The New York Tribune
May 11, 1914

R. H. Davis Tells Story Of Arrest By Huerta's Police

Tribune's War Correspondent Seized as He Stepped from Train in Mexico City by Secret Service Men.

Other Newspaper Men Thrust In Jail

People of Capital Believe Their Nation Is at War with the United States, Despite Wilson's Declaration to the Contrary

In spite of appearances to the contrary, Americans know that with Mexico they are not at war; they know the mediators are at work and peace reigns; they know any Mexican can travel as freely through the United States as any Englishman or Swede; they know if he says "I am a Mexican," they will reply, "Welcome to our city," but the Mexican does not know that; his mind cannot grasp the nice distinctions between occupying his territory and invading it.

His chief seaport has been captured by bullet and shell, his customs duties seized, his post office confiscated, his supplies of food stopped so completely that up at Mexico City he goes to bed hungry, and his fellow countrymen have been killed, and he does not know that that is not war. It is like the man who said, "Why run from that dog? Don't you know a barking dog doesn't bite?"

"Yes," says the other man, "I know that, you know that, but the dog does not know that."

The Mexican does not know that peace smiles. I have just travelled to Mexico City, and by order of the police have returned and during the two days going and two days returning and the day the police allowed me to remain in the city I did not meet with a single Mexican, including General Maas, who did not think his people and mine were at war, and they not only think that way but act that way.

From refugees I had heard this, but was skeptical, for at Vera Cruz the correspondents look on the stories told by refugees with suspicion. Technically they class them with the wounded man story. That means they are apt to be exaggerated and hysterical. Whenever a refugee told me his train had been stoned, that he had been dragged from it and cast into jail, where he was robbed and beaten and his throat cut from ear to ear, I did not believe him.

When I started to make the same trip in reverse order I planned to say that an American could journey from Vera Cruz to Mexico City as safely and pleasantly as from New York to Toronto, but he cannot. For the fact that he can't the Mexican is responsible; but, though responsible, he is not to be blamed. He acts just as we will act when we declare war.

The difficulty now is that while the American in Mexico considers himself a tourist and entitled to protection, the Mexican regards him as the hated invader and friend of the traitors Villa and Carranza—and that different point of view leads to trouble.

If finally war is declared, we can come out squarely as enemies and things will run more smoothly.

When, on May 7, I left Vera Cruz for Mexico City, other Americans on the train were Medill McCormick, of Chicago, who, though a Bull Moose national committeeman, consents to act as war correspondent for the *Times* of London; Frederick Palmer, a veteran correspondent of six wars, and Adam Weimer, a German-American, in the Mexican National Bank.

For three miles we were carried by train to where for the next three miles the track is destroyed. There Captain Richardson, commanding the train guard, advanced to meet the lieutenant in command of the Mexican patrol under a flag of truce. This flag, carried by an orderly, was, I observed, on ordinary occasions a bath towel. Whether this was intended on the part of the orderly as a subtle insult to our Mexican brothers I cannot say, but certainly there is nothing less likely to bring peace to the mind of a Mexican than a bath towel.

For the three-mile trek a speculative Indian was renting ponies, and the Americans each chartered one. We did not know that our more fortunate state would lead those who walked unload upon us their bundles, bags and babies, but that is what happened, and unburdened by a baby in his arms, a small boy on his back and another of the saddle bags clasping him around the neck, the man who walked got the best of it.

It was a most picturesque procession. For half a mile straggled a few foreigners and many Mexicans returning to Mexico City. The women were in inevitable nun-like black, the men in tailless shirts, with trousers so tight it was impossible to see how they got their feet in or out, and hats so gigantic that three men coming toward you look like a distant view of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and with these were Indian *cargadores* staggering under trunks, boxes, bundles of bed linen, cooking pans, babies and fighting cocks.

On either side of the roadbed were the ashes of funeral pyres of ties and iron bedplates, twisted in fire, and beyond them land as level as an Africa veldt, but crowded with all the foliage and flowers of the tropics.

Sometimes we rode between groves of cocoanut palms or manigua, all yellow like our forsythia, or ceiba trees hung with poor relations of the orchid, or giant morning glories, the scarlet tullipan and papaya mango trees, and banana palms all heavy with fruit, and wild flowers of many colors, from pale pink to the richest purple, to which the Mexicans could give no name.

As our strange procession staggered, panting and sweating, through this jungle it made one think of the marches of the early days of ’49, when the gold-seekers crossed the isthmus.

At Tembladeras we again picked up the tracks and packed ourselves into a freight train that bumped us a few miles further to Tejeria. At the end of the first rail head, where Richardson wished us good luck, we had said good-by to the man in khaki.

Now all was Mexican. There were soldiers to the right of us and soldiers to the left of us, in more and different uniforms than there are armies of the world. They were drilling, sleeping and cooking on the stone platform of the railroad station, between the tracks and under the trees, with their scarlet blankets flung from barbed wire fences.

They regarded us not at all, and we scrambled for places in a single passenger coach and were pushed on to Paso del Macho. When General Maas and his Federals retreated from Vera Cruz it was here that he halted. Paso del Macho is a village so pressed for room that they have crowded into the shedlike station the headquarters of the general. The long table where usually the passengers eat and the public bar were presided over by an Indian squaw smoking a cigarette.

For an hour we sat within twenty feet of the general, and had he wished to examine our credentials he had only to raise his voice and we would have presented them, but for a

Mexican general that method of procedure was too simple and direct. Whether he wanted to impress us or scare us, he certainly succeeded in scaring us. We cannot guess, but we know he went about getting what he wanted in the way calculated to give us the most trouble.

Trouble began when a lieutenant dressed like a motorist on a Havana trolley car told me to come with him. I asked why, and he said "silencio." So I silencioed, but at the same time winked at McCormick to get busy and effect a rescue.

He gave me a high sign that he would, and went to get Weimer, our guide, interpreter and friend. The lieutenant led me to an open place, where were four boys, not over fourteen years of age. They wore uniforms of blue drill, their bare feet were in sandals of bullhide, and their headgear did not match, but I noticed their rifles and bayonets did.

The lieutenant formed them in a hollow square, with me in the centre, and left us.

I was two feet taller than the boys and one foot taller than their bayonets, and, standing in the blazing sun like a monument surrounded by a picket fence, I felt very silly and looked it.

Then I saw McCormick approaching and thought rescue was at hand. He looked pained and surprised, but not on my account.

"They tagged me, too," he said.

Then they brought Palmer, also looking pained and surprised, arranged us in single file, and with boy scouts on our flanks marched us through the village.

I have written many stories about Latin American and in them someone always gets shot against a stone wall. As we marched through the village I recalled this and it seemed to me I never had visited a place with so few houses and so many stone walls. So every time we passed one without halting I gave thanks to Saint Rita.

We were led between rows of more blue drill soldiers to a courtyard in which were more lieutenants and the local strongarm squad. They all seemed very angry about something and frisked us for concealed weapons, then searched us and ordered us to take off our shoes. Had they caught us blowing up a troop train with dynamite they could not have been more excited or more insolent.

When we got rid of our boots the lieutenant with his own fair hands searched our socks for hidden papers. He was greatly annoyed at finding none. He ordered us into a cell, simply furnished with one iron barred window, a bootblack's box, a broken chair and a packing case.

Palmer took the chair, McCormick the packing case and I drew the blacking box. Then the lieutenant, still angry, assigned a guard to each of us, but we all are tall, and our guard looked so inadequate that another lieutenant with a sense of humor substituted their elder brothers, who sized up more to our class.

The one who guarded McCormick, who looked like Chief Meyer, of the Giants, took but one glance at his prisoner and then proceeded hastily to load his piece. In pointing it at each of us, including the lieutenant, he jammed his fingers in the breech and dropped two cartridges.

It was the only moment when I felt we were in real danger. We were ordered not to talk to one another or with the outside. Palmer was not allowed to communicate for a long time and sat in eloquent silence to keep his mind off past sins and possible future, got out his blacking brushes and in spite of trembling fingers I improved the appearance of my shoes. So did McCormick, but he is better polishing sentences for a Progressive platform than boots. After what seemed a long time the lieutenant returned and we were marched back to General Maas. War existed, he said, and Americans could not visit "City Mexico," as he expressed it.

English, French, even Chinese, can go, but not Americans. As Palmer was writing for an American paper only, Maas ordered him back to Vera Cruz. As McCormick and

myself are writing for English and Canadian papers he assumed we were English, and while we did not say we were English we did not contradict him.

My orders from my papers were to go to Mexico City, and at the moment did not meet the opportunity for standing on a chair and singing "The Star Spangled Banner." Besides, saying you are an American always sounds so like boasting. From the train we waved to Palmer, who, surrounded by soldiers, looked very lonesome, and pushed on to Orizaba, where the train halted for the night.

There is a monument to the citizens who, in 1847, were killed fighting the Americans. When the next morning I walked out to see the city before the train started, I found in placards hanging in all the shop windows that people were reminded of this monument and urged to kill all Americans and give no quarter. My desire to see more of the city soon passed.

At the station a drunken brakeman tried to make trouble for us because we were Americans, and wanted to put us off the train, but his antagonism was mostly pulque, and he is mentioned only because he was the only private citizen who showed us the least reudeness or hostility.

It was the public officials who gave us trouble at Orizaba. Pines took the place of palms, and on the head and shoulders of Pica de Orizaba was snow—we still wore the clothing worn the day before in Vera Cruz, where the heat is the moist heat of the Congo and Nagaski, and by noon we were shivering with cold.

The train was so crowded the people were jammed like cattle in aisles and hung from the platforms, but no physical discomfort could spoil the beauty of the journey. The ride between Orizaba and Esperanza, around the mountain peaks, with bays and oceans of green farmlands below, itself should repay anyone who visits Mexico at 9 o'clock at night.

After standing for hours and without food we arrived in the city, where McCormick was met by E. T. Oakley, local correspondent of the *Times* of London. He had engaged rooms for us at the Palacio Hotel. Many hotel runners were rushing and shouting through the crowd. A man, much excited, showed me what I thought was a hotel runner's badge.

I said, "I am going to Palacio." He said, "No, you are going to police headquarters." It turned out he was right. They did not tell us why we were arrested. The detectives put an American named Schuler, a Missourian, for two years in business in Mexico, in a cab with me. Neither was he told why he was arrested.

As we were led to the magistrate's room I saw through the open door A. J. Sutton, of the *Washington Post*, whom I had met in Vera Cruz. He beckoned to me. I asked if I might go to him, but was told he was incommunicado. When Schuler was taken away I promised to take word of his arrest to the Brazilian Legation, where McCormick and I were driven by a detective and an inspector of police.

There we found Walter C. Whiffen, for four years the local correspondent of the Associated Press, who had come up from Vera Cruz to lock up his house and draw his money from the bank; and though he could settle his affairs in a few hours and return to Vera Cruz he had been locked up by the police two days.

We waited, guarded by detectives, while Cardozo do Oliviera, the Brazilian Minister, the police inspector and Dantin, formerly counsellor of our embassy, considered our case. Dantin had been threatened with arrest, and now takes refuge in the Brazilian Legation, where he has been indefatigable in helping Americans who are more fortunate than himself and are free to leave Mexico.

After an hour we were called in to hear the result of the deliberations. It was most astonishing. The inspector had taken all the tricks. The minister explained to us we could go free if we promised the inspector that we would return to Vera Cruz by the first train, which was leaving in twenty-four hours; that while the war lasted we would not return to Mexico

City, and that while in the city we would not try to send out letters or cable; that until the train started we would remain in jail.

It was a humiliating proposition and was meant to be humiliating. It was not the humiliation I so much objected to, but that after two days in a freight car with nothing to eat I did not want to go to jail but to the restaurant Sylvain, the fame of which had reached even Paris, and I desired a bath and a clean bed, but instead I urged there was no war with Mexico and we had committed no crime. For the police to put us on parole and then put us in jail to see we kept it was absurd. We pointed out McCormick was a well known man, as his father was an ex-ambassador, and he would keep his word. Whiffen also was well known for four years in Mexico City and had held a responsible post. He would keep his word.

In my own case, the Brazilian ambassador at Washington had asked the Mexican government to permit me to come to Mexico City and the government had given its consent, and having given its consent, as soon as I arrived arrested me. So I announced that unless I could go to a hotel and was guaranteed while waiting for the train to start I would not be arrested, I would remain where I was in the Brazilian legation and the inspector could take me from there only by force.

I knew he knew he could not do that. The Brazilian minister knew it, but had not suggested it. Instead, he assented to our going back to jail. He is well meaning, but sees only the difficulties. He seems to lack authority and influence. For a few days Sir Lionel Carden, who was so cruelly abused by the American papers, was looking after Americans, and when he learned one of them was in jail his way was to jump into his auto and go in person to Police Headquarters, and when he left it the American left with him.

Every American I have met tells me that outside of O'Shaugnessy our people have had no greater friend than the British ambassador. In our own case the inspector was at once recalled and said so long as we left by the first train we could go where we pleased. As he spoke excellent English his tone suggested where he would prefer we should go. Instead we chose Sylvain's. I suggested going with Whiffen to headquarters to tell Sutton he was free, but he said it was better he would go alone and later he would join us. On his return from police headquarters in spite of the promise given by the inspector in presence of the Brazilian minister he was again arrested.

The next day, through the courtesy of the French Legation, McCormick and I left on a special train with French refugees for Puerto Mexico, from which point, by steamer, we have just arrived at Vera Cruz. When we left Dostor, of *The Sun*, and Sutton were still under arrest, as the authorities know who they are, and now know they are not spies; and as they ask only to return to Vera Cruz, their detention is without excuse. They may not be in personal danger, but they are being persecuted, humiliated and played with as a cat plays with a mouse, and many more Americans are in jail in Mexico City lacking credentials and denied the use of the cable and denied access to the Brazilian Minister.

He did not know of Sutton or Sculer until we told him. It is not pleasant to contemplate. The government to which the men belong and the government that has been asked to protect them mediate, and while they mediate the Mexican who does not know we are at peace acts as though we were at war.

(Source: Chronicling America: http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1914-05-12/ed-1/seq-1/)