New York Tribune
May 31, 1914

Bold Tejar Marines Scorn to be Rescued

Daily Visit of Soldiers to Vera Cruz Waterworks Garrison Described by Tribune Correspondent—Tells How One Shot May End Mediation

Vera Cruz, May 30.—Water for this city is pumped out of the Jamapa River at Tejar, nine mines from Vera Cruz. To guard the waterworks are three hundred marines with Bendmarcier quick-firing guns and three-inch field pieces. But in places the nine miles of iron pipe through which the water is forced to the city is exposed and could be destroyed.

To prevent this every day one of the two troops of the 6th Cavalry here patrols the line of water pipe, and after a rest at Tejar returns to Vera Cruz. It is a joke of the troopers that these daily expeditions are to rescue the Tejar garrison of marines. "Thank God, we are in time!" and the marines retort with solicitude, "Did you lose many men on the way up?"

Since the murder of Parks no one is permitted to go beyond our outposts except on the train to Tejar and on the train to where on the road to Mexico City the tracks are torn up. These trains are guarded by marines and infantry, and the one that meets the passengers from Mexico City carries a wireless apparatus.

The only other way to escape from the heat and flies of Vera Cruz is to ride out with the patrol. When you are with it you are not supposed to be beyond our line, because the patrol itself is an outpost and prevents you carrying information to the enemy and the enemy from shooting you.

Davis Sees the Rescue

I went with the troop and saw the daily rescue of the garrison yesterday. There were no casualties. The cavalry camp is on the outskirts of the city, in a cocoanut grove. Captain Myers was in command, and at 7:15 o'clock gave the order to mount. We started up the railroad in what the infantry would call single file and the cavalry a column of troopers. Three hundred yards in advance of the troops was a point of five men with a sergeant.

They were linked to us by a connecting trooper, who by twisting his neck was able to see the captain's semaphore signals. By him a message was relayed to the point. Trailing the troop was a rear guard of four. Each man carried a rifle, a hundred rounds of ammunition and an automatic pistol and in the saddle bag a sandwich.

Marching at a fast walk soon we were clear of the city limits, and for three miles the double track of the Mexican Central runs along the same embankment with the Alvarado single track. Between these and on either edge of the ties are paths beaten by the hoofs of burros, mules and ponies bringing into Vera Cruz milk, vegetables, eggs and chickens.

At that hour of these there was an almost unbroken procession. The milk was carried in cans set in saddlebags of rawhide, and as the little ponies that bore the burden moved at a dog trot the wonder grew that when the milk reached Vera Cruz it had not changed to cheese and butter.

Chickens Ride on Burros

Chickens and turkeys are brought in alive in wicker cages rising from each flank of the donkeys in tiers, or more frequently the chickens are hung, tied by the feet, in bunches. From beneath this living cloak of feathers the legs and ears of the burro alone are visible. We passed hundreds of these patient, faithful little beasts loaded down with charcoal, sugar cane, bundles of green grass, pineapples, bananas, lettuces and mangoes. They slipped and fell over railroad ties, dodging in and out among the big troop horses that in comparison towered like elephants.

The farmers are encouraged by General Funston to enter our lines. The fresh food they bring is very welcome, and what else they bring in their saddlebags no one asks. The other night a Mexican arrived at the American outpost with four burros, each carrying two new suitcases, in which he told the sentries he had $1,000,000. The sentries supposed it was a joke, but after Colonel Van Vliet and his officers of the 4th Infantry had for four hours counted the contents of the suitcases it was discovered that it was a fact. The joke is now considered to be on the sentries. And every time in a lonely part of the trail we met a burro carrying a valise we wished we were at war.

Good for Sniping

One mile beyond the city we passed our last outguard, and so strict are the orders that, although I was in such good company, before I could go further I had to produce my pass. We now were outside, through not for some time beyond sight, of our outposts. We were in the enemy's country, and a very beautiful country it is. It also is admirably adapted for an ambush or sniping.

No one can determine what one of these roving bands of bandits may try to pull off. Day before yesterday the patrol saw twenty cavalrymen from a distance of two hundred yards. Nothing happened, but some day a band of these irregular horsemen may stumble into the advance or rear guard of the patrol, and not knowing the rest of the troops are within call may fire as they fired on Parks and on an airship. And then all the King's horses and all the King's men can't bring mediation back again.

We rode along the top of the railroad embankment, and from that elevation looked down on the swamps, beautiful with the white iris morning glories and cattails like those at home, only as befits this hothouse climate, of gigantic size. The train to Tejar, crawling by, swept us off the track and crowded us between car wheels and the swamp, causing one horse to decide of the two deaths the one by drowning was the more pleasant. So he leaped into the swamp, and finding it less hot than the roadbed and the rails, refused to come out.

This was of interest, and only because the troop was forced to halt and dismount, and at once with rumors the outposts burst into activity. Silhouetted against the skyline we could see the nearest outguard on Cemetery Hill whipping the air with his flag, and our signal man read off: "Patrol halted one mile beyond the lines, point dismounted, rear guard closing in."

Flags Began to Flash

The sandhills took up the exciting intelligence, and from hill to hill, from infantry to engineers, from soldiers to marines, the white and red flags flashed in eloquent half circles. Three minutes after the troop horse took the water jump and the patrol had halted it was known along the entire line of outposts, and had the patrol's own signalman unstrapped his flag from his saddle and wigwagged for aid all the supports and reserves were already at his service.

Three miles beyond the city we came to where the tracks separate and the single one turns to the left toward Tejar. It is here that most frequently the patrol sees the enemy. Either there is a Federal outpost near this junction or else the Mexicans seen are those from the guard where the tracks are destroyed three miles to the north. We are now above the swamps, and the railroad track runs through pasture land and is bordered by beautiful groves of cocoanut palm.

Captain Myers finds among the trees old friends of Cuba and the Philippines, the feathery bamboo, the palm and the flame tree as far spreading as a giant oak and as scarlet as a cardinal's robe, and many other trees beautiful and abnormal of no known and listed species which not even Gifford Pinchot or Gouverneur Morris could give the pedigree.

Their Thirst Was Prodigious

When we set out, in cuplike leaves of the swamp lilies there was dew enough to bathe your face. Now the sun has drained that, and we ride through the moist heat of a steam laundry and each face is caked with the dry dust of a brick kiln. The sweat runs through it in rivulets. We have stopped talking, and the only sound is of the creaking leather or the ring of a steel shoe when one of the forty horses stumbles. Mentally we have just refused at any price to sell the thirst we have acquired, when an opening in the trees shows us the tall tower of the pumping station and our journey's end.

Tejar has a freight shed, a cantina, a dozen thatched and palm tree shacks and the waterwords. The rest of it is entirely khaki colored tents. It is an extremely pretty camp, as clean as a Japanese garden, shaded by palms, encircled by the river and the wooded hills beyond waiting to be attacked. There seems at Tejar little to occupy the time. The enlisted men are not given permission to visit Vera Cruz, but seem content, as they should be. The burro trail passes through their camp, and before they reach Vera Cruz the marines had had the first pick of all the fruit, chickens and vegetables, and they have a cantina where they can buy soft drinks.

A civilian only can buy beer after a ride of nine miles on a red hot railroad track. I had looked forward to enjoying his privilege, but the realization was disappointing. Beer drunk under the cold, hard glare of twenty marines, each of whom is consuming a pink fluid that tastes like a tooth wash, loses its flavor. Tejar has another advantage in the river, where there is a firm, sandy bottom, and the rapids are swift enough to rub out all the stiffness of a day in the trenches.

Always New Guests

The hospitality of the officers in Tejar is boundless, and it needs must be. Every other officer on the warships and in the regiments was wishing to see the distant outpost stranded outside our lines self-supporting, so each day at the mess there are always new guests.

One day there were sixteen that would make the best housekeeper peevish, but Major Russell was as unmoved as when the Federal officer gave him ten minutes in which to surrender

Tejar, and the only change made by Captain Wirgman, his adjutant, was to give his camp chair to a visitor and sit on a box of ammunition. Yesterday the officers carried their courtesy so far as to bring to us messages that heavy firing was heard between Tejar and the city, but this effort to render our return march of interest was futile.

Too well we knew that whenever an admiral is saluted in the outer harbor some sentry reports an artillery duel going on directly in front of his post. Our doubts were justified. In safety we regained the city. That the marines had refused to seek safety with us was on their own heads. We had ridden out to rescue them. They had refused to be rescued. Tomorrow they will refuse again.