

HENRY LANE WILSON

Ten Tragic Days

1913

Henry Lane Wilson was U.S. ambassador to Mexico from 1909 to 1913. Previously, he had been U.S. minister to Chile and Belgium. He worked tirelessly against Madero, plotting to overthrow the president with reactionaries Félix Díaz and Victoriano Huerta during the Ten Tragic Days in February 1913. His disdain for Madero was evidenced by his unwillingness to intervene to save the deposed president's life. In this excerpt from his memoir, Wilson defends his activities during the Ten Tragic Days. He maintains that he consulted with Díaz and Huerta in an effort to end the horrific destruction and bloodshed in Mexico City as the armies of Madero, then led by Huerta, and Díaz fought in the streets of the capital. He quite clearly admits to having helped frame the agreement that brought the generals into an alliance that toppled Madero.

On the seventh day of the bombardment, deeply concerned for the safety of many Americans remaining within the firing lines and who could not be rescued, I went to the national palace . . . for the purpose of procuring from General Huerta an armistice, during the continuation of which foreigners might be removed to places of safety. Upon our arrival at the palace, much to our regret, because we hoped for prompt action from Huerta, we were taken to see the President whom we had not asked to see, and it was only by insistence that we were permitted to have an interview with General Huerta. . . . I asked (1) that the military dispositions of the government should be made so as to avoid firing at the Citadel over the residential quarter; (2) that the American embassy should be treated as a humanitarian establishment and a free zone established around it; (3) that the government should unite with an American committee in establishing centres for the distribution of bread to the poor; (4) that federal soldiers on American buildings which

From Henry Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium and Chile* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1927), 259-61, 279-82.

had been made places of refuge should be removed; (5) that an armistice of three hours should be given to enable our rescue committee to take starving Americans and other foreigners out of the firing line; (6) that an armistice of twelve hours should be given to enable foreigners to leave the city by train. These demands were finally agreed to by General Huerta and the President. . . .

The establishment of the armistice and the subsequent rescue work by the embassy committees were distinctly humanitarian acts. . . . Some fifteen hundred . . . people, mostly Americans, some of them in a starving condition, were removed from the danger zone. . . .

Later . . . I determined that I must take a decisive step on my own responsibility to bring about a restoration of order. This was the situation: Two hostile armies were in possession of the capital and all civil authority had disappeared; sinister bands of looters and robbers were beginning to appear in many of the streets of the capital; starving men, women, and children were parading in many public thoroughfares. Some 35,000 foreigners who, as developed during the bombardment, seemed to rely upon the embassy for protection, were at the mercy of the mob or exposed to indiscriminate firing which might at any moment begin between the forces of General Huerta and General Felix Diaz, thus re-involving the lives and property of non-combatants. Without having conferred with any one, I decided to ask Generals Huerta and Diaz to come to the embassy, which, as neutral ground, would guarantee good faith and protection, for a consultation. My object was to have them enter into an agreement for the suspension of hostilities and for joint submission to the federal congress. . . .

I lost no time in bringing the two generals together in the embassy library whither, to my dismay, they brought a number of retainers and advisers. These so-called advisers soon engaged in wordy conflicts bemoaning unknown duration and infinite possibilities. This was not the purpose of the meeting, and I was finally obliged to ask all but General Huerta and General Diaz and my clerk, d'Antin, to withdraw. I then said to the two generals that I had called them together solely for the purpose of terminating the conditions which had existed in Mexico for the last ten days, conditions which had inflicted incredible suffering on the population of the city, had involved the destruction of ten thousand lives and a vast amount of public and private property; that these conditions must continue indefinitely unless the two belligerents arranged their differences and submitted to Congress, the only existing representative of the people. Three times, when the discussion was broken off, I entered the room and with appeals to their reason and patriotism

induced them to continue. Finally, to force a decision, I said to them that unless they brought about peace the demand by European powers for intervention might become too strong to be resisted by the Washington government. This had the desired effect, and at one o'clock in the morning, the agreement was signed, deposited in the embassy safe, and a proclamation announcing the cessation of hostilities was issued. During this conference, exceedingly dramatic in some of its phases, a throng of anxious thousands surrounded the embassy. Within there was subdued but animated discussion, a battle of conflicting interests; without, the vast throng waited expectantly, patiently, for the announcement of a decision which so closely concerned their lives, their property, and their country. When it was finally announced that by the agreement of all parties an arrangement had been reached, and that with the authority of Congress General Huerta was to be provisional president and General Diaz was to be free to pursue his candidacy for the presidency, the news ran like wildfire through the city and was welcomed with universal rejoicing. That night thirty thousand people paraded through the streets of Mexico City giving thanks for peace and to the American government for having been instrumental in bringing it about. President Wilson considered the part played by the embassy as an intrusion in the domestic affairs of Mexico; persons who rest pleasantly by the home fires sometimes have curious conceptions of what the conduct of a public officer should be under critical and dangerous conditions. After years of mature consideration I do not hesitate to say that if I were confronted with the same situation under the same conditions I should take precisely the same course.

The consummation of this arrangement I regard as the most successful and far-reaching of the difficult work I was called upon to perform during the revolution, in that it stopped further effusion of blood, allowed the population of the city to resume its usual peaceful occupations, and led finally to the creation of a provisional government which rapidly restored peace throughout the republic.

EDITH O'SHAUGHNESSY

A Diplomat's Wife

1914

Edith O'Shaughnessy was the wife of Nelson O'Shaughnessy, the chargé d'affaires (second-in-command) at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City during the Madero and Huerta regimes. She provides in her memoirs, A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico and Diplomatic Days (both decidedly pro-Huerta), a foreigner's view of the events taking place. She is, of course, mainly concerned about the damage to American property and the safety of U.S. citizens in Mexico. In this excerpt from Diplomatic Days, she subtly pokes fun at Madero.

NOVEMBER 7TH.

Late yesterday afternoon ex-President de la Barra, accompanied by his family and the staff of his mission, left for Vera Cruz to take *La Champagne* for France, *en route* to Rome. There was a great demonstration at his departure. The *Corps Diplomatique* was out in full force, and all Mexico besides, it seemed, as we got down to the station, around which mounted soldiery with difficulty kept a free space, pressing the crowd back to let in the carriages and motors, one by one.

The most interesting thing about it all, to me, was the group that at one time formed itself on the rear platform of the special train—President Madero, ex-President de la Barra, and Orozco, the military genius of the moment, the type of the trio so distinct as they stood there. Orozco is a very tall man, head and shoulders over the other two, the northern Mexico ranchero type—prominent nose, high cheek bones, with a dark mustache that doesn't at all conceal a cruel, determined mouth.

De la Barra, international, immaculately dressed, suave, smiling, was entirely the diplomat departing on a special mission, showing no trace of the difficult and anxious months of office.

Edith O'Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), 150-51, 252.