

# Mexico's War With the Yaquis

(From a Special Correspondent.)  
HERMOSILLO, Mexico, April 1.—"Has it ever been held that the war policy of the United States government against the formerly rebellious Apaches was inhuman or unwarrantable?"

The question was substantially the first utterance of General Luis E. Torres, military governor of the state of Sonora, in the interview granted me on the subject of Mexico's dealings with the hostile Yaquis of this section. And there was something in the tenor of the speaker that suggested entire confidence in the ground whereon, as a chief factor in the campaign against the Indians in question, his principles were based. It was this "something" in the speech and general bearing of the distinguished Mexican that, from the beginning, impressed me far more than did his exalted rank and dignified presence. The absolute uniqueness, however, of the quality referred to in a man of his warlike calling for a time rendered its exact nature indeterminate. Then by degrees I came to interpret and to appreciate it in the implicit trustfulness that at once dominated his character and required in others all that it gave.

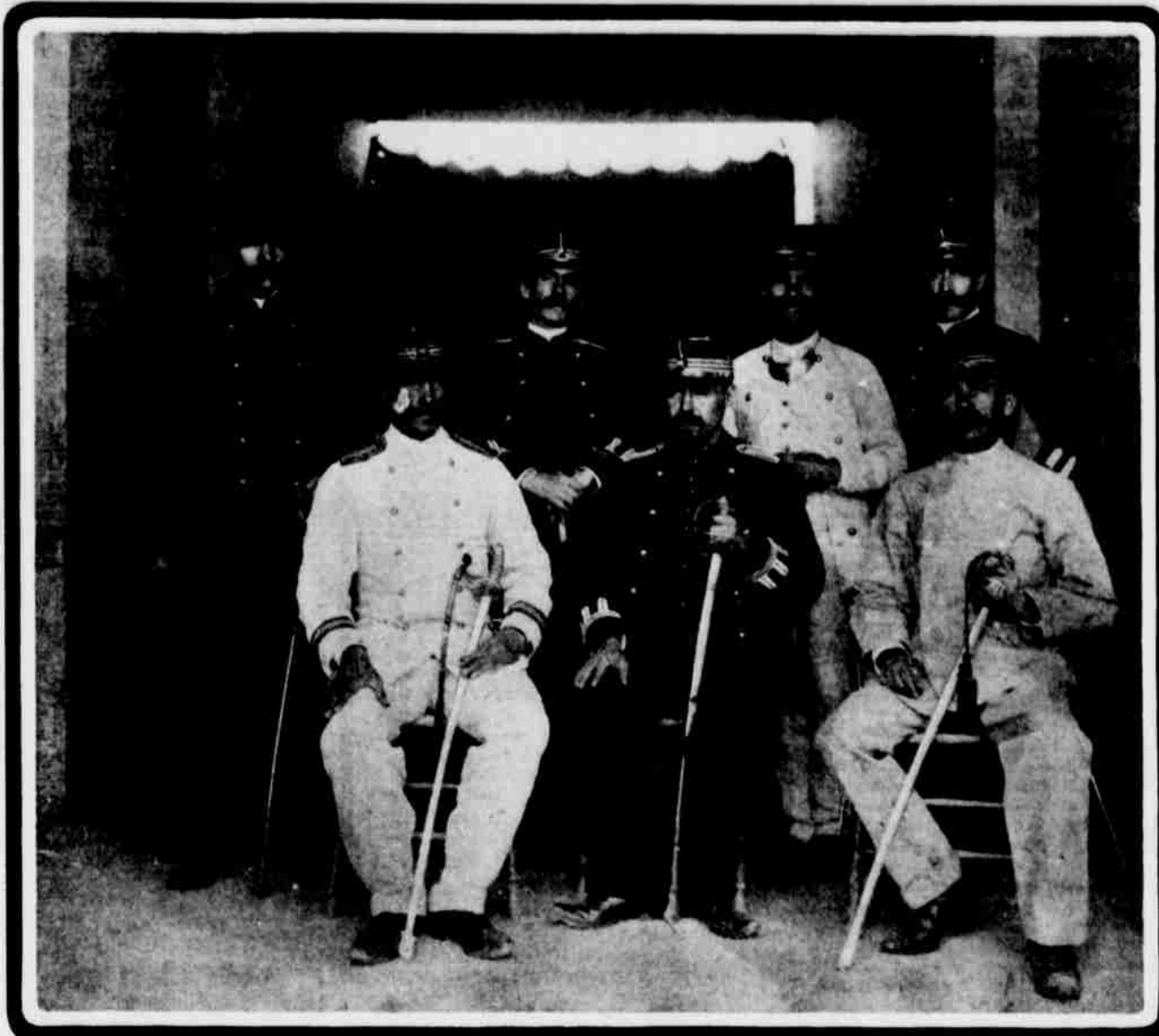
In undertaking to investigate the actual facts connected with the present Yaqui war, concerning which during the two years of its progress so many conflicting reports have been published, it had occurred to me that the first authority to consult was the man under whose immediate supervision the campaign is being conducted. Hence, instead of making application through the customary channels for permission to enter the hostile Yaqui country, I proceeded direct to the capital of Sonora and applied in person to General Torres for the desired privilege, together with a statement of his own convictions on the subject of the rebellion.

I found the general at his beautiful home in the suburbs of Hermosillo, to which he

cultivation that either have demanded, but unlimited territory wherein they might pursue their savage tendencies without restraint. The United States government very early adopted the theory that there was absolutely no dependence to be placed in an Apache so long as the least freedom were allowed him. Accordingly, a persistent round-up was inaugurated, and when taken alive he was shut up on a closely guarded reservation. But even this policy proved ineffectual, and it was not until a large percentage of the tribe were exterminated and the most refractory of its surviving members removed to faraway Florida that peace and progress in the former Apache country was established. Had the Mexican government been disposed, at the outset, to adopt like measures in its dealings with the Yaquis, the tribe would long ago have been thoroughly under control."

"But," I interposed, "is it not true that in the present war you are pursuing a similar course with the Yaquis?"

"Precisely," was the frank rejoinder. "And it was in justification of this policy that I have cited the precedent established by the United States government. The only difference in the two circumstances lies in the lateness on our part in resorting to such drastic methods with the Indians. For years we were impelled, in the face of the most trying discouragements, to hope for a better solution of the Yaqui problem. Our policy was to accord the Indians, from the outset, every privilege enjoyed by the average citizen of Mexico, in the belief that such a course would in time create of him a valuable factor in the permanent settlement of the country. To this end he was allowed to roam at will throughout the entire north-west territory. If he chose to work for others, the great haciendas offered him no lack of employment, while, if more independently disposed, he was given the preference of settling on whatever public lands best



MEXICAN OFFICERS SERVING IN THE HOSTILE COUNTRY.

least amount of cash they could raise for an existence. At times, as necessity compelled it, some of the tribe would proceed to other parts of the state, where they would work for a short while, only to return again to their wilderness retreat, there to live in idleness, so long as their earnings would permit. Repeated efforts were made by the Mexican government to induce the Indians to cultivate rich lands of which they had possessed themselves, but without avail. And not only did they resent every such effort toward their own development, but likewise opposed the improvement and cultivation of any part of the country in their vicinity. Their opposition, moreover, was not in the nature of mere protest, but of the massacre and robbery of all who dared violate their barbarous principles. This violent perversity on the part of the Yaquis is the direct cause of all the bloody warfare that for years has been waged in the rural districts of Sonora.

"It has been stated that the Yaquis are fighting for their lands, which is an error. The Yaquis think nothing of the country for what it will produce. It is the advance of civilization they are fighting. In behalf of the Mexican government I have repeatedly made special allotments of agricultural land to these Indians, and furnished them with abundant corn and wheat for planting purposes. The latter, however, they would almost invariably trade for mescal, their favorite liquor, or else eat outright, with the result that none of the land assigned to them has been, to any extent, cultivated. Such a thing will never be when a Yaqui will come to me and say, 'I have cultivated all the land you have given me and have need of more,' but what he will receive all that he may require. But such thriftiness is entirely foreign to the Yaqui character, and the most serious complaint he has ever raised is that the white settlers are destroying the mesquite trees! It is these mesquite trees that constitute, to so great an extent, his wilderness retreat, and they cover the most fertile public lands in the state."

"What specific trouble led to the present war?" I inquired.

"It was the building of the great irriga-

tion canal which has its source in the Rio Yaqui," stated the general. "At the close of the last Yaqui war, in 1897, the Indians were allotted seven pueblos, representing something like 112,000 acres of choice land in the valley of the Rio Yaqui. A portion of this land, however, lies too high for irrigation from the river direct, and was therefore comparatively unproductive. To render this land available for agricultural purposes, the Mexican government shortly afterward gave an American company a concession to run a canal from the Rio Yaqui into the country to the southward, under the condition that it should be so constructed as to furnish water to such portions of the Indian lands as could not otherwise be irrigated. But after the work had progressed to a considerable extent the old spirit of rebelliousness on the part of the Indians against the encroachments of civilization again prevailed, and without the slightest warning they fell to murdering every white settler they could find in the region. This act on the part of the Yaquis was the bitterest disappointment of my life, for it destroyed all my hopes of ever being able to resolve them into a peaceful, progressive community. It was then that I felt compelled to recommend to the Mexican government that the tribe be entirely dismembered. To effectually accomplish this it was necessary to deport the prisoners as fast as they were captured to parts of the republic sufficiently remote to insure their inability to return. It has been stated that these captives were sent to Yucatan, which is absurdly erroneous, as that district is likewise infested with rebellious Indians. Such Yaqui prisoners as I have thus far had sent out of the country were mostly taken to the state of Jalisco, one of the most beautiful sections of Mexico, where renewed endeavors are being made toward their civilization."

"How many Indians do you estimate are now on the warpath?" I asked.

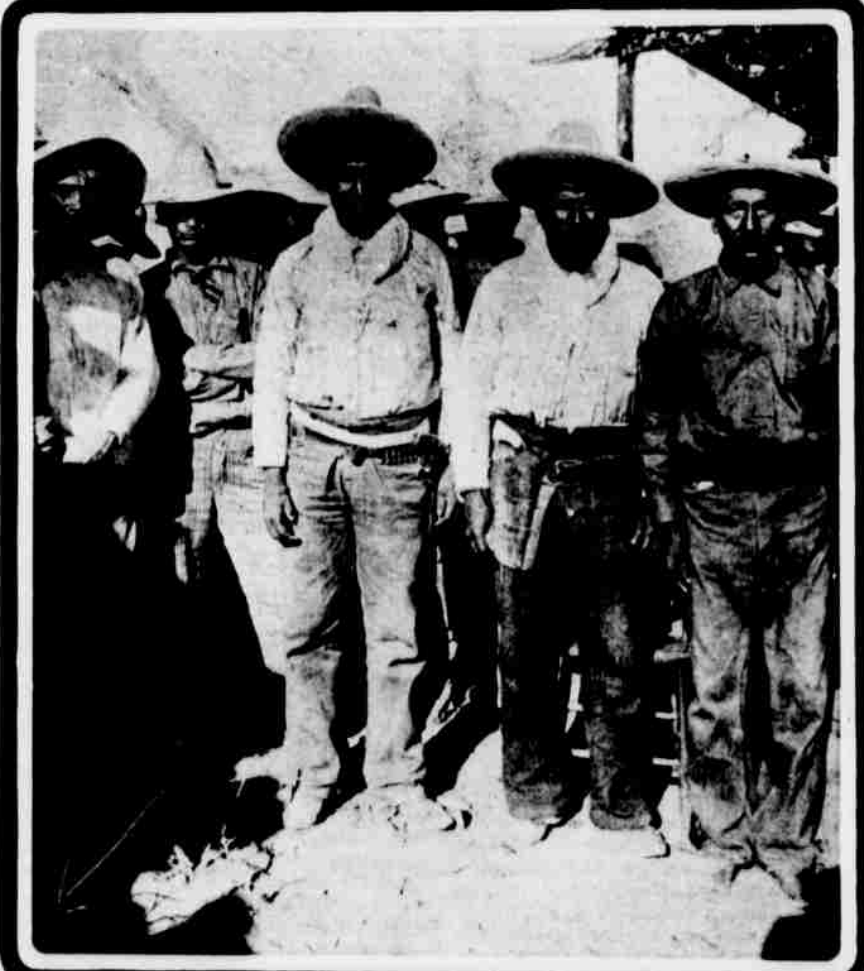
"That is difficult to determine," answered the general. "It is my belief, however, that their number has been reduced to not more than 300, and these in turn are broken up into numerous marauding bands. Besides, their numbers fluctuate, for at times members of the hostile faction will leave

the mountains, and, passing themselves off as peaceable Indians, proceed to the haciendas and secure work. Then with the proceeds of their labor they will purchase ammunition and return to the hostile country. Thus, it will be seen that the Indian problem here in Sonora is a very intricate one. The very mozo who serves my table today may, a week hence, be lying in ambush for me among the hills, while the nurse who attends my household is perhaps using her wages to supply the warring Indians with cartridges."

"When the present war is at an end, will the surviving Indians be allowed to reoccupy the valley of the Rio Yaqui?" I inquired.

"Not as a tribe," was the response. "Experience has demonstrated that the rural districts will never be safe so long as the Yaquis are permitted to band themselves together. There are always disturbing elements among them, whose influence might at any time precipitate another outbreak. The Yaqui is naturally of an incendiary disposition and it takes little to arouse his hunger for destructiveness. We have endeavored for years to rectify his tendency to viciousness, but to no avail. When the missionary priests who went among them attempted to preach industry and peace, their influence with the Indians was thenceforth irretrievably lost. On the other hand, they would listen with eagerness to the voice of an insurrectionary spirit. For this reason it will be my future policy to keep the Indians apart. Although obliged to resort, in a measure, to deportation, I am not in favor of carrying it to extremes. With all his incorrigibility, I still have hopes for the Yaqui, and will yet eliminate his vicious tendencies. And of this, I assure you," concluded the general, with unmistakable sincerity in his tones, "notwithstanding the seeming harshness of the measures I have been forced to employ in effectually crushing his spirit of rebelliousness, I have a far deeper interest in the welfare of the Yaqui than any of those who, without the least knowledge of his true character, are seeking to uphold and encourage him in his crusade against civilization."

JOSE DE OLIVARES.

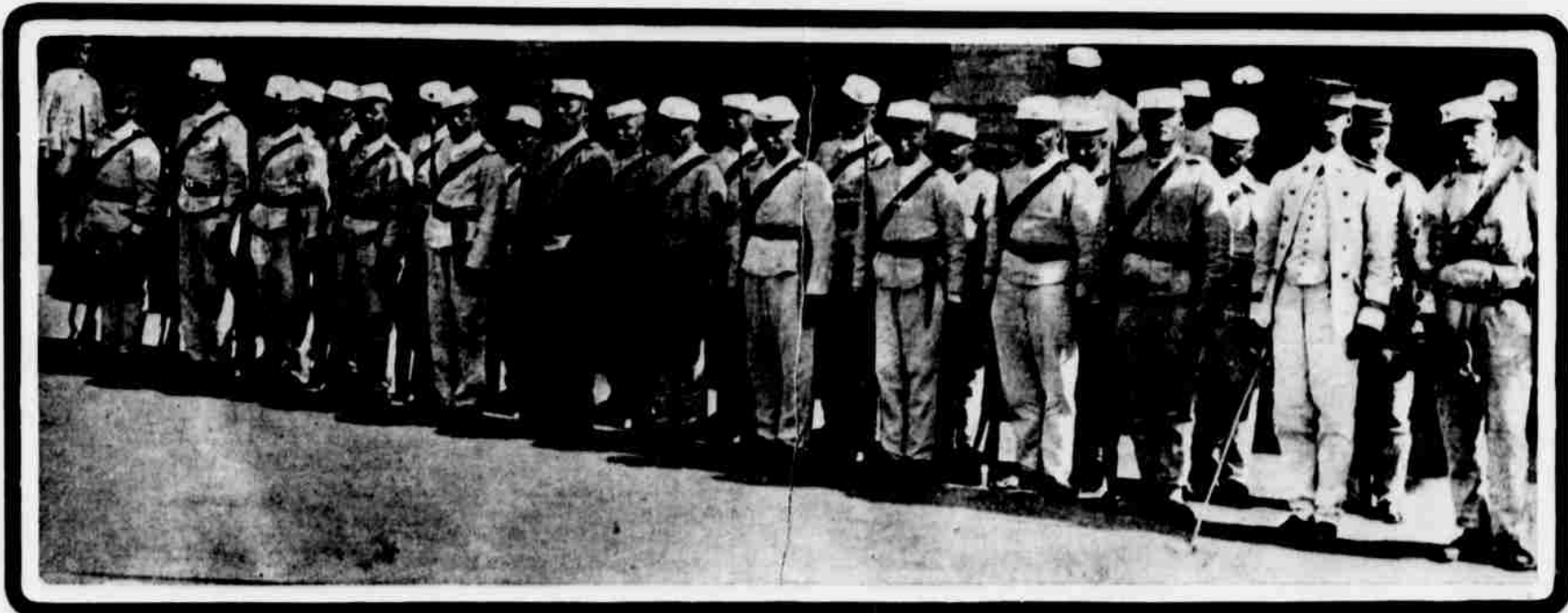


YAQUI WAR CHIEFS AND FOLLOWERS.

had just returned after an arduous trip into the heart of the Indian country. Notwithstanding his evident physical exhaustion, he received me with customary Mexican hospitality, assuring me that his house was at my disposal so long as I chose to remain, an assurance which the kindly look in his frank eyes in no sense belied. And certainly no prospect could have been more delightful than a protracted sojourn in the languorous atmosphere of his semi-tropical retreat. However, there was no other way than to put aside all such allurements, for the brief interval I spent at Hermosillo was entirely occupied with the interview accorded me.

"For fifteen years," continued the general, after the slight pause following upon the incontrovertible question with which he had prefixed his statement, "I have been, in one capacity or another, identified with the task of civilizing the Yaquis. And for twelve of those years, characterized though they were by repeated outbreaks on the part of the Indians, I never once gave over the hope and belief that I would live to see the day when they would constitute a powerful element in the population of Sonora. Throughout this interval the various traits of the Indian character have been my closest study. I have seen tribe after tribe in the adjoining United States take to the warpath for identically the same reasons as those that have influenced the Yaquis, namely, a general antipathy for civilization in its every form. There are no two natures more similar than those of the Yaqui and Apache. It is not land for the purpose of

suited his fancy. The result was that a larger portion of the tribe located themselves in the Rio Yaqui district, a remote but exceedingly fertile section in the southeastern part of the state. Here they lived after the manner of the average uncivilized Indian, depending on game and the very



MEXICAN TROOPS CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE YAQUIS.