

ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Founded 1947

Officers and Committees for 1971-1972

REV. OSCAR H. LIPSCOMB, Mobile *President*
BERNARR CRESAP, Florence *Vice-President*
JAMES F. SULZBY, JR., Birmingham *Secretary*
MILO B. HOWARD, JR., Montgomery *Treasurer*

Executive Committee: The officers and Rucker Agee, Birmingham; Hugh C. Bailey, Samford University; Mrs. Lee C. Bradley, Jr., Birmingham; C. J. Coley, Alexander City; Caldwell Delaney, Mobile; Mrs. Ralph B. Draughon, Auburn; Mrs. Margaret Pace Farmer, Troy; Mrs. Burke S. Fisk, Huntsville; Eugene G. Fitzgerald, Birmingham; Miss Lucille Griffith, University of Montevallo; S. Wallace Harper, Demopolis; William H. Jenkins, Decatur; Allen W. Jones, Auburn University; Frank M. Jones, Birmingham; F. David Mathews, University; T. B. Pearson, Leroy; Miss Frances C. Roberts, Huntsville; Mrs. Hugh Smith, Langdale; Sam A. Sommers, Jr., Selma; H. E. Sterkx, Montgomery; Richard J. Stockham, Birmingham; Charles G. Summer-sell, University; Ralph M. Tanner, Birmingham-Southern College; and Leslie S. Wright, Samford University.

Object of the Association: To discover, procure, preserve, and diffuse whatever may relate to the natural, civil, literary, cultural, economic, ecclesiastical, and political history of the State of Alabama.

Communications regarding the Association should be addressed to the Secretary, James F. Sulzby, Jr., 3121 Carlisle Road, Birmingham, Alabama 35213.

Manuscripts for publication, exchange journals, and books for review or listing should be sent to the Editor, Dr. Malcolm C. McMillan, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama 36830.

Non-members may subscribe to the *Review* at six dollars per annum; single issues at \$2.00 each. Orders should be addressed to The University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama 35486.

The *Alabama Review* is published quarterly, in January, April, July, and October, by The University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama. Entered as second class matter at the post office at University, Alabama, under the act of March 3, 1879.

The ALABAMA REVIEW

A Quarterly Journal of Alabama History

VOLUME XXIV

JULY, 1971

NUMBER 3

Contents

UNLIKELY CONQUISTADORS: ALABAMIANS AND THE MEXICAN BORDER CRISIS OF 1916 H. E. STERKX	163
JOHN ALLEN WYETH: HISTORIAN LEE N. ALLEN	182
THE FORT MIMS MASSACRE FRANK L. OWSLEY, JR.	192
NOTES AND DOCUMENTS MICHAEL PORTIER: FIRST BISHOP OF MOBILE MRS. SIDNEY VAN ANTWERP	205
NEWS AND NOTICES	214
BOOK REVIEWS	216
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TREASURER	224

Published by THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS, University, Alabama
in cooperation with the ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
Copyright © 1971 by The University of Alabama Press

Editor: MALCOLM C. McMILLAN, Auburn University

Editorial Board: MILO HOWARD, 1971, Director, State Department of Archives and History. HUGH BAILEY, 1971, Samford University. SARAH WOOLFOLK WIGGINS, 1972, University of Alabama. JUSTIN FULLER, 1972, University of Montevallo. FRANK L. OWSLEY, 1973, Auburn University. MARGARET PACE FARMER, 1973, Troy, Alabama.

CONTRIBUTORS

H. E. STERKX is professor of history at Auburn University in Montgomery

LEE N. ALLEN is professor of history and dean of the Graduate School at Samford University

FRANK L. OWSLEY, JR. is professor of history at Auburn University.

MRS. SIDNEY VAN ANTWERP is a historian and a civic leader of Mobile.

Unlikely Conquistadores: Alabamians and the Mexican Border Crisis of 1916

By H. E. STERKX*

ON THE AFTERNOON OF MARCH 9, 1916, ALABAMA newspaper subscribers read about Francisco "Pancho" Villa's surprise attack on the little town of Columbus, New Mexico.¹ They registered shock and anger over the killing of their fellow citizens,² but like Americans everywhere it was not the first time in recent years that articulate citizens had reacted to the ever-changing turmoil of the Mexican Revolution. That event which had been unfolding since 1910 took a violent turn toward the left in 1914 with the emergence of such zealous revolutionaries as Venustiano Carranza, Francisco Villa, and Emiliano Zapata.³ During the struggle for dominance these leaders brought on Civil War and as Mexico drifted towards anarchy, President Woodrow Wilson recognized Carranza, the self-styled "First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army and Depository of the Executive Power of the Republic of Mex-

* Presidential Address, delivered before the Alabama Historical Association in Decatur on April 24, 1971.

¹ Anniston *Evening Star* and *Daily Hot Blast*, Birmingham *News*, and Montgomery *Journal*, March 9, 1916.

² Seventeen American citizens were killed, of which nine were civilians and eight servicemen. Wounded numbered three civilians and nine servicemen. See Montgomery *Journal*, March 10, 1916.

³ Frank Brandenburg, *Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 52-53.

ico,"⁴ the *de facto* president as the safest bet for producing peace and security in the troubled republic. When such recognition came on October 19, 1915, it also imposed a strict embargo on all arms destined for the anti-Carranza leaders.⁵ Thus the peak of Villa's revenge came at Columbus. The unforgiving Mexican was gambling that the raid would lead to war, and that the ensuing conflict could strengthen his hold over the peon masses, and increase his chances of becoming president of Mexico.⁶

It was an especially inauspicious time for a crisis. The two-year-old European war had already cost the Wilson administration much time and energy in maintaining a policy of neutrality. A creeping fear of American involvement increased in intensity as the Allies' military fortunes showed no signs of breaking that long and bloody stalemate at Verdun. As if to compound an already disquieting situation, the prospects of a resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare seemed imminent, and the pending presidential election of 1916 contributed little towards easing the public mind. The First Chief presented almost insurmountable problems to the United States, and he was confronted with the immediate prospect of survival in the face of Villa's rising popularity after the American raid. He was also bedeviled by the problem of allowing an American punitive expedition into Mexico in search of Villa, and at the same time remaining a patriotic Mexican, steadfastly opposed to any form of foreign intervention. Carranza, understandably, followed a devious strategy in all his dealings with American authorities. Con-

⁴ Clarence C. Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa: A Study in Unconventional Diplomacy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), 29.

⁵ J. Fred Rippy, *The United States and Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), 340.

⁶ Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 175-176.

sequently, after an exchange of circumspect notes, the United States, believing that Carranza had agreed to an expedition, sent 6000 men commanded by General John J. Pershing barreling into Mexico in search of the "notorious Villa."⁷

As subsequent events turned out, Pancho proved an elusive fugitive and Carranza grew increasingly bolder in demanding immediate withdrawal of American forces. At times he threatened hostile action and then suddenly changed his mind with offers to cooperate in apprehending the common foe. While this delicate situation seemed insoluble, the outbreak of a series of tragic episodes brought the two nations dangerously near the point of war. Looming large was the loss of American servicemen in Mexico followed in close order by repeated raids into Texas. Far and away the worst event occurred at Carrizal on June 21, 1916, when *de facto* government troops joined a civilian mob in killing twelve American soldiers and holding twenty-three others as prisoners-of-war.⁸

It was a messy and uncertain situation, the likes of which had not been seen since the Spanish American War. In short order scores of Alabamians who were caught up in this environment delivered countless opinions accompanied by myriads of suggestions for resolving the crisis. Among the first were the well-meaning amateurs or self-proclaimed Mexican watchers who possessed questionable credentials for rendering any mature judgments on foreign affairs. Public officials also came forward with their panaceas and, of course, there were the ubiquitous cranks whose opinions reached the public press only through the indulgence of kindly editors. Out-numbering all others were the editorial writers of large and small newspapers. During the ten month period following

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176-177.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 179-181.

the raid the gentlemen of the press not only advocated particular points of view, but they also devoted considerable amount of space to Mexican affairs. In fact, on more than one occasion it took precedence over the European war in both headlines and editorial comments.

Despite such generous outpouring of words, few Alabamians had any personal contact with either the revolutionary leaders or even Mexican civilians. Among the exceptions were those who happened to be in New Mexico during the raid. There was for instance, Captain Hamilton Bowie of Anniston, hailed as a hero for his successful efforts in rallying dispirited American cavalymen and, "after a fierce battle" forcing the Mexicans into full scale retreat.⁹ However, the most incredible experience fell to Maude Hawk Wright, formerly of St. Clair county, the only known American hostage riding with Villa. In this woman's account of the frightening ordeal, she told of the hardships of a nine day ride as the only female present. Through it all she remained calm and aloof, and for such exemplary behavior Mrs. Wright was jokingly dubbed "Queen of the Villistas" and released unharmed at Columbus with a gift of \$100 and a permit to travel anywhere in Villa controlled Mexican territories. Later on in a public statement she blasted her captors and Mexicans in general, and reported that Villa not only coldbloodedly plotted the raid with the object of attracting Germany and Japan as allies in a war with the United States, but that he was also in personal command before and after crossing the border.¹⁰

Mrs. Wright was only one of many Alabamians holding Mexicans and especially their leaders in low esteem. For almost a century their version of the Black Legend held Span-

⁹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 19, 1916.

¹⁰ *Birmingham News*, March 11, 1916; *Montgomery Journal*, March 10 and 11, 1916.

ish persons and culture in utmost contempt. This attitude was borne out when the state's citizens proudly counted themselves among the first allies of the Texans during their struggle for independence in 1836¹¹ and ten years later eagerly enlisted to do battle against the same enemy in the Mexican War.¹² More recently, many had applauded Wilson's stern handling of the 1914 Tampico and Vera Cruz incidents, and had registered keen disappointment when no action was taken following the January 10, 1916 killing of seventeen American miners at Santa Ysabel, Mexico.¹³

This cursing and fulminating against Mexicans took on even greater dimensions in 1916, when reservoirs of anger mixed with wounded national pride surfaced as almost one voice demanding vengeance and strong measures to protect Americans from future harm. Quite predictably, torrents of abuse fell upon Pancho Villa as nearly everyone from newspaper editor to housewife denounced him as the century's meanest villain. One irate Alabama citizen using the pen name of "Amor-Patraiae [sic]" cried out, "Down with Villa and his merciless gang" and called on every patriot to "destroy every vestige of the bandits in the name of humanity."¹⁴ Less inhibited persons branded the object of their hatred as "Greaser," "wolf," "hairy monster," and other insulting epithets.¹⁵ A Montgomery editor seriously ranked Villa as "the most desperate criminal . . . on the American continent," and one Birmingham observer thought that all Mexicans were

¹¹ Claude Elliott, "Alabama and the Texas Revolution," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, L (January, 1947), 315.

¹² A. B. Moore, *A History of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama Book Store, 1951), 189.

¹³ *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 10, 22, and 24, 1914; *Montgomery Journal*, January 12, 1916.

¹⁴ *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 16, 1916.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, March 14, and April 21, 1916; *Montgomery Journal*, January 21 and December 17, 1916; *Huntsville Mercury*, March 17, 1916.

only interested in looting and killing innocent Americans.¹⁶

Besides delivering withering verbal blasts most city editors festooned Villa's picture in unflattering poses on front pages and frequently included derogatory cartoons accompanying editorial comments. Often the bandit leader appeared as a revolting animal or in the stereotype of a toothy grinning peon scratching fleas out of his exaggerated hairy mustache.¹⁷ Popular, too, was the lumping of Villa and Carranza in the same category. For example, to C. C. Bailey of Furnsdale, if Villa suddenly vanished from the scene, "his mantel would fall on old Carranza. Certainly he is no better than Villa, he just lacks the nerve, that is all."¹⁸ The First Chief's vacillating policy brought out even greater denunciations, and he became generally described as several personalities rolled into one and split. At least one Huntsville writer thought him a bit better than Villa as he had "lots of white blood in his veins," but he nevertheless still bore close observation.¹⁹ Conversely, a Birmingham critic thought Carranza entirely untrustworthy, because his Indian blood might mysteriously erupt into some form of treachery and compel the United States "to eliminate . . . him and others . . . to provide . . . decent government in Mexico."²⁰

As the border crisis deepened, Alabamians exhibited an amazing amount of contempt for the Mexican people. In countless ways these latter day fire-eaters excoriated their Latin neighbors as hardly a generation removed from semi-ape ancestors, predictably treacherous and incapable of self-government. A quite typical case of such an attitude was that

¹⁶ Birmingham *Ledger*, March 8, 1916; Montgomery *Daily Times*, March 21, 1916.

¹⁷ Montgomery *Advertiser*, March 13, 1916; Montgomery *Daily Times*, April 19, 1916.

¹⁸ Montgomery *Advertiser*, April 21, 1916.

¹⁹ Huntsville *Mercury*, March 17, 1916.

²⁰ Birmingham *Ledger*, March 15, 1916.

of a Birmingham newspaperman who insisted that the Mexicans' standards of civilization fell so far below those of North Americans that there was "not the remotest hope of the lower classes becoming industrious, or ever rising above their present miserable condition."²¹

Other journals along with individual citizens echoed similar opinions and even the most optimistic predicted that Mexico's future welfare depended upon the restoration of a dictatorship modeled after the Porfirio Diaz regime.²² The often heard charge was that Mexicans of all ages passionately hated and feared North Americans as a way of life. Multitudes of stories attesting to the fact that such hatred was congenital in some cases and environmentally produced in others through a malevolent program of propaganda.²³ In an interview upon his return from west Texas one Montgomery businessman told a local reporter: "I can tell you how they hate us for it is bred in their bones." "They are told from birth," he continued, "that we will take their country . . . and kill them, and they are so ignorant that they believe it."²⁴ And, doubtlessly, large numbers of the state's citizens concurred with this point of view.

Yet not all Alabamians agreed with the highly emotional charges leveled against the Mexican people. A substantial number quite unwittingly set themselves up as champions-in-residence for the underdog people. When Mrs. Samuel Hodgson visited friends in Montgomery following a sojourn at Tampico with her diplomat husband, she expressed shock on hearing that all Mexicans were persons of deceitful nature. She instantly denounced such talk as irresponsible gossip, and happily proclaimed knowing many Mexicans who were as

²¹ *Ibid.*, March 30 and April 11, 1916.

²² Birmingham *Age-Herald*, June 15, 1916; Florence *Times*, August 18, 1916.

²³ Mobile *Register*, June 21, 1916; Montgomery *Advertiser*, March 13, 1916.

²⁴ Montgomery *Advertiser*, June 29, 1916.

faithful in friendship as those inhabiting the elegant parlors of the capital city.²⁵ In a delightful parody reminiscent of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal*, L. R. Wilson of Demopolis suggested that the United States army begin killing every Mexican at once; "skin them, and make shoes of the hide." It was his understanding that since most Alabamians believed a Latin to be a "loose skin animal, and . . . as his skin is naturally tan it would consequently save the government the expense of sending the skin to a tannery." In conclusion the rustic satirist opined that killing Mexicans would also contribute enormously toward improving a sagging economy since it would offer "our Alabama boys employment."²⁶

Citizens professing liberal tendencies added their voices in behalf of Mexicans and their revolution. One spokesman of this persuasion signing as "Single Taxer" accused European and American absentee landowners of bringing about all the unhappiness upon Mexico and praised the revolutionary prospect of land distribution as one of "the bounties which God gave to Mexico."²⁷ Lambasting conservatives as unfeeling Capitalists and greedy persons was Joe F. Shackleford of Troy when he wrote that "American landowners alone . . . who pay the United States no taxes whatsoever . . . caused all . . . of the trouble."²⁸ Left-handed compliments attesting to Villa's guerilla skills regularly appeared in newspapers. Such estimations usually carried with them the warning that the conflict would be a long and difficult undertaking.²⁹ In following this line of reasoning one Birmingham resident observed that "It is not going to be a pink tea affair. Villa knows his

²⁵ *Montgomery Journal*, December 3, 1916.

²⁶ *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 4, 1917.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, March 23, 1916.

²⁸ *The Troy Messenger*, November 29, 1916.

²⁹ For example, see *Birmingham News*, March 11, 1916.

ground, understands the temperament of the people . . . and has years of experience as a guerilla."³⁰

Public officials of almost every rank spoke out their opinions of what should be done in solving the perplexing crisis. Some, however, were modest as was Governor Charles Henderson when he admitted knowing little of the details, but he could see no other alternative except war.³¹ Others assumed a more belligerent pose, but there was a small minority who followed a pacific policy. Congressman George Huddleston of Birmingham surprised large numbers of his constituents when he joined the lone socialists in the United States House of Representatives in voting against the federalization of the National Guard.³² Taking great pains in explaining his reasons, Huddleston pointed out that: "Poor Mexico, distracted by revolution . . . is to be the object of our attack." Continuing his appeal along the lines of fair play, the solon reminded Americans that Mexico would not only be a "poor match" for a powerful nation as the United States, but also doing battle against her would be accounted as an "act of moral cowardice."³³

From the outset a flood of commentaries came from the state newspapers setting forth what specific policy the United States should adopt and put into immediate operation. In general, these included the approval of Wilson's policy to capture and punish Villa without dishonoring Mexico's territorial integrity. Another called for an immediate declaration of war as the only way of pacifying the southern republic, and finally, there were advocates of the annexation of all or parts of Mexico as the surest means of avoiding any future border troubles. As both military and diplomatic situations

³⁰ *Birmingham Ledger*, March 13, 1916.

³¹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 19, 1916.

³² *Ibid.*, June 24, 1916.

³³ *Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. LIII, 1295.

worsened, those advocating war became more and more vociferous for action. Accordingly, in late April of 1916, when the United States forces had failed to capture Villa, The *Tuscaloosa News and Times* demanded immediate war, if for no other good reason than to restore "the image of Tio Sam" in the eyes of the world.³⁴

Others of like ilk joined in the war chant. Commercial and fraternal publications and even one religious journal came out strongly for upholding the nation's honor at all costs. Proclaiming the United States as mainly a Christian country, a Methodist paper warned that if Carranza failed in his commitments to cooperate with Pershing's troops, "our armies should march to Mexico City, take possession of the land of Montezuma . . . hold it . . . until the people learn how to govern themselves."³⁵

While war hawks raged vehemently for conflict, soft line editors became just as vehement in behalf of peaceful means. Such was the way of C. J. Hildrith of the *New Decatur Advertiser* in his undeviating support of the Wilson administration. In a typical editorial he pointed out that "there is never honor nor profit for us in fighting poor, ragged, and starving Mexicans."³⁶ Shortly afterward, the mild Hildrith excoriated war advocates as an unnatural combination of American economic conservatives and "hot-headed generals who are disporting themselves at the front."³⁷ Harry Ayers of Anniston's largest paper also supported the Wilson position, but he shifted toward the belligerent side with the outbreak of new violence along the border. Following a bandit raid into Texas, Ayers nearly exploded when he wrote: "We have dilly-dallied too long. Two years ago, when the Marines

³⁴ April 9, 1916.

³⁵ *Alabama Christian Advocate* (Birmingham), March 16, 1916.

³⁶ June 29, 1916.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1916.

. . . landed at Vera Cruz, sufficient forces should have been sent into Mexico and kept there until conditions . . . were normal."³⁸

There was none more earnest and indeed more persistent in favoring war than the editors of the *Montgomery Daily Times* and the *Montgomery Advertiser*. During the spring of 1916, J. H. Nunnellee of the *Times* relentlessly pressed for annexation as the only way out for the United States. Writing without the least semblance of restraint he once flatly stated that "the whole of Mexico should have been annexed fifty years ago." "If that had been done," he added, "it would now be one of the most thickly settled and prosperous sections of this great republic." In ringing phrases recalling the expansionists of 1848, he went on record to favor annexation of all territory "this side of the Panama Canal."³⁹ At times he devoted entire issues over to this point of view and whenever small papers backed his stand he gratefully responded with the highest thanksgiving.⁴⁰ Nunnellee thought nothing of scoring Wilson's policy as weak and unworkable, but when the Republicans launched their attack during the last of the 1916 presidential campaign the tug of Democratic loyalty forced him and others of like temperament into a moderate corner where they remained silent on Mexican matters for the remainder of the Border crisis.

The *Montgomery Advertiser*, on the other hand, never moderated its belligerent position, and became the most fiery daily journal committed to war in the state. Under the editorial direction of W. T. Sheehan, hardly an issue hit the streets without a statement urging war, annexation, or both alternatives. The day following Villa's raid, Sheehan angrily

³⁸ *Anniston Evening Star and Daily Hot Blast*, May 9, 1916.

³⁹ *Montgomery Daily Times*, March 13, 1916.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, March 23, 1916.

wrote that Americans would be less than "worthy of their traditions if they do not advance the Stars and Stripes through Mexico to the National Palace. And, once it is thrown into the breeze of that accursed land, it should never be hauled down." Then after a series of cutting remarks about Mexican culture, he ended with "to hell with Villa and Carranza, to hell with Mexico."⁴¹ Nor was this the mildest fate wished upon that country. In fact, Sheehan could see nothing wrong in "spending blood and money to teach Mexico that America is not afraid of her." He closed with his favorite line admonishing United States authorities to raise "the flag in Mexico City, and keep it there."⁴²

The day of the super-patriot came on June 23, 1916 when President Wilson mobilized the entire National Guard into Federal service.⁴³ A martial spirit rivaling that of the 1860 generation swept Alabama as persons of every station of life volunteered their services in some capacity. Medical doctors, dentists, lawyers, and teachers vied with merchants, clerks, farmers; and the chronically unemployed put in for commissions or volunteered as soldiers in the ranks.⁴⁴ Propositions poured into Montgomery to form cavalry companies, hospital corps, and other vital military units. In point of fact, there was too much enthusiasm in Sara Wilson's view and she wrote the governor asking for the release of her over-patriotic husband who, she averred, was "intoxicated when he joined up."⁴⁵ Parents by the score wrote in for the release of underage offspring, but one stood out from the rest when a father

⁴¹ Montgomery *Advertiser*, May 10, 1916.

⁴² *Ibid.*, June 18 and 19, 1916.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1916.

⁴⁴ For example, see Dr. Hugh Boyd to Governor Charles Henderson, June 23, 1918, Adjutant Generals' File, Alabama National Guard Records, 1916, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

⁴⁵ Sarah Wilson to Henderson, June 26, 1916, in *ibid.*

voiced no objection to his two sons doing military duty so long as it was performed in Alabama, but "certainly not . . . to go to Mexico, or to the Mexican border."⁴⁶

Vandiver Park in north Montgomery was selected as the mobilization and training center. In short order troops began coming into the improvised camp where they immediately busied themselves setting up those countless installations necessary for a military center. All arrived fresh and starry-eyed from traditional hometown farewell ceremonies staged by relatives and friends. Many could be seen carrying neatly tied lunch boxes crammed with the owner's favorite fare, while others noisily chatted about the lingering embraces awarded by sweethearts.⁴⁷ Everyone had delicious memories of these affairs while others left home without discharging just indebtedness. Such was the memory of one Birmingham unit who owed a Negro laundress \$29.30 for two weeks' work. When the unfortunate woman failed to collect, she appealed to the chief executive of Alabama for a redress of grievance. The millionaire governor settled the account up to \$8.00 out of his own pocket and there the matter ended.⁴⁸

Women of all walks of life caught the martial spirit as numbers volunteered as Red Cross workers, or acted in the capacity of morale boosters to raise the spirits of the men in khaki.⁴⁹ Aged veterans of past wars offered their services as soldiers in the ranks. G. R. Stone wrote from the Confederate Soldiers Home at Mountain Creek that although he was over 70, he could still "see, hear, work, and shoot, and was willing to stand an examination" to prove his eligibility for military

⁴⁶ W. J. Brown to Henderson, June 28, 1916, in *ibid.*

⁴⁷ See Anniston *Evening Star and Daily Hot Blast*, June 26, 1916; Birmingham *Age-Herald*, June 27, 1916; Mobile *Register*, June 23, 1916.

⁴⁸ Martha Scott to Henderson, August 5, 1916, Adjutant Generals' File, Alabama National Guard Records, 1916.

⁴⁹ Montgomery *Journal*, July 25 and 26, 1916.

service.⁵⁰ So inclined were a group of Spanish-American War veterans of Gadsden when they "offered . . . to defend the American rights," in any capacity that the United States authorities deemed best.⁵¹

The outpouring of patriotism also touched a large number of Alabama's Negro citizens. Scores of Montgomery Blacks signed a petition on June 22nd asking permission to form a military unit of their race, but the project was abandoned in the face of official opposition.⁵² Simultaneously, a group of Tuskegee Institute students wrote in support of the nation's Mexican policy and also tendered their personal services as "volunteers . . . for the defense of the flag."⁵³ They quoted their late President Booker T. Washington when he pledged his race's cooperation in the Spanish-American War by stating that "the Negroes . . . will be no less patriotic at this time than in former periods of storm and stress." The Black Man, he continued, "was an American through and through" and the president need not fret about divided allegiance, because there were "no hyphnates among us."⁵⁴

From the beginning, Montgomery and the Guardsmen enjoyed the most cordial relationships. Citizens opened their homes and accorded the soldier-visitors the customary Southern sociality. Receptions and balls were commonplace in private residences and hotels. Both beautiful and plain girls became objects of affection for scores of furloughed soldiers seeking feminine company. On week-ends, Camp Vandiver

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1916.

⁵¹ Gadsden *Evening Journal*, June 29, 1916.

⁵² *Montgomery Journal*, June 22 and 23, 1916.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Repeated offers to form Negro military units received the following rejection from General Graff Hubbard, Alabama's Adjutant General: "No authority for organizing any new troops." For example, see Graff Hubbard to E. H. Field, June 23, 1916, Adjutant Generals' File, Alabama National Guard Records, 1916.

⁵⁴ *Birmingham Reporter*, July 1, 1916.

seemed flooded with visitors from all over the state anxious to see and be seen by friends and kin in uniform.⁵⁵

Montgomery merchants were estatic with happiness over the presence of thousands of potential customers which it was estimated had a spending power exceeding \$100,000 a month.⁵⁶ Happy too, were owners of places of prostitution. Business in the world's oldest profession picked up considerably on week-ends, but it reached a high plateau of activity during the exceedingly rainy month of July.⁵⁷ Bootleggers and gamblers also enjoyed unprecedented prosperity as they offered their special diversions near or within the campsite. In a concerted effort to check such activity, various religious denominations started campaigns for providing recreation of quite a different nature. One local church, for example, urged that its members extend "a cheerful handshake" along with the greeting "God bless you" upon meeting servicemen on the streets. Members were urged to direct "the boys to the Y.M.C.A." for more conventional recreational outlets.⁵⁸

At first, military training seemed much like playing at war as National Guardsmen went about routine duties. Each of the large newspapers ran a military news column reporting a kind of "fun and games" activities. Among these were detailed accounts of exhibition drills, athletic events, and humorous antics of hometown personalities. A case in point was that of Bill Corrigan known widely as Alabama's best bugler simply because he could "blow out sweet strains for . . . the girls tripping along Dexter Avenue," some three miles from camp.⁵⁹ Another was credited with inventing a dance called

⁵⁵ *Montgomery Journal*, July 29 and 30, 1916.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, June 21, 1916.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, July 20, August 14, 1916.

⁵⁸ *Birmingham Alabama Baptist*, July 9, 1916.

⁵⁹ *Montgomery Journal*, June 24, 1916.

"Chili Wiggle," which said inventor promised would be taught the señoritas when the boys crossed into Mexico.⁶⁰

Yet all was not sweet repose as boredom and restlessness strained tempers and inevitable friction broke out between officers and enlisted men. In one incident a Montgomery private was pinioned to stakes, spread eagle, face down on the manure covered floor of a cavalry stable. There he remained for about five hours for allegedly cursing an officer and the flag of the United States. The punishment understandably attracted wide-spread attention, sides were taken, and the issue bitterly debated in the press; but in the end both men in question were reprimanded for extraordinary behavior.⁶¹

After spending four months at Camp Vandiver, Alabama Guardsmen received orders in late October to report for duty along the Mexican-American border. Although the worst of the crisis was about over, during the next thirty days over 4,000 happy warriors left their home base for Nogales, Arizona, and El Paso and San Antonio, Texas.⁶² It was a memorable journey for the farm boys and urban clerks whose travel experiences had probably never extended beyond Alabama's boundaries. En route, troop trains literally rang with the noises of merriment mingled with piercing screams of bravado of what Mexicans might expect from the National Guard. Among the most offensive cries of all was the unflattering: "I wanta get 'er 'Greaser'! I wanta get 'im n-n-n-o-o-o-w-w-w!!"⁶³

Upon arrival at their respective posts, the only Mexicans encountered were the Mexican-American citizens. The ex-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, June 28, 1916.

⁶¹ *Birmingham News*, August 12, 1916; *Mobile Register*, August 3, 1916; *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 19, 24 and 28, August 3, 1916.

⁶² *Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. LIV, Pt. 2, 2015; *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 1, 1916.

⁶³ William H. Amerine, *Alabama's Own in France* (New York: Eaton and Gettiger, 1919), 38.

pectations of glory faded fast into dreary garrison duty along with a rise in boredom and nostalgia for home and friends. Even the so-called "foreign correspondents," whom large newspapers employed from among literate guardsmen, busied themselves only with describing the countryside and stories of imaginery Spanish beauties.⁶⁴ In fact, absolutely no shots were fired in conflict except for occasional discharges of firearms in local bar rooms.⁶⁵ Before too long, new and haunting chants came into prominence. Among the most plaintive ran thusly: "I want to go home, now," and "I want to go back to the farm and stay."⁶⁶

Some home front civilians, acting with elected officials, responded to such pleas and launched campaigns to get "the boys" home for Christmas, or soon after the New Year of 1917.⁶⁷ Next, nature intervened with unusually cold weather causing an outbreak of pneumonia among the enlisted men. Newspaper correspondents filed especially lurid copy describing the horrors of inadequate treatment as well as the poor housing afforded the enlisted men.⁶⁸ Rumors of dereliction of official duty spread rapidly into Alabama via letters and telegrams causing near panic conditions. A mothers' petition movement urging official investigation proliferated in every county seat to such an extent that the governor saw fit to take action. Accompanied by the first lady the chief executive hastened westward and following a short tour of facilities containing Alabamians, he reported no one was to blame for

⁶⁴ For example, see *Birmingham News*, October 16, 1916; *Montgomery Journal*, November 7, 1916.

⁶⁵ See *Birmingham Ledger*, November 24, 1916; *Tuscaloosa News and Times Gazette*, November 2, 1916.

⁶⁶ *Montgomery Journal*, November 7, 1916.

⁶⁷ See comments of Congressman George Huddleston in *Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. LIII, 1924; *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 1, 1916.

⁶⁸ *Montgomery Journal*, December 13, 1916.

the deplorable conditions. However, Henderson recommended that the Federal government should demobilize all National Guard units as soon as it was practical.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the situation had taken a new turn as Guard officers began denouncing those men who had complained as sissies and other epithets calculated to cast doubts on their manhood. Backing them in this was the *Geneva County Reaper* editorial entitled: "I Want To Go Home, Boo-Hoo!" In it complainants were not only chided for immaturity, but also for doing irreparable damage to Alabama's reputation throughout the nation.⁷⁰ While the controversy raged, the long sought for orders releasing all National Guard units came in February of 1917. As the crowded trains streaked homeward, Alabamians were much too happy to fret about hurting their state's reputation. The more thoughtful passengers accounted the experience a major step toward producing better soldiers and boosting the military preparedness program of their generation.

In this Alabama civilians completely agreed,⁷¹ but it is doubtful if those who had come out in print and speech ever fully understood or accepted America's failure in obtaining its objective in the border crisis. Surely none realized at the time that major foreign problems seldom lend themselves to simple and immediate solutions. Perhaps two veterans at a Birmingham depot may have captured both the mood and the truth of the moment when a reporter asked them to describe their feelings on the entire situation. "The training has benefitted me physically; my hope is, . . . that I may get forgiveness for the profanity I have used toward those who sent us to

⁶⁹ Birmingham *Ledger*, January 19, 1917; Montgomery *Advertiser*, January 18, 1917.

⁷⁰ January 26, 1917. 5000 copies of this editorial was ordered printed by General Plummer, Commandant of the Nogales District.

⁷¹ Birmingham *News*, February 17, 1917.

the border," said the first. And the other hastily chimed in with a loud "Never Again."⁷² Famous last words indeed, for in less than a month both were back in uniform doing battle in World War I against "Krauts rather than Greasers."⁷³

⁷² Montgomery *Journal*, February 20, 1917.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, April 5, 1917.