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Subject: "Exchange of visits between President Roosevelt and President Avila Camacho".

During the many conversations which I had with President Avila Camacho, either those of an official character or those of a friendly and private character, it was quite obvious to note not only his interest in allied victory, not only his interest in Mexico making her full contribution to the war in her power, and he knew that this was limited to certain fields, it was obvious that he had this great admiration for the military effort which we were making, and it was clear above all that he had for President Roosevelt, whom he had never met, a great admiration and affection and respect. There was hardly a conversation in which he did not mention President Roosevelt in some way or other. President Avila Camacho was a man of very fine, human sentiments, and he had a great and a real interest in the common man. I think that this was one of the great ties between the two men who had never seen each other. He felt that President Roosevelt had this same feeling with regard to the underprivileged. I could detect in these conversations a real desire on the part of President Avila Camacho to meet and talk with President Roosevelt. While I kept this very much in mind I did not in any way encourage it, because I realized that a visit by President Avila Camacho to the United States would have to be returned and that, in view of the occupations of President Roosevelt, it might be almost impossible for him during the course of the war to return such a visit in Mexico.

The collaboration between the ^{two}/countries was really on such a sound and proper basis that I thought it was desirable to give some recognition to it and that the time might have come when such a visit, that is, an exchange of visits, would be possible. I therefore one day said to President Avila Camacho that I thought it would be a wonderful thing if he could spend a few days in our country. I knew it was dif-

ficult for him to leave Mexico but I was sure that, while he would have to postpone the real trip to the United States which he wished to make to know our country until after the war was over and when he himself might be a private citizen, it might be possible for him and President Roosevelt to meet. I was sure it would give them both great satisfaction. President Avila Camacho said that nothing would give him greater satisfaction than to be able to meet President Roosevelt. He realized the difficulties in the way because of the President's occupations, but whenever the time came that this was possible he wanted me to know that he would be only too happy to have such a visit take place.

Therefore, on the next trip I made to Washington I said to the President that I was sure that Avila Camacho had this real desire to know him and that I thought that the time had really come for such an exchange of visits, if it was in any way possible, so far as he was concerned. I said that so far as I knew no American President had ever crossed the border into Mexico during his term of office, and so far as I knew no Mexican President had ever crossed the border into the United States during his term of office. The relations between the two countries had really developed in such a friendly way and were on such a cooperative basis now that it would, I thought, be a really splendid gesture and very helpful, not only for public opinion in the United States but also in Mexico for such an exchange of visits to take place. Besides that, I knew what personal satisfaction it would give to President Avila Camacho to have a few days with President Roosevelt. I could see that the President was very much interested in what I was saying. He replied, "George, I don't see any reason why this visit shouldn't take place. The time has come to do it. I think I can do it in the near future. I don't think it is the time to make a long visit. I think

I should only spend a couple of days in Mexico and it would be better for Camacho to spend only a few days here. Everybody has too much to do these days." He then thought for a few moments and he said, "I'm going to Corpus Christi some time in the near future. I will be spending several days there. That would be a good time for Camacho to come to see me at Corpus Christi. It is not so far from Mexico. I don't want to go to Mexico City because it takes too much time and I would rather go by train. Isn't there some city in the north where I could visit Avila Camacho?" I replied that Monterrey would make an ideal place. It was a big city and it was close to the border.

Without any further conversation, the President said, "Let's have Riley in". He asked General Watson to ask Riley, of the Secret Service, to come in. Riley was a very intelligent man. I had known him for some time. The President simply said, "Riley, when am I going to Corpus Christi?" and Riley told him the date, which was several months ahead. The President said, "I intend to go to Monterrey to see President Avila Camacho before I go to Corpus Christi. I intend to return from Monterrey to Corpus Christi and there Avila Camacho will come and spend several days with me. Can it be arranged?" Riley said he saw no reason why the appropriate arrangements could not be made; it depended entirely upon the President. The President said to Riley, "I intend to have this exchange take place. I'm going to talk with Messersmith further about it and then he will talk with you about the details and you will go to Mexico City to arrange the last details".

After Riley left the President's office, the President said to me, "George, there is only one thing about this visit. The big ^{boy} ~~fallow~~ will have to go to see the ^{smaller boy} ~~little fallow~~ first. That is the only condition that I make to the visit. I will have to go to Mexico first and

Avila Camacho comes to see me after I've been in Mexico". I said to the President that that was wonderful, that that alone would make the visit a memorable thing in Mexican-American affairs; that the whole Mexican people would appreciate what a generous gesture the President had made in going first to Mexico.

I talked with Riley briefly before I left the White House about the visit. He was the one who had charge of all the details as he had to look after the protection of the President. Riley said that after I had talked with the President in Mexico City and had determined on the time that would be convenient, I was to let him know and he would come to Mexico City to talk over the details with me.

I returned to Mexico City and immediately saw President Avila Camacho. I said to the President that during my recent trip I had had a talk with President Roosevelt who had expressed a desire of knowing him and because his time was so limited he hoped the President would understand that he might not be able to come further than, let us say, Monterrey. I said that President Roosevelt hoped that after he had been with President Avila Camacho a few days in Mexico, that President Avila Camacho would be able to come to Corpus Christi for a few days. President Avila Camacho's face lit up. He was pleased. When I told him that the President wanted to come to Mexico to see him and that then he, Avila Camacho, would go to Corpus Christi, his face was really luminous. He recognized the generosity of the gesture and he realized that that alone would make the visit a success and bring about the purposes which he, President Avila Camacho, had in mind, a real strengthening of the ties between the two countries and peoples and better understanding.

Riley came to Mexico City and we made the appropriate arrangements for the visit. It was understood that the President would come

by train to Laredo and that there, after crossing the border at Laredo, Dr. Padilla, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mrs. Messersmith and I, would board the train. The train was to arrive in Monterrey shortly after luncheon. President Avila Camacho would go to Monterrey to await the arrival of the President. President Roosevelt would remain in Monterrey until some time during the day following. The next evening, President Roosevelt would return by his special train to Corpus Christi. President Avila Camacho would proceed to Corpus Christi on his special train, at the same time accompanied by those of the Mexican government whom he would invite for the visit. President Avila Camacho would remain in Corpus Christi about two days, that is, the greater part of two days. Then President Roosevelt would go to Washington and President Avila Camacho would leave by his special train for Mexico City at the same time.

I will not go into the details of the visits which I arranged with Riley. Important measures had to be taken for the protection of both Presidents. Riley was an extraordinarily fine person with whom to deal with. He is an extraordinarily and unusually intelligent and understanding man. He knew President Roosevelt so well that he knew exactly what could be done during the visits and what could not be done.

I had been informed by the President at the time the original arrangements were made for the visits, that the whole thing would have to be kept confidential until he actually crossed the border into Mexico. Riley impressed this on me when he came to Mexico City to see me. I said I thoroughly understood. President Avila Camacho thoroughly understood, and while it was a little more difficult to keep the matter quiet in Mexico City, it was done. Only a few of the higher officials in Mexico and some of our people in the Embassy knew about the visit which was to

take place and there was practically no knowledge among others of the approaching event. Th

The details of the visit in Monterrey were prepared very carefully so as not to make it too difficult for either President Roosevelt or President Avila Camacho. The day before President Roosevelt's train was to cross the border at Laredo, the Foreign Minister, Dr. Padilla, and Mrs. Padilla and Mrs. Messersmith and I went by automobile to Monterrey. The following morning we went to a place indicated in the north of Mexico, just outside of Laredo. The train arrived about noon and stopped in the open country where we boarded the train. President Roosevelt had with him on the train Sumner Wells¹¹, the Under-Secretary of State, a cousin of his, Miss X ^{Orlando} (I will substitute the name later), Mrs. Roosevelt, and Major Harry Hooker, a very old friend of the President, who had been one of his law partners in New York City years before. The President was in very good humour, he was looking forward to this little outing from Washington. He said that he wanted me to be present at all of the conversations between him and Avila Camacho and that I was to translate for him as well. Naturally, Under-Secretary Wells was to be present at these conversations also, but because I knew the President of Mexico so well I was to do the translating.

Shortly after we boarded the train, luncheon was announced and I recall there were at the luncheon table only the President and Mrs. Roosevelt, Harry Hooker, Miss X ^{Orlando}, and the Mexican Foreign Minister and Mrs. Padilla. Mrs. Roosevelt did a good deal of the talking; she embarrassed the President a good deal by asking him why he did not do certain things at home and why he did others. She was talking principally of certain social works. The subject got on the negroes and the President grew more and more embarrassed as Mrs. Roosevelt continued to press

the President as to why he didn't do certain things. The President finally turned to Mrs. Roosevelt and he said: "Lots of people think that I'm a dictator, you of all people know that I am not a dictator". At the end of the luncheon President Roosevelt asked how much time there would be before we got to Monterrey and said that he wished to take a little nap. Sumner Wells and Padilla and I went into the next car where compartments had been reserved for us. Wells left Padilla and me alone and we sat in Padilla's compartment. The President had given Padilla a big long cigar. When we entered the compartment Padilla sat in a corner, lit his cigar and leisurely took a puff now and then, and it seemed to me at least ten minutes before he said a word. I hadn't the slightest idea what he was thinking of but I was sure that he had been surprised by the conversation at the luncheon table and Mrs. Roosevelt pressing the President so hard. Finally, without a word having been uttered since we entered the compartment, Padilla looked up at me and he said: "Messersmith, wouldn't it be wonderful if someone would invent a brassiere to hold the great big hearts of some people?" ~~Shortly~~

Shortly before the train arrived at Monterrey the President and all the rest of us were seated in the observation car at the rear of the train, and the President had the seat just inside the door leading to the platform of the car. When the train stopped in the station at Monterrey, President Avila Camacho and some of the people accompanying him entered the train by the observation car. President Roosevelt got up to greet the President as he entered the car from the rear door. To my horror I saw that the President had been sitting on a copy of "Time" which had just appeared and which I had seen in Monterrey the day before. It had on the cover a picture of the President's brother, General Maximino Avila Camacho. The article in the issue of "Time" about the Pres-

ident's brother was anything but complimentary. As President Roosevelt rose from his chair, President Avila Camacho was looking down and I could see the look on his face when he saw that the President had been sitting on this issue of "Time", which he undoubtedly had already seen. My own feelings can be imagined because I felt that here was a possibility of the whole visit being ruined. While the President of Mexico knew his brother well, he was very closely attached to him. Of course, "Time" had no reason to know that this visit was going to take place and there was no coincidence between the visit and that this article on the President's brother should be the cover story of that week. If President Avila Camacho really noticed the issue of "Time" in the President's chair, there was no further evidence of it than this first look which I saw pass over his face. Avila Camacho really had many qualities of a great man.

I do not go into the details of the visit in Monterrey. Everything had been well arranged by the Mexican government and by our people. Everything was done for the comfort of the two Presidents. The Presidents were received enthusiastically by the people of Monterrey who lined both sides of the streets through which they went to the Government Building. There were several conversations between President Avila Camacho and President Roosevelt. I was present at these conversations and translated for President Roosevelt. It is not, I believe, of importance to go into here of the details of these conversations except that they were most cordial. They spoke as two friends. They had no special problems to consider. They spoke of the war. I shall, of course, have to consult my notes before making a final memorandum on the subject of these visits, but as I recall it there was nothing of any special significance mentioned either by President Avila Camacho or President Roosevelt. Neither had an ax to grind. Neither had anything special to say

to the other. They wanted to see each other. They knew that their seeing each other in this way was an important event in the history of the two countries. Their conversations could not have been more cordial. The two men took to each other like ducks to water. If they had thought before that they liked each other, now that they looked into each other's eyes and talked with each other, there was no doubt but what all the impressions which they had had of each other from a distance were confirmed. The two men liked each other; they had respected each other before.

The ceremonies in connection with the visit had been kept at a minimum. The time was short, that is, the time for the visits in Monterrey was short. There was one important formal occasion, which was a meal in the Municipal Building in Monterrey. At this meal President Avila Camacho proposed a toast to the President of the United States and to the United States. It was a short, excellent, well considered speech. The most important thing which he said, and which had a transcendent significance in the history of the two countries, was a phrase in which President Avila Camacho said that Mexico was a country which looked into the future and not into the past. The significance of his remark was not lost to those present. What President Avila Camacho was saying was that the rancors and recriminations of the past and growing out of the past relations between the two countries, the Mexican government had forgotten and wished to forget. Mexico was looking into the future. This was a very brave thing for the President of Mexico to say. President Avila Camacho knew that some of his good friends, and particularly General Cárdenas, would not like that; but President Avila Camacho had the courage of his convictions. President Roosevelt proposed a toast to President Avila Camacho and to Mexico, and his remarks were most appropriate.

The visit could not have gone along better. It was, I believe, the evening of the second day that both special trains left for Corpus Christi. I accompanied the President on his train. Mrs. Messersmith, I believe, did not go with me to Corpus Christi. The visit at Corpus Christi lasted about a day and a half. As at Monterrey, the ceremonies were kept very simple. President Avila Camacho enjoyed the visit. It was obvious that he did so. He was shown all the proper attentions due to a President of Mexico and to his person.

On the second day of our stay in Corpus Christi, President Avila Camacho said to me that he would be very happy to have me return to Mexico with him on his train. He said that after arriving at Matamoros he would have to be stopping at a number of places on the way to Mexico City, and that he would be very happy to have me make the trip all the way to Mexico City with him. I told the President that I appreciated his courtesy and that I would be very happy, in any event, to go as far as Matamoros with him. I said that I knew that after he crossed the border again into his own country, he would have a great deal to do on the train as wherever the train would go there would be so many people who would be wishing to see him, that I did not wish to cause him any preoccupation.

The visit at Corpus Christi went off very well. President Roosevelt was happy and President Avila Camacho was happy. There were no conversations of any real importance between the two Presidents at Corpus Christi. They talked in a friendly way and as if they had been friends for many years. A real bond had been established between the two men.

As I recall, the special train of the President of Mexico left first and I accompanied him on the train. As the trip from Corpus Christi

to Brownsville is a relatively short one, as I recall, three hours or so, the President and I sat chatting in the rear of the observation car all the way to Brownsville. President Avila Camacho was looking out of the window all the time. He was interested in the country through which we were passing. It is one of the most attractive parts of Texas. We passed through miles and miles of orchards of grapefruit and oranges and highly cultivated land. I could see that the towns through which we passed, the good appearance of the houses, the orchards, everything he saw made a deep impression on the President. While we were engaged in constant conversation, I could see that the President was thinking of other things as well. I do not pretend to know what he was thinking of.

When the train arrived at Brownsville there was a brief reception in the station, and the President said goodbye to those of the American officials who had accompanied him as far as Brownsville. I continued on the train and the train crossed the ~~bridge~~ over the Rio Grande to Matamoros. As soon as we arrived in Matamoros scores of people pressed into the observation car to greet the President. The train was there for not less than several hours before it proceeded on the way to Mexico City. After the train left Matamoros a number of those who had come aboard to greet the President remained on the train. There were, I recall, several of the governors of the northern states. There was very little opportunity for conversation. They all had something to say to the President. The President sat in a chair at the rear of the observation car and I saw him looking out of the window as he had on the way from Corpus Christi to Brownsville. He was sad and pensive. The contrast between the country/~~XXXXXX~~^{that} we were passing through and what we had passed through from Corpus Christi to Brownsville was really very great. The President, while trained as a military man, is also deeply

interested in agriculture. He realized that the soil and climatic conditions on both sides of the river were the same, and the contrast between what had been done on one side and the situation on the other side of the river made a deep and unhappy impression on the President.

I spent the first night after our departure from Matamoros on the train. The following morning I told the President that I knew that he was going to be very busy on the train going back to Mexico City and that I thought it was better that I take my car, which was waiting for me, and return to the City. I felt sure that the President would understand. I did not wish to cause him any embarrassment by being on the train and feeling that he had to give me some time and attention when there were so many of the people of the country through which he was passing who had the prior claim to his time and attention and whom he wished to see. The President was very kind and understanding and said that he thoroughly understood.

This exchange of visits was really a memorable event. It made a deep impression on the Mexican people. The fact that President Roosevelt had come first to Monterrey was something which was not spoken of much in the press but which was in the minds of all thoughtful people in Mexico. That the President of the United States should come and make this visit at a time when he was so preoccupied and occupied with the many responsibilities he had and when our country was in the midst of this great war, also made a deep impression. The small part that I played in this matter always has given me a deep sense of satisfaction. It was the first time that two Presidents, of Mexico and of the United States, had visited each other in their respective countries. That the visits were short was not important. That these visits took place

at the time they did and under the circumstances which existed was of primary importance. In many ways it was really the beginning of a consolidation of a new era in the relationships between the two countries.

It was shortly after I left Mexico for Argentina, towards the middle of 1946, that President Aleman made a visit to the United States on the invitation of our government, which was followed thereafter by a visit by President Truman to Mexico City. This was followed by President Eisenhower and President Ruiz Cortines meeting at the Falcon Dam on the Rio Grande River in 1953. The building of the Falcon Dam, or rather its completion, was a culmination of efforts which had been made to bring about this project during many years. I recall that when I was in the Department of State as Assistant Secretary, from 1937 to 1940, this was one of the projects already under discussion between the two governments. The ^{meeting} ~~visit~~ of President Ruiz Cortines and President Eisenhower at the Falcon Dam was a relatively brief one. The ceremonies took place during part of a day.