

AMERICANS CAUGHT IN TRAP AT PARRAL

Civil and Military Officials Receive Major Tompkins in Friendly Manner Just Before Fight.

DE FACTO SOLDIERS OPEN FIRE

THE FRONT, April 15.—(Via Aeroplane to Columbus, N. M., April 21.)—The fight at Parral, where, according to indisputable evidence reaching here today, Carranza troops in force attacked the cavalry command of Major Frank Tompkins, has changed the entire aspect of the Villa chase so far as an immediate military plan are concerned. This attack upon an American force which went in perfect good faith into Parral, in the most friendly fashion, blocked what seemed to be an excellent opportunity for the capture of Villa or the dispersal of one of his strongest bands.

Heretofore, the American troops have reckoned only on meeting opposition from brigands, but resistance from regular armed troops of the Mexican army put the American military forces under the necessity of preparing for serious difficulties. Whether these preparations will have to be completed depends on the future course of the Carranza faction. It can be stated that within a few hours after the Parral fight, the new disposition of American troops was partly completed and within two days its most important features had been entirely carried out.

On April 17, about noon, Major Tompkins of the Thirteenth cavalry, who chased the Villistas across the constitutional line at Columbus, went into Parral with only a small portion of his force, which totaled about 150 men, including a pack train outfit. He had troops M and K of the Thirteenth.

Sends Message to Parral.
Major Tompkins had taken the precaution the night before to send word by a messenger to the president of Parral, Luz Herrera, that he would call upon him the next day to arrange for buying provisions and to have the Parral military officials designate some camping place for the Americans outside of Parral in accordance with agreement by which the American troops were not to occupy

Mexican cities. Major Tompkins left most of his men outside of Parral, but took his advance guard into the city during his call. The presence of this guard was both a military precaution considered necessary in a country credited with being strongly Villista in sentiment, and also was the usual formal escort accompanying commanding officers, when according to Mexican customs, they pay official visits.

The president said he had not received the message which Major Tompkins had dispatched. The messenger was a Mexican, a Carranza petty officer. After the Parral fight, the authorities there claimed they had discovered that this messenger had been captured and killed by Villistas on his way to Parral. The conference in the city with the president and with the Carranza general commanding in Parral, General Ismael Lozano, was pleasant.

Mexicans Open Fire.
Promises were made to sell the Americans food and to show them a good camping site. Immediately the Americans started out of the city, accompanied by Herrera and Lozano, who were riding with Major Tompkins.

When the Americans were out of the town, the pack train at the rear, Major Tompkins heard firing. Looking back he saw that some one in the town was shooting at the pack train. He had heard shouts of "Viva Villa" and "Viva Mexico," and curses against "gringos." Major Tompkins turned to the Carranza leaders and asked them what they knew about firing on his pack train. General Lozano and the president hurried back toward the town to stop the shooting.

The Americans were in a column formed for defense when the firing began, a formation which Major Tompkins had ordered to protect his pack train, which was 500 or 600 yards to the rear. Both of the soldiers killed in the action were near Major Tompkins.

As the firing became general, Major Tompkins and the men of his command could see some of their assailants. They wore the khaki uniforms which are customary among the Carranza soldiers. Major Tompkins discovered one column of these uniformed men moving out to cut off the road to the east and the north, where he would have to retreat to escape from the pocket at the camp site.

He ordered the Mexicans to get away from the road. When they did not heed his warning, the American commander wheeled on his horse and ordered his men to reply to the fire.

Sergeant Jay Rigeley of troop M, Thirteenth cavalry, was the first American to fall, as he rode, firing, near Major Tompkins. The sergeant's body lay all day where it fell in the road, as his comrades were too hard pressed to pick it up.

A bullet struck Major Tompkins in the left breast. The wound was slight, according to military surgeons, and the major continued fighting all afternoon and until night, when reinforcements ordered one of his superior officers arrived to relieve him.

Retreat Fifteen Miles.
Lieutenant J. B. Ord of the Sixth Infantry, who accompanied the cavalry expedition, was shot in the left ear, a slight wound.

As the fight began Major Tompkins received word from the Carranza general that civilians were doing the shooting; that his troops were unable to control them and advising the Americans to fall back. This falling back movement continued for five hours and a half, over a distance of fifteen miles on a road bordered by bushes and hills, affording good cover for pursuers. During all this time the American troops repeatedly caught sight of men in Carranza uniforms shooting at them, but saw few if any civilians.

After moving out from the trap of hills where the fight began Major Tompkins formed a line of dismounted men, well spread out, across the road and on all joining eminences, who retarded the attackers until the pack animals and stores had time to get back toward the American rear.

Americans Save Ammunition.
Repeatedly during the afternoon this defense line continued to form, to fire from the cover of rocks, plowed ground and ditches and then fall back to its former position for further retreat. The Americans had no machine guns, only their pistols and rifles, and every man was instructed to save his cartridges until he could make them count. During one of these defensive stands Private Herbert Ledford, Troop M, Thirteenth cavalry, was shot in the hand. He continued to fight. Late in the afternoon, his hand, swollen and almost useless, still fighting, he was shot dead off his horse, a bullet passing through his chest. His body lay in the road, but at all times under cover of such an effective American fire that it was not molested. The other Americans woulded during the afternoon fight were Corporal Benjamin McGeehe of the Thirteenth cavalry, shot in the mouth; Corporal Walter E. Williamson, Thirteenth cavalry, shot in the calf of the leg; Corporal Richard Tammous, Troop K, Thirteenth, shot twice in both elbows and forearm; and Private L. M. Schenberger, Troop K, Thirteenth cavalry, who suffered a slight wound in the left hip.

As the Americans fell back, Major Tompkins finally ordered that only the expert rifle shots among his men should reply to the Mexican fire, as the cavalrymen were not hard pressed, and he wished to save ammunition.

Shortly before dark, the Americans reached the adobe Mexican village of

Santa Cruz, where they loopholed some heavy mud walls, a foot or more thick, making very effective defensive positions. The Mexicans did not press them in this village, but continued fighting until 6:30 o'clock. At this hour all shooting ceased. The long fight was over.

Then a mounted man bearing a flag of truce approached the American lines and was taken to Major Tompkins.

Carranza General Makes Truce.

In the Mexican line, however, was blowing the military recall for cavalrymen. The truce messenger brought word from General Lozano, who was at the time in Mexican lines, a short distance from the Americans. Lozano's note suggested that he was unable to control his men. Tompkins replied immediately and quickly there came another flag of truce from Lozano, who was still at the Mexican front. This second message was a demand from General Lozano that Major Tompkins withdraw and threatened to attack him if he refused.

Colonel Brown, who arrived at this time

with 250 men of the Tenth cavalry and took command, replied that he would not retreat a step further from Santa Cruz unless ordered to do so by his commanding officers. To this Lozano addressed no reply.

Investigation of the Parral situation showed that while General Lozano himself had no record as a Carranza leader, most of his men were former Villa soldiers. Parral was known as a hotbed of Villistas. The direct effect of the Carranza attack on the Americans was to stop the fast pursuit of Villa which the American columns were making with a handful of men.

While they were unable to verify the stories that Villa was wounded and on a stretcher was being carried by his men southward past Parral, they knew that an important part of his forces was fleeing southward toward Durango and they were daily wearing this force of bandits. In order to proceed past Parral, the Americans were forced to buy provisions for men and horses at that town. It

was this necessity which led Major Tompkins to open negotiations with the Parral civil and military officers.

Americans Concentrate Quickly.

The concentration of American columns was so rapid after the Parral fight that at present there is no worry for their safety among officers here. The day after the fight, President Herrera of Parral sent messengers to Colonel Brown saying he regretted that there had been a fight. He said that he thought the Americans should not have gone into Parral unannounced. Colonel Brown replied by pointing out that the Americans had gone at what seemed a most reliable invitation from Carranza officers and had certainly sent the message to announce their coming.

The president repeated that Parral civilians outnumbered the soldiers so that the people could not be controlled. So far as the actual fighting was concerned, the Americans assert they obtained positive evidence that the Carranza troops

were not outnumbered by civilians and that few civilians participated. The body of Sergeant Rigeley was sent into the American camp. It apparently had not been molested.

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