sheriff of Cochise County, had just returned from a California vacation, taken "to recuperate from stress" just in

**REPORTS OF TROUBLE
AT JOHNSON, UNTRUE**

Report were received in Tombstone this morning from Douglas that Dragoon and Johnson, about thirty miles from Tombstone had wired to Washington for troops for protection, claiming that there were 400 armed Villistas in the camp, and American life and property were in danger. In order to confirm the report a Prospector representative immediately got into touch with the Sheriff's office, and that the report was a false one, was shown by a letter that had just been received at noon from Constable Jenkins of that place in which he stated that all was absolutely quiet in the camp and most of the Mexicans there were Carranza sympathizers. No trouble was anticipated, according to the letter.

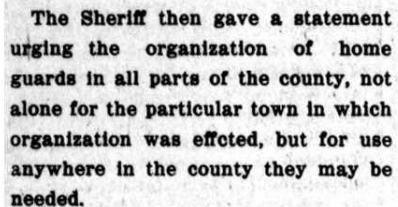
time to have rumors of invasions and uprisings tossed in his lap. He drove to Naco, along the border to examine the town's defenses against raids. Then he checked in with Bisbee and Tombstone to investigate false rumors of Mexican uprisings among sympathizers of Pancho Villa. Rumors of uprisings in Johnson and Dragoon (25 miles north of Gleeson) were investigated and found to be groundless. Sheriff Wheeler then raced to Douglas, crossed the border, and inspected the Mexican government troops and compound in the Mexican town of Agua Prieta. There had been

rumors and counter-rumors that the government of Mexico itself was planning to invade Douglas. Wheeler found, on the contrary, that the town was quiet and undisturbed. The Mexican troops, in fact, were scattered and unprepared for any such action.

The rumors of wars and invasions caused many people to petition the federal government to send troops to their town to protect

them from the incursions of either the Mexican government, the rebels of Pancho Villa, or just imaginary *banditos* from across the border. Sheriff Wheeler, feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed with the discharge of his duties, sent a telegram General Funston, commander of the army stationed at Fort Sam Houston, asking whether federal troops might be stationed at various towns in Cochise County, to protect against invasions or uprisings by various groups associated with the revolution in Mexico. There was recent precedent for such a request. In 1914, troops from Fort Huachuca had been dispersed to several towns (including 12 troops sent to Gleeson), because of tensions resulting from the “Tampico Affair” This “affair” was an international fiasco caused (incredibly) by a petulant American insistence that the President of Mexico salute the American flag. When he refused to do so, the United States invaded the port at Veracruz, and occupied it for six months while the Mexican revolution raged around them. Feelings ran so high that U.S. citizens along the Mexican border feared that an uprising of Mexican immigrants would result. No such uprising ever occurred, and the soldiers were quietly withdrawn to their postings. Now, two years later, after the attack by Pancho Villa in New Mexico, Sheriff Wheeler sent his telegram. The response from General Funston was brief and reasonable. The army had learned its lesson from the previous farce two years before. No federal troops would be stationed in Arizona towns unless they were actually under attack by forces from Mexico. *All towns that think themselves in danger of local uprising must depend upon their local authorities first,*” was the reply of the Army commander.

Sheriff Wheeler, therefore, began to organize “home guards.” These were local groups of citizens who would stand watch against insurrection and invasion of Villa sympathizers, government troops, or anyone else who seemed to have designs upon the safety of the local citizenry. Unfortunately, these groups occasionally allowed their patriotism, and their imaginations, to get the best of them.



The Sheriff then gave a statement urging the organization of home guards in all parts of the county, not alone for the particular town in which organization was effected, but for use anywhere in the county they may be needed.

In Gleeson, a Mexican man named A. C. Lopez was arrested by authorities, members of the local home guard, who had been watching him. It was thought that Lopez was the brother of Pablo Lopez. Pablo was a Lieutenant in Villa's army and was accused of being responsible for the massacre of 18 U.S. miners in Mexico at

MAKING BOMBS

At Gleeson, early this week, one A. C. Lopez, reported to be a brother of the Lieutenant Lopez that was commander of the Villa forces that committed the Santa Ysabel massacre and later was captured by the Carrancista troops, was arrested and given a preliminary trial, bound over to the Superior court and taken to Tombstone. It seems that the authorities had been watching him for several days, finding that he was using his time after working hours in cutting up scraps of iron that it was believed he was intending to make use of in the manufacture of bombs. At the time of his arrest, he was carrying a sack containing a quantity of this material which he was taking to his home. The opinion prevails that the young man has become somewhat unbalanced owing to the various mishaps that have befallen the members of his family in their fervent support of Francisco Villa. This party has been living in Gleeson for a considerable time, and was married about one and a half years ago.

Saint Ysabel. Pablo was also thought to be the commander of the deadly raid in Columbus, New Mexico. A.C. Lopez, a Gleeson resident for several years, was arrested for collecting scrap pieces of metal which authorities thought were being used to make bombs. The case was later dropped. As it turns out, A.C. really was only collecting scrap pieces of metal. There was no bomb-making involved. It appears that the name "Lopez" was much more common than the agitated and paranoid local citizens of the home guard had imagined, and any relationship between A. C. Lopez and Pablo Lopez was also only imagined.

The Mexican Revolution had largely wound down by 1920. Pancho Villa retired from fighting in July of that year. He was assassinated three years later, while returning in his car from his godchild's baptism. His killers were never caught. Relations between the United States and Mexico steadily improved and became regularized as Mexico's own democratic processes created a more stable government on the south side of the border. The citizens of Arizona lowered their defenses and many were somewhat embarrassed by what they considered to be an over-reaction to the events of the revolution and disorder across the border.