

the picayune, not the great, with the result that he ruined his finest moments. Who ever saw in him any display of real enthusiasm, official or private, toward the great events of the Revolution? He was not maganimous even in rewarding. . . .

"Carranza," I said, "is nothing but a self-seeking politician who is devilishly shrewd at turning to his own advantage his training in the old school of Mexican politics. There is no real sense of civic duty or ideals of any kind in the man. Nobody who is not a flatterer and bootlicker, or that doesn't pretend to be to further his personal ambitions with Carranza's help, can work with him. He systematically corrupts people; he fans the evil passions, the petty intrigues, even dishonesty, in those who surround him, so he can better manage and hold the whip hand over them. There is not a revolutionist with any personality, or even sincerely devoted to the cause, who, unless he has been willing to let himself be used as a tool, has not been obliged to break with him or accept an insignificant, humiliating role. And those who have not yet openly broken with him are on tenterhooks and don't know what attitude to take. You know as well as I do that many of our friends are in one of these two situations. This is what has happened or is happening with Maytorena, with Angeles, with Villarreal, with Blanco, with Vasconcelos, with Bonilla, and even with you. You remember the rebuffs and secret hostility with which he treated you when we were in Nogales. The truth is that Carranza dreams of the possibility of becoming another Porfirio Diaz, a bigger and better Porfirio Diaz, for at heart he admires and venerates his memory. Isn't it apparent that Carranza is trying to turn everything to this one end, and that he doesn't care a rap about the good the Revolution might bring to Mexico? You know perfectly well that from the first moment Carranza has systematically kept the Revolution divided against itself. . . ."

. . . The explanation of what took place while Carranza was in power is to be found, better than in anything else, in the voluntary confusion that sprang up between *meum* and *tuum*, the confusion having to do with taking, not giving. Without this peculiarly characteristic detail his rule becomes an almost unintelligible political phenomenon. One cannot otherwise understand the historical significance—as apart from the merely individual—of the private acts of many of Carranza's close followers, nor the culminating moments in the political events of these days and shortly afterward: the official looting of the banks, the paper-money scandal in Veracruz, and the standardization of the currency.

It is curious how the public, so prone to make mistakes—notwithstanding what is said to the contrary—and so inclined to attribute

heroism and grandeur to clay-footed gods, hit the nail on the head in this case from the very first. From Carranza the popular fancy coined *carrancear*, and "to carranzaize" and "to steal" became synonymous. Stealing became a categorical imperative among the adherents of Carranza, in part because it was a safe, quick way of getting what they wanted, and in part a sport and amusement.

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## VENUSTIANO CARRANZA

*The Agrarian Law*

January 6, 1915

*Venustiano Carranza was a member of a landowning family in Coahuila, in northern Mexico, who rebelled against the conservative reaction that overthrew Madero in 1913. Carranza led the Constitutionalist faction that won the Revolution. The Agrarian Law helped to convince many people in the countryside to support his cause in the civil war against Villa and Zapata. He had no intention of implementing the decree, however, and once he had won the war, he restored the land to the hacienda owners whose property had been confiscated by the revolutionary generals. Nonetheless, the decree served as the basis for much of the land reform that occurred after 1920, for others used it as a legal precedent.*

The Law that Declares null all the expropriations of land, water and mountains owned by the pueblos, authorized in contravention to the Law of 25 June 1856.

VERACRUZ, JANUARY 6, 1915

From Venustiano Carranza, "Ley que declara nulas todas las enajenaciones de tierras, aguas y montes pertenecientes a los pueblos, otorgados en contravención a lo dispuesto en la ley de 25 de junio de 1856" in Graziella Altamirano and Guadalupe Villa, *La Revolución Mexicana: Textos de su Historia* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública and Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1985), 3:447-48, 3:450-53. Translated by Mark Wasserman.

Venustiano Carranza, First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army, in charge of the executive power of the United States of Mexico and the chief of the Revolution. . . .

Considering: That one of the most general causes of unease and discontent of the agricultural population of this country has been the despoiling of the communal property . . . conceded by the colonial government as a means to secure the existence of the indigenous class, and that on the pretext of complying with the Law of June 25, 1856, and other dispositions that ordered the breaking up and reduction of the pueblos' lands into private property left into the hands of speculators; . . .

That in the same case they encountered multitudes of other populations in different parts of the Republic . . . that had their origins in . . . the possession of more or less large holdings which they kept undivided for generations, water, land, and mountains. . . .

. . . That providing the means . . . to recover the lands of the many pueblos that were despoiled or obtaining that which is necessary for their well-being and development, we do not try to revive the ancient communities, nor create others similar, but only give the land to the rural population . . . so that it can fully develop its right to life and freedom from economic servitude. . . .

To accomplish this I have issued the following decree:

Article 1. Declare null:

- I. All the alienations of land, water, and mountains belonging to the pueblos, *rancherías*, *congregaciones*, or communities taken by the political bosses, governors of the states, or whatever local authority in contravention of the Law of 25 June 1856 and other pertinent laws and dispositions;
- II. All the concessions, compositions, or sales of land, water, and mountains by the Secretary of Development, Treasury, or any other federal authority from the first of December 1876 until the date with which these lands were invaded and occupied illegally. . . .
- III. All of the surveys carried out during the period of time noted above by companies, judges, or other authorities of the state or federal government through which the communities were invaded illegally. . . .

Article 2. The division or distribution of the lands which are legitimately the property of these communities . . . and wrongful acts can be nullified only when two-thirds of the residents petition. . . .

Article 3. Those pueblos that because of the lack of documentation cannot succeed in restitution can obtain sufficient land to reconstitute through government expropriation of neighboring land.

Article 4. In order to put into effect this law and other agrarian laws in accordance with the political program of the Revolution, we create

1. A National Agrarian Commission of nine members, presided over by the Secretary of Development that will supervise the laws;
2. A Local Agrarian Commission, comprised of five people, for each state or territory of the Republic, with the attributes that the laws determine;
3. Executive Committees in each state with three members with the attributes to be determined.

Article 5. The executive committee will depend in each state on the Local Agrarian Commissions, while in turn [are] subordinate to the National Agrarian Commission.

Article 6. The solicitations for restitution of the lands belonging to the pueblos that were invaded and occupied illegally, and which fall under Article 1 of this law, will be presented directly to the Governors of the states in front of the highest authorities, but in cases where there is a lack of communications or a state of war makes local government action difficult, the solicitations will be also presented to the military chiefs that will be specially authorized by the Executive Power.

contact and plan the triumphal entry into Mexico City, and then yes, the Revolution will hoist the flag of reform, liberty, justice and law over the National Palace.

Without further [thoughts] for the moment, and . . . [repeating my desire] that you not forget my recommendation that the partitioning of lands in the North be undertaken in conformity with the Plan of Ayala—because I have faith that you may well be the only one in the North who is concerned with the progress of the people, and the one who essays to effect in those regions the division of lands and the parcelling of the large monopolies of lands, as is indicated by the Plan de Ayala—, I salute you and your comrades-in-arms, to whom I hope you will convey my respects.

I am your most affectionate, attentive and faithful friend and servant.

EL GENERAL  
[Emiliano Zapata]

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### ALVARO OBREGÓN

#### *The Battle at Celaya*

*April 13–15, 1915*

*Alvaro Obregón was indisputably the best general of the Revolution. More than his mortal enemy, Pancho Villa, he adapted his tactics to modern warfare, using trenches, barbed wire, and machine guns to frustrate the daring and ultimately failed attacks of his opponent. A Sonoran, he joined the Revolution late in 1911, later attaching himself to Venustiano Carranza after the death of Francisco Madero in 1913. He defeated Villa in a series of hard-fought battles in the spring of 1915. During one of those battles, he lost an arm. Bleeding profusely from his wound, he tried unsuccessfully to kill himself, only to have the gun jam. Obregón was elected president in 1920 and served until 1924. He fell victim to an assassin's bullet in 1928, just after his election for a second term as*

From Alvaro Obregón, *Ocho Mil Kilometros en Campaña* (1917; repr., Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959), 311–14. Translated by Mark Wasserman.

*president. His memoir, Ocho Mil Kilometros en Campaña (Eight Thousand Miles in Campaign), primarily describes his military campaigns against Huerta's federal army in 1913 and 1914. This selection, however, is about the crucial battle against Villa's forces at Celaya in 1915, when Obregón used Villa's impatience to defeat him.*

At five in the afternoon the battle begins. Initially, we heard fire from the front of the positions occupied by the First Brigade of Infantry, which ended after a short while. At six our side opened fire, the artillery began, and in a few minutes, bombardments erupted from all of the cannon from both sides. By nine at night the hard-fought battle spread over a zone of approximately twelve kilometers.

The enemy continued to advance on our flanks, then attacked our rear guard. . . . The reactionaries continued to attack and suffered large losses.

The artillery did not cease. The assaults continued through breakfast on the fourteenth. Protected by the night, the enemy advanced to within five hundred meters of our lines. The land was perfectly flat and deforested, and there was no hiding the combatants, who fought desperately. Our troops did not retreat a single step, and the enemy did not succeed in taking any of our positions. At five a.m. I ordered reinforcements. . . . And the fighting continued until dusk.

In the morning there occurred a bloody battle on our flanks. . . . I ordered my troops to continue the fight until 7 a.m. the next day, when the cavalry would attack the enemy flanks. . . . All replied that the spirits of the troops were high and that they would continue to fight in these conditions. . . .

At noon I had a telegraphic conference with General Cesáreo Castro, manifesting my wishes to shift the burden to the cavalry the next day, at which time the enemy, without noticing our movements, would believe us lost and then commit his reserves into the line of fire and result in a complete disaster. The battle continued with bloodshed at the flanks and center. . . .

After four a.m. on the fifteenth I ordered General Amaro and others to involve their troops to the right of the enemy, where the reactionaries amounted to 6,000 and had taken position on the banks of the Río La Laja.

On the morning of the 15th I ordered General Hill's infantry, then acting as a defensive line on the right flank, in support of the cavalry column on the right of the enemy. . . . I ordered General Laveaza to cover the right flank. . . . The cavalry dislocated the enemy at the Hacienda

de Higuera; after an hour of combat they advanced to the Hacienda de Burgos. Although the enemy had unprecedented numbers . . . we vigorously attacked the front and left flank. Our infantry dispersed in the wheat fields, continuing decisively, its advance throwing them over the lines occupied by the enemy, and one by one they took the positions of the enemy, despite the useless desperation of the reactionaries. Meanwhile, the cavalry had begun to take Villista prisoners.

### 3

## Soldiers' Lives

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We will never know how many soldiers and civilians died in the Revolution. The evidence we have indicates that the population declined by one million to two million people, but these were not all casualties of the fighting. Many thousands fled across the northern border and were untraceable thereafter. Others may have died in the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918. It is estimated that 1.5 million Mexicans (10 percent of the population), men and women, were under arms during the decade-long wars. At the height of the fighting in 1915, there were 150,000 soldiers in both the Constitutionalist (Carranza and Obregón) and the Conventionalist (Villa and Zapata) armies.

Historians have not written extensively about the lives of soldiers during the Revolution. The best insights we have often come from contemporary reporters and novelists. Aside from a few officers trained in the national military school, the leaders of the Revolution learned about strategy, tactics, logistics, and management as they went along. The troops were often undisciplined and unreliable, and desertion was a constant problem. The soldiers' lives were harsh, for they were frequently short on rations and ammunition and did not have proper shelter or clothing. As in all wars, keeping the armies fed and armed was crucial.