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AIR MAIL

México, D.F.,
April 3, 1944.

SECRET

My dear Mr. Secretary:

I have to acknowledge your secret letter of March 23, in reply to mine of March 15, with which I sent you a copy of a secret letter of that same date to the President, reporting that Dr. Padilla, the Minister for Foreign Relations, had informed me of the desire of President Avila Camacho to offer the participation of a Mexican air squadron at a combat front and to enter into conversations with us covering the appropriate arrangements which General Arnold has in mind regarding this participation.

I received several days later a letter from the President dated March 24, in which he stated that he had discussed the matter of the combat participation of a Mexican air Squadron with General Arnold and that General Hall, the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, would discuss this matter informally with me and make arrangements for several other officers of General Arnold's staff to go to Mexico City later at the convenience of President Avila Camacho to discuss details. The President said that these officers would be fully conversant with the details of our suggested plan for equipping and maintaining a Mexican squadron. The President said that he was sure that satisfactory details can be worked out.

Arrangements had previously been made for our Government to decorate General Salinas, the head of the Mexican Military Air Force, and to this end General Hall, the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, arrived in Mexico City on March 26. He arrived with instructions from General Arnold to discuss this matter of possible Mexican participation through an air squadron with me on behalf of General Arnold and with the President of Mexico. The fact that General Hall came here for the purpose of decorating General Salinas made it possible for us to carry through all these conversations while he was

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The Honorable
Cordell Hull,
Secretary of State.

here on participation by the Mexicans without any information getting to the press or to others with regard to the conversations which he also carried on with respect to Mexican participation. This was a very fortunate circumstance, as it is desirable for the present that the same reserve be maintained with regard to this matter, as we have maintained up to the present both at home and in Mexico.

On the afternoon of March 27 I took General Hall to call on Dr. Padilla and General Hall conveyed to Dr. Padilla the information which he had previously conveyed to me on behalf of General Arnold. The Minister said that he would be very glad to have some of the information which General Hall had given him specifically with reference to the composition of an air squadron in writing so that he could use it in his conversation with the President in the next day or two. General Hall prepared such a memorandum and I think I can best convey this information by enclosing herewith a copy of the memorandum which General Hall furnished me and which I later furnished the Minister, Dr. Padilla, for the information of President Avila Camacho. This is enclosure no. 1 to this letter.

In view of the fact that General Hall had discussed with General Salinas the possible composition of a Mexican air squadron, General Hall wrote me a secret memorandum dated March 29 covering this and I am appending hereto a copy of this memorandum (enclosure no. 2) for the record. While I conveyed the information in this memorandum of General Hall's of March 29 to Dr. Padilla orally, I thought it well to leave a copy with him so that he might be able to inform the President with absolute definiteness as to the degree to which General Hall had discussed this matter with General Salinas -- and this in view of the fact that General Salinas has not been informed by President Avila Camacho of the President's decision that a Mexican air squadron shall actually participate at the combat front.

Later I took General Hall to see President Avila Camacho at his home in Los Pinos and Dr. Padilla, the Minister for Foreign Relations, was present. During this conversation the President reaffirmed to General Hall his firm intention to have a Mexican air squadron participate at a combat front. He said that Dr. Padilla had fully informed him concerning the conversation which General Hall and I had had with him. The President said that he was fully in accord with the outline and composition of the Mexican squadron which General Hall had left with him. He said that he would like to have a little further supplementary information and that was as

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to the rates of pay which the officers and men in an American squadron received. He said that he also wished to have as full information as General Hall could give him as to the cost of maintaining this squadron and he explained to General Hall the information which he wanted. The President said that he would need this information in order that he would be able to prepare the budget for the maintenance of this squadron at a combat front.

It was interesting that President Avila Camacho should ask for this information concerning the rates of pay paid to our officers and men in such a squadron as he is undoubtedly thinking in terms of paying these men in the Mexican squadron the same rates of pay as paid our own. This, of course, in many ways is desirable but it will mean that the men in the Mexican squadron will receive a very much higher rate of pay than they receive in the Mexican regular service. It was also interesting that the President wished to have full information concerning the cost of maintenance of the squadron as he is obviously contemplating that Mexico shall pay for the maintenance of the squadron.

One question developed during the course of our conversation with the President which will cause some little delay although no essential difficulty. The President said that it was interesting that all of us had been considering this matter of a squadron at a combat front and that we had not thought of the fact that he was not yet authorized to send troops out of this hemisphere. He said that he had authority from the Congress to use the Mexican Army in this hemisphere but that he had no authority to send them outside of this hemisphere. It was, therefore, necessary for him to seek that authority from the Congress.

The President said that he would have to call a Special Session of the Congress. This did not present great inconveniences, particularly in view of the fact that he would have to call the Senate into session shortly. The indications were that the water treaty now before our Senate would be happily ratified by our Senate and that immediately thereafter it was his intention to call a meeting of the Mexican Senate to ratify the treaty. He was considering calling the other House into session also in order to get this authority to send a Mexican air squadron or squadrons abroad -- i.e., outside of this hemisphere. He anticipated no difficulty whatever in securing the approval of the Congress for he felt that Mexican

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public opinion was prepared for this step.

General Hall said that it was important for them to know when the arrival of the Mexican squadron for training purposes could be expected in Texas where it is intended to train it. The President said that sending the squadron which is selected for training in Texas would not necessarily have to await the action by Congress as he had authority to send the men to Texas for training and nothing need be said at the time that they were going overseas unless the Congressional action in Mexico had been taken at that time. In response to the specific question of General Hall as to when the Mexican squadron would be ready to proceed to Texas for training, the President said that he thought it would be able to leave in two months. It would take that time in order to select the men as carefully as he wished them to be selected. I think we can take it, therefore, that within two months the squadron will be ready to go to Texas for training even though no public announcement of their ultimate destination can yet be made when they leave here for Texas. This involves some inconveniences but I do not think it is serious.

If the water treaty is approved by our Senate in the near future, the President can call the two Houses together here shortly thereafter and this may coincide more or less with the time of the departure of the squadron for training in Texas. The sooner, of course, that actual announcement can be made of this decision by the Mexican Government, the better it will be as the sending of the whole squadron to Texas for training will arouse much speculation as to ultimate destination.

An interesting question arose in connection with the task of the composition of an air squadron which, under our procedure, includes a chaplain. As there are no chaplains in the Mexican Army and as this religious question is still a delicate one, I was a good deal surprised and extremely interested to hear the President say that he thought that a chaplain could be sent to accompany the Mexican squadron. He said that while the Mexican law did not permit a chaplain to be attached to such a squadron in Mexico, he saw no reason why a chaplain should not accompany a Mexican squadron to the front and that he thought this would be in many ways desirable. For this reason he asked General Hall to give him as much information concerning the welfare duties of the chaplain as possible which are in addition to his functions purely as chaplain in a religious sense. I only mention this as it shows the discreet way that the President has of handling these problems and yet of his willingness to take decisions which involve a very great deal of courage.

General

General Hall raised the question as to whether the President would agree to two or three officers coming down from General Arnold's staff to enter into further details and the President gave his agreement. General Hall like myself was not sure whether these officers should come down now as it was not certain as to whether they would be needed. I told General Hall that so far as this Embassy was concerned, we left this entirely to the discretion of General Arnold. My own thought was that unless there was something very specific which they could do at this time, it would be preferable not to send them, but I thought General Arnold must be the judge of this. I did say that if General Arnold sent any officers down here on this particular matter they should be sent as assistants to the Military Attaché here in the normal way so that their assignment here would not arouse any suppositions with respect to Mexican air participation.

I am transmitting herewith (enclosure no. 3) a copy of a memorandum prepared by General Hall dated April 1 which covers briefly the substance of his conversations here.

I am not going into full detail with regard to the conversations which took place while General Hall was here as General Hall will inform General Arnold fully with regard to details and the substance contained in this letter. I am not writing to the President with regard to this matter but I am enclosing herewith copies of this letter and would ask that a copy thereof be sent to General Arnold and you will use your discretion as to whether a copy should be sent to the President who has shown this interest in this matter.

The important thing for the moment is that there must still be the most complete reserve and secrecy with regard to this decision of the Mexican Government. The President, however, is proceeding with the selection of the personnel for the squadron and he has indicated that it will be ready to leave for training in Texas in two months. General Hall in the meantime is preparing the additional data which President Avila Camacho requested and which the President asked should be sent by General Arnold to me and by me to him. I think I should emphasize that for the present here the matter of the decision of the President to send a combat squadron to the front is still one which has not been communicated to the military authorities, including General Salinas, the head of the Mexican Air Force, who, while he realizes that the President is thinking along these lines,

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does not know that the President has made this decision and informed us of it.

A very interesting development which I should bring out in connection with this matter is that General Salinas, the head of the Mexican Air Force, is very anxious to command such a squadron, if it goes to a combat front. The President of Mexico made it clear in the conversations which he had with us that he thoroughly understands that this would not be possible and that the Mexican squadron would have to be commanded by an officer of the same rank who would command an American squadron in the group of which the Mexican squadron will form a part.

I shall report further developments in this matter to you when I receive for presentation to the President here the additional information which General Hall is preparing. As I am not communicating directly with General Arnold, I would respectfully suggest that a copy of this letter be sent to him.

I think this matter is developing satisfactorily. It is a curious thing that none of us thought of the fact that the President does not have the authority to send Mexican troops outside of this hemisphere. It had completely escaped me, as it apparently escaped the President himself. The formality, however, of getting the approval of the Mexican Congress is, I think, only a formality, as I feel sure that the country is prepared for this step.

I shall keep you informed of developments.

With all good wishes,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

G. S. Messersmith

Enclosures:

1. Secret memorandum.
2. Secret memorandum for the Ambassador, dated March 29, 1944.
3. Secret memorandum for the Ambassador, dated April 1, 1944.

(In triplicate)

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