

The New York Tribune
April 30, 1914

Soldiers Relieve Navy On Shore At Vera Cruz Today

***Marines from Fleet Will Return to Their Ships,
Leaving Only Those from the Transports on Duty in City***

Vera Cruz, April 29.—The harbor of Vera Cruz is like a half moon. The wharves of the city project from the centre of a semi-circle. For purposes of defense and administration the city was divided by the navy into three sectors.

When Brigadier General Funston assumes the title of Military Governor tomorrow, and the army relieves the navy from shore duty, the fleet marines will return to the ships, but the marines from the transport will remain in charges of the northern sector. The Fourth Infantry commands the centre, and the Seventh Infantry the southern. The Twenty-eighth and Nineteenth guard the water front and act in reserve. The sectors stretch fanwise from the harbour to the sand hills.

Captain Constant Cordier, who served as military attaché to Peru and Ecuador, and other officers visited the navy outposts this morning, preparatory to occupying them with infantry. Behind us, flat as a prairie, lay the city, entirely encompassed by hills, drifting sand on which only cactus survives and in which one sinks above the shoetops.

To all outposts water is carried by hand. Without shade, without firewood for cooking even, the hills to the north are especially bare, like those of the Desert of Sahara, piled up by windstorms. Sixty-seven years ago, when American troops were landing in the south and circling the circumference of these hills they carried water through the same pass guarded today by marines and the 4th Infantry. They entered and captured Vera Cruz. Grant was with them as a second lieutenant. This morning we met his grandson, now a captain of engineers, noting on his map the trenches already dug and planning others which will enfilade with rifle and artillery fire the opening in the walls of sand through which his grandfather marched.

The positions selected for the defensive works thrown up by the bluejackets and marines are highly praised by army engineers, who will advise continuing to occupy the same strategic outposts.

Bivouacking on these barren sand hills is hard, and to relieve the monotony, like rotation in crops, soldiers will on succeeding days perform outpost duty, patrol the streets and rest in reserve.

All here are hoping that the delays of mediation will not dull or rust the fine fighting edge. The 5th Brigade came from the healthiest post in the United States in the highest perfection of military training, after months of the most scientific practice on the rifle range. Each day of sitting idle on the sand hills or pounding the pavement as policemen threatens their fitness. Any rifle team trained to compete for the Palma trophy, after a month of enforced idleness, would make poor practice.

If the latest story circulated here is a true incident, one of the bluejackets instructed by his officer to challenge all approaching at night with “Alto, quien?” was heard last night, shouting “Alto quo vadis?”

The *Kilpatrick*, first transport to touch the wharf at Vera Cruz, found waiting to greet her a force consisting of exactly five persons—four Mexicans and one moving picture man. Not Mexican diplomats; not Mexican civic dignitaries: not even Mexican soldiers. No; four Mexican stevedores.

As three thousand soldiers swarmed down the ratlines in eager anticipation of at least some activity on the wharf the four stevedores looked up at them—and yawned.

It was an unexpected reception, but more chilling had been the lack of greeting from our bluejackets, who as we drew past battleship after battleship—there were so many it looked like the manoeuvres off Oyster Bay—surveyed our khaki-covered decks in motionless silence.

Four days we were without news. Whenever we wirelessly the *Louisiana* our convoy was ordered to keep out: so we knew nothing. In time our plight touched the heart of one man aboard the battleship—a red-headed sailor. With his cap he semaphored in one word the amazing truth. The word was “Mediation.”

It ran from deck to deck of our transport, and to all ranks it brought a sense of wasted effort. But as though it had expected this fiasco—as though for eighteen months it had trained for no other purpose than assuming the duties of a constabulary—the army at once started taking over the policing of the city.

No city ever was better policed. It is patrolled and roped off and every belfry holds a squad of expert marksmen. You cannot walk fifty feet without having a bayonet pointed at your beltline.

After visiting the scenes of the two days of fighting I am impressed by two things—the enormous difficulties surmounted by our sailors in fighting their way through streets barricaded at the skyline and their adaptability in not only making themselves at home but in making themselves masters of that home. Everywhere—in cafes, shops in the plazas—our men seated themselves next to Mexicans who, from balustrades, in civilian clothes, had fired on them. In an orphan asylum which men from the Arkansas had converted into a barricade I found orphan boys teaching our bluejackets to throw lariats and the bluejackets reciprocating by teaching the orphans to play baseball.

On the same clothesline were hung to dry the petticoats of six-year-old orphan girls and the jumpers of our bluejackets.

A picture of peace to delight our Secretary of State!

The work of our big guns was perfect. The *Chester* made the Naval Academy building look live the ruins of Messina. You can follow the passing on five-inch shells through the four walls of a building a block square. The rifle fire was no less destructive—plateglass windows look like sieves, street corners as though hit by a motor truck.

Curfew did not ring last night (Tuesday). The lid was raised today, turning the city over to the supervision of the army.

And, while diplomats decide whether we have any national honor, our army of trained fighting machines, sent here to instruct the second-story workers of Vera Cruz in municipal reforms, becomes an army of white wings; the Springfield rifle is exchanged for the broom.

The apostles of peace and feminists have won a glorious victory!

A compilation has arisen to which it is impossible to give too much consideration. In agreeing to mediation Washington may not appreciate that, while our forces would honestly

maintain the status quo, certain elements among the Mexicans feel in no way bound to postpone hostilities. The criminals liberated at the time the navy captured this city are now in the hills beyond it. Sailors from the *New Jersey* at an outpost were fired on last night by a trooper of the Federal cavalry, but as they were under orders not to return the fire they were forced to see the man ride away unpunished.

These bandits terrorized the refugees yesterday, stoning the train on which they were travelling, and this morning they destroyed the wires to Mexico City. The forbearance of our marines and infantry is misinterpreted by these criminals, and each day they grow in insolence and boldness. Unless our men may defend themselves or send out an expedition against these guerrillas grave disaster may follow. After dynamite outrages or after outposts are cut up it will be too late even to mediate.