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INTER-AMERICAN DEFENSE BOARD

WASHINGTON

December 12, 1942.

The Honorable
George S. Messersmith
American Ambassador
Mexico City, Mexico.

My dear Mr. Messersmith:

I do not know whether you were informed that General Embick was detached from duty with the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission on December 1st, that I have taken his place as Chairman, and that General John P. Smith, U.S.A. has relieved him as senior Army member. Knowing you are interested and wanting to keep you informed about the work of this Commission, I will tell you what has happened since General Embick and I had the pleasure of conferring with you during our visit to Mexico in September.

As other changes in the membership of the Commission have occurred since I last saw you, I will begin by giving you the names of ~~the~~ ^{members of the} Commission as now constituted:

Mexican Section

Major General Francisco Castillo Najera
Brigadier General Luis Almillo Flores
Comodoro Ignacio Garcia Jurado
Lieutenant Colonel Jose Perez Allende
Major Raul de Zaldo
Captain Manuel Martinez Castro

United States Section

Vice Admiral A. W. Johnson, U.S.N.
Major General John P. Smith, U.S.A.
Colonel F. E. Glantzberg, G.S.C.
Lt. Colonel E. W. Hockenberry, G.S.C.
Captain George E. Hickman, G.S.C.
Lieutenant Alan W. Laidlaw, U.S.N.R.

General

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General Alamillo, as you know, relieved General Sanchez Hernandez when we were in Mexico. He is intelligent, energetic, and, I believe, has favorably impressed us all. He also has relieved General Sanchez-Hernandez as Senior Mexican Delegate on the Inter-American Defense Board, and is one of the outstanding men among the forty odd delegates composing that organization. At the last meeting of the Inter-American Defense Board, General Alamillo told us about his recent flight in the American Army bomber to Mexico, Panama and the Galapagos Island. He spoke very feelingly of the friendly and enthusiastic manner in which he, the Mexican and American Delegates accompanying him, were received everywhere by the people in Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and Guatemala. This greatly impressed all the Latin American delegates of the Board, particularly those from the Argentine and Chile.

General Embick has retained the Chairmanship of the Inter-American Defense Board, but has been relieved as a member of the Joint United States-Canadian Defense Board. His place on that Board has been filled also by General Smith. I do not know exactly what General Embick's new duties are.

Comodoro Ignacio Jurado of the Mexican Navy arrived in Washington recently, and has been appointed a member of the Joint United States-Mexican Defense Commission. I am glad of this because I have felt all along that the Mexican Navy should be represented by a high ranking officer. He replaces Lieutenant Hernandez Sagarra who has done very good work here. Lieutenant Hernandez Sagarra will remain in Washington as the Commodore's Assistant.

As all of the American Republics are represented on the Inter-American Defense Board, I have the opportunity to observe the attitude of each country with respect to cooperation for common defense. With the exception of Chile and the Argentine, all of the countries seem to me to be more cooperative than Mexico. I do not refer to the delegates - all of whom personally are very cooperative, but to the attitude of the various governments they represent.

As I see it, the situation in regard to collaboration between Mexico and the United States is this:

Mexico is interested primarily in obtaining military and industrial equipment from the United States to build up Mexico's armed forces and her national economy. As the United States must first supply her own forces and those of her allies abroad to prosecute the war overseas,

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she is unable to supply Mexico with all the things she wants.

The United States wants to obtain from Mexico strategic raw materials for the war production and permission to develop operational facilities in Mexico, including permission to employ our own personnel and aircraft for this purpose within Mexican territory. Mexico is unwilling to permit United States armed forces to operate in Mexico. She feels she is fully capable of defending Mexico and protect shipping with her own personnel, provided she is given the equipment requested. She also fears political repercussions, if American forces are permitted to operate within Mexican territory.

I have pointed out to the Mexican members why the United States cannot meet all of Mexico's requests. They say that if the United States does not furnish the military equipment to Mexico, it may be interpreted in Mexico as our lack of confidence in Mexican valor and in their ability to use the equipment efficiently. On the other hand, I intimated to them that Mexico's refusal to permit United States forces to operate in Mexico might be interpreted as an indication that Mexico fears "Yankee Imperialism" more than German aggression.

For the above reasons, collaboration between Mexico and the United States can not be said to be entirely satisfactory though entirely friendly.

I believe the Mexicans really want to take an active part in this war and would like nothing better than to send Mexican troops to fight overseas. Our Army authorities sincerely hope Mexico will not request the United States to sanction such an undertaking, as they would have to refuse. The complications regarding shipping, etc, would be too great, as you can easily appreciate, and would interfere with our own war effort; therefore, any suggestions of this nature from a Latin American country should be discouraged. Personally, at some future time, I hope to see Latin American troops sent abroad to fight.

Most of the requests made by the Mexican Section since this Commission was organized have been disposed of. The principal matters still pending before the Commission are:

- a) The construction of a military road in Lower California.
- b) The construction of six airfields in Lower California.
- c) Settlement of terms regarding completion and use of Tehuantepec Airfield.

d)

- d) Installation and manning of weather stations at Tampico, Vera Cruz and Tapachula.

Mr. McGurk and Mr. Carrigan are cooperating with us and are now working on matters relating to the Lower California Road and Airfield, as I understand, you are also. They will let me know the result of the negotiations now under way.

I don't know what the hitch is about Tehuantepec. I suspect it is being held up by General Cardenas.

In regard to the weather stations, we have just asked the Mexicans to reconsider their attitude regarding our manning them with American personnel.

I have been trying to get the Navy Department to allocate some sub-chasers to the Mexican Navy but so far have been unsuccessful. Several have been allocated to Brazil and to Cuba. However, as these navies operate directly under the command of United States Naval Officers, it is easy to see why they are given preference. Anything we can do to overcome the Mexican complex for exclusive command and exclusion of our forces in Mexican territory would help a lot.

Captain Riefkohl dropped in to see me a few days ago just before returning to Vera Cruz. Colonel Weeks was in Washington recently, but did not stop in to see General Embick or me. Capt. Hickman of this Commission is flying down to Mexico tomorrow evening and will call upon you. I am sending this letter by him personally.

Fortunately, the tide of war has changed greatly since I last saw you. The Army and Navy Departments are not now as greatly concerned as formerly about the possibility of hostile enemy action against Latin America. Consequently, the need for the use of Mexican facilities by us is not as urgent as we formerly imagined it would be.

I have tried to cover the salient points as I see them from this end. I am most appreciative of your co-operation in the past and know it will continue in future. Please do not hesitate to make any suggestions to me that you think will help in solving our common problems.

With kindest regards to Mrs. Messersmith, Captain Conover, Mr. Bursley, and with all good wishes to you, I am,

Very truly yours,
(Signed) A. W. Johnson
A. W. Johnson
Vice Admiral, U.S.N.

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