

Billee and Tultas Jamieson's Account

As found in *Tultas Of Torreón: Reminiscences of Life in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1969), pp.112-123.

Federal troops had arrived in Torreón to supplement the ones already there, and when it appeared, from the capture of Gómez Palacio and Lerdo, that an attack on Torreón was imminent, barricades were set up in the streets and preparations for battle made. From the windows of the Chalet Wulff it was possible with field glasses to see a great horde of people, just waiting. These were civilians, not soldiers, who had come from as far away as Zacatecas in order to loot Torreón when the town was taken. Mama, packing up to leave, saw them. She caught the last train out of town, and it was nearly a month before Papa knew that she had arrived safely in San Antonio.

A letter of Billee's, written to his father in Ottawa and published in one of the Canadian papers, gave a good account of his efforts to get back to Torreón and the battle that took place. It is dated May 24, 1911.

Dear Dad:

Well, I have just passed through my first experience of actual warfare and can't say that I am stuck on it. On and after this date, when I want more warfare, I shall seek the M.P. show. Any bloodthirsty tendencies of atavistic descent or origin have been totally annihilated.

On the 21st of April I took Dalla and the kiddo to San Antonio. We were held up about 100 kilometers out of Torreón but allowed to pass, as some eighty members of the Madero families, that is, servants and children, were on the train going to Monterrey. After we left the rebels burned the bridge behind us and the station also. We arrived in Eagle Pass too late for the S.O. connection and had to lay over for 24 hours in that little hole. Arrive in S.A. Sunday night and started for here on Tuesday morning. On arriving at Spofford, the conductor told me that there was no train for Torreón so I hiked back to S.A.

After hanging around there for 8 days, I started south by way of Laredo. After leaving Saltillo, we were held up and \$350 taken from the express car, but the passengers were not molested; in fact many of us knew nothing of the rebels until the following morning when we awoke some 75 kilometers farther on, where we stayed for 10 hours on account of a burnt bridge. The rebels destroyed the telegraph lines, so that we had to feel our way to San Luis Potosi, where we found the northbound train waiting.

They had relieved the engineer and conductor of their watches and the peon said that they had showed a gun against his (the peon's) belly and had taken a dollar away from him. Furthermore they were waiting for our train to treat us the same way.

As soon as this news got around the passengers were unanimous about going back to San Luis. The conductor of the train was an Englishman and spoke very little Spanish, and as I was the only one on board who could speak both languages, the rest requested me to beseech the conductor to return. The telegraph, or rather telephone lines, being open to San Luis, the agent got communication with that place and had a wire sent by way of Queretaro to Aguascalientes asking for orders. Finally, they came and we went back, arriving in San Luis at 8:15 p.m.

Next morning we started out again and arrived in Aguas without incident. Waited there for 8 hours and took the northbound train on the Central, arriving in Torreón the next day at 12 noon.

It took me 125 hours for a journey that ordinarily is done in 23 hours.

Those on the train leaving Laredo the day following us did not get home for a week.

When I arrived everything was excitement. The rebels had possession of Gómez Palacio, 5 kilometers away, and were preparing to attack Torreón.

On Thursday morning 11th, the last train out left Torreón with some 25 foreigners on board, mostly women, including Mrs. Wulff. Until this morning we did not know if they had arrived in San Antonio or not. At 2 p.m. the same day a private train loaded with wealthy Mexicans and their families left for the south, but was turned back at the first station out. That afternoon there was a short skirmish which lasted about an hour. Saturday morning at 10 a.m. the ball opened in earnest. The firing commenced east of the city, around the Continental rubber plant and the smelter, the Alameda and the Chinese gardens. Then all along the river bank it became alive with rebels.

The rattle of musketry was intermingled with the crash of the metralladora (machine gun) and the cries of the contesting parties.

Viva Madero and *Viva Porfirio Díaz* were heard on all sides. All day long the firing was an almost continuous crash. Bullets whistled up and down the streets. I was in the emergency hospital in the centre of town (Garza Aldape's drug store). Presently the wounded began to come in. The first man was a *pelado* (lower class Mexican) who, while crossing Morelos Avenue, was shot twice through the right leg, breaking the tibia in four places. The next one was a curious man who stuck his head out from the corner of the street to see what was going on. He found out, but the information did him no good, for a Mauser bullet went through this brain. All day long we worked, and when night came we had to wait, as the rebels took the electric light plant on the edge of town and shut off the current.

We did not dare to stir, for the Federals were firing at every shadow. They fired constantly at the Red Cross, although they had promised to respect it. All night we sat in the drugstore, Drs. Gerkins, Lim, Garza Aldape and I, besides the stretcher bearers and young Carlos Gonzalez, who had volunteered for the Red Cross work. The mosquitoes, the heat, and the cries of the wounded whom we were unable to send to the hospital, made it a night of distress for all. Early next morning I started out to hunt some breakfast. The firing had ceased about 3 a.m., but I had not gone more than a block when the whine of two Mauser bullets which passed close to me made me reconsider my determination to break my fast, and I returned muy damn pronto to the hospital to chew the cud of reflection and meditate on the horrible way in which war interferes with a man's digestion or rather his getting something to digest. The cud of reflection proving a poor substitute for ham, eggs, and coffee, Garza Aldape, Gerkins, Carlitos Gonzalez and I started forth at 6 a.m., again seeking refreshment, and also to put Carlitos under the protection of the U.S. Consulate, as both he and his father had taken a very prominent part against the rebel forces in the Laguna. Garza Aldape was going home, as he had not seen his family for 24 hours and was anxious. He lives near the Alameda, which was the centre of the firing. He left Gerkins and me at the corner of Rodriguez and Morelos, and I watched him to go the bend in the street at Acuña street. Then he suddenly wheeled around and came back on the run, saying, "*Muchas balas.*" The battle had opened up again.

Somehow or other he got home, but he couldn't get back again. I worked until 11 a.m. Sunday, then went to bed until 5 p.m. All Saturday night we could hear the rebels yelling, "*Viva Madero*" and "*Muera Porfirio Díaz.*" Every time they yelled the machine gun would spit forth its hail in the direction of the sound. A thunderstorm about midnight made the sounds more distinct, and it seemed as if the firing was in the next street.

Sunday night I retired about 12, and about 2 a.m. I heard the march past of the Federals as they evacuated the town. Their ammunition had given out. Either through accident or design the last consignment of cartridges was found to be worthless, having wooden maneuver bullets

instead of steel. General Lojero then and there made the mistake of his life. Instead of surrendering the town, he determined to evacuate, thus leaving the town at the mercy of the populace. The Federal fire ceased about 4 a.m., it having been kept up by a few *Rurales* and volunteers while the troops were evacuating. At 5:30 a.m., the rebels sent scouts out, who reported that the town was empty of soldiers. Soon we could hear the yells of the people and the rebels as they entered.

The mob entered the Chinese Bank Building and on the third floor found a number of newly arrived Chinamen whom they threw out the windows to the street and their friends below finished them.

Little children were stood up against the wall and shot down, crying "*No me maten*" (Don't kill me). Chinese women were served the same way. Mounted troopers rode to the outskirts of the town and dragged Chinamen in to the plaza by the hair to execution. Some took refuge in the Casino, the fine \$250,000 club of the city. The mob entered and after killing them sacked the place, leaving it an utter ruin. I saw one fellow with a fine heavy silk plush curtain which he was using for a saddle blanket.

For three hours the slaughter of Chinese and the sacking of buildings went on, until the arrival of Castro and Emilio Madero, brother of Francisco, put an end to the most savage display ever seen or heard of in a supposedly civilized country. The rebels meanwhile had burnt the *presidencia* (city hall), the jail, the store of Henry Wulff (Dalla's uncle), Alfonso Campbell's place next door, after sacking them.

All the pawnshops were sacked, as well as the Chinese steam laundry and the stores kept by Arabs. Some Spanish stores also suffered, notably that of Victorero Bros., who lost everything. The plate glass windows of the Suiza and Harzer building next door were shot to pieces. The house of Carlos Gonzalez was looted of everything and the elegant bedrooms and parlors are now used as a stable for rebel troopers. On Monday afternoon three or four men came to Mr. Wulff's house and demanded arms.

I had moved my furniture to the little house beside Mr. Wulff's and they wanted to know who lived there. They were told "*un doctor de la Cruz Roja.*" After talking this over for a few minutes one of them turned and asked, "*Donde anda este doctor rojo?*" (Where is this red doctor?)

It was explained to them with some difficulty that I wore a Red Cross on my arm and was a physician in charge of a hospital. With that they seemed to be satisfied and left. Four times that afternoon came parties to search for arms, but offered no molestation. The last bunch asked who lived there, and the servant girl told him, "Don Federico Wulff."

He immediately became more respectful and said, "He is a great friend of the Maderos, isn't he?" "Yes.", said the cook and he departed. Mr. Wulff was a great friend of old Don Evaristo Madero, and Dalla, when she was 15 years old, took a trip all over California with him and his two daughters.

Then began the burial of the dead. They were loaded into carts and taken to the cemetery, where the Mexicans were buried in trenches inside and the Chinese outside. I was out to the cemetery a few days later attending the burial of James McCarty, superintendent of railroads in Torreón, who was found dead in bed. In one trench were probably 25 cheap coffins containing dead, left uncovered. One fellow had been thrown there without a coffin and lay half propped up against the side of the grave.

Then came the tidings of peace. Everybody was joyful; the church bells rang for an hour; pistols and guns were shot off. But I don't think that the rank and file of the rebels were any too glad, as they will be disarmed and sent back to work. These fellows have been getting a peso a day for fighting, have had a good horse and a rifle, and they are going to be very sore over giving them

up. The first thing that was done was to send a force of 250 men to the ranches to protect the workmen and *hacendados* while the crop was being harvested. As already little bands have been pillaging, this is very necessary. At El Porvenir a force of rebels was passing the other day while 10 yards away 8 or 10 men were robbing the store. The proprietor was there with a gun against his "tummy" and you can bet your last frijol that he wasn't very talkative.

Last Thursday or Friday the lower classes gave a "*baile*" (dance) in the Chinese Laundry, where the previous Monday they had slaughtered all the inmates.

The first train from the U.S. came in yesterday morn and was followed by one from Mexico City, bearing mail detained for two weeks.

Well, I reckon this is enough for one time. During this diverting episode I have about lost track of time. Love to all.

Will.

Billee managed to miss recounting one very interesting episode in his letter. Across from the house of the tailor, Mr. Lindquist, who was also the Swedish consul, was a Chinese restaurant where some fourteen or sixteen Chinese were employed. When word came of the killing of the Chinese, Mrs. Lindquist brought the restaurant employees into her house and hid them. At her door she placed a table with a pretty little Mexican servant girl and some beer and sweets of various kinds. Half a dozen times during the three hours that the massacre lasted, rebels came to demand the Chinese. Each time Mrs. Lindquist refused, insisting that they wait till the "*comandante*" arrived. After the killing was stopped, the surviving Chinese were to be taken to the *cuartel* for safety, and Billee, to his dismay, found himself leading them across town. It was a nervous procedure, for tempers were still hot, and one cross look or something equally trivial could have started things all over again. Mrs. Lindquist was later decorated by the Chinese government. Some twelve or fifteen year later Billee was in Chicago on business when he heard someone calling his name. It was one of those Chinese, and he took Billee to a fine restaurant he owned and wined and dined him enthusiastically...

During the looting Billee ran across a peon wearing a silk hat and carrying a commode, on which he was beating with a stick. He asked the man what he had, but he didn't know, and when Billee explained, he threw it away in disgust.

When Emilio Madero arrived in Torreón and stopped the killing of the Chinese, he also ordered the looting stopped "on pain of death." So then people began bringing back the things they had stolen. A dry irrigation ditch was filled with typewriters and other things that had been taken.