

## ***AGUILAS AZTECAS:*** **THE MEXICAN AIR FORCE DURING WORLD WAR II<sup>1</sup>**

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“On a windy day in February [1945], the cold somewhat tempered by a warm Texas sun, a few privileged persons, among whom were high officials of two nations, witnessed a unique ceremony. This ceremony marked the culmination of training for the first unit of the Mexican Air Force to complete training in the United States since the beginning of the war.

Everyone present must have had the realization that the historic spectacle unfolding before him was symbolical of the solidarity which existed between the peoples of the United States and Mexico.

Perhaps some of the witnesses, and certainly all of those being honored, realized the long hard process which had brought this unit to the state of proficiency exemplified on this occasion.”<sup>2</sup>

The day after the Imperial Japanese Navy's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Mexico, our neighbor to the south, severed diplomatic relations with the Axis powers. In addition, Ezequiel Padilla, Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Relations, encouraged other Latin American nations to support the Allies. The majority of Mexicans felt that breaking diplomatic relations with the Axis was enough for the time being and that declaring war was not necessary. Mexico and the United States agreed to cooperate on mutual defense issues and signed economic agreements. Furthermore, President Manuel Avila Camacho expelled German, Italian, and Japanese diplomats from Mexico. Had Nazi Germany not provoked Mexico into going to war, the status quo between Mexico and the Axis powers would have continued. However, on the night of 14 May 1942, a German U-boat patrolling in the Caribbean torpedoed the Mexican oil tanker

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<sup>2</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” (Majors Field, (72nd Fighter Wing), (Second Air Force), for period 6 August 1944 to 1 February 1945, Greenville, Texas, File 4-2316-18, Microfilm Roll AO768, HQ USAFHRC/AD, Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, AL.

*Potrero de Llano*. The ship was well lit and identifiable flying the Mexican flag. And while the Mexican Left clamored for an immediate declaration of war, Avila Camacho sent Germany a dispatch insisting upon appropriate indemnification and total satisfaction. Germany responded by sinking another Mexican oil tanker, the *Faja de Oro*, on 24 May. Avila Camacho appeared before Congress and noted that Mexico had tried to avert war, but that Mexico would not stand passively for this unprovoked attack on the nation's honor. He asked for a declaration of war and with no serious opposition, he got it on 30 May 1942.<sup>3</sup>

Quickly Mexico's precious oil fields and munitions factories were taken over by the military. In addition, the modernization of the Mexican military began through America's Lend-Lease program which funneled arms and equipment to Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

Not satisfied with solely contributing raw materials (e.g., meat, food, timber, and leather) and workers (the *bracero* program) to the war effort, the administration decided to send a small military unit to fight alongside its allies. A fighter squadron, the 201st (known as “*Los Aguiluchos*” {the young eagles}), composed of roughly 300 officers (36 of them fighter pilots) and men, was selected to represent Mexico in the war.<sup>5</sup>

The United States undertook the task of equipping and training the squadron under Lend-Lease agreements. Personnel for the squadron, pilots, ground crew members and administrative staffers, were selected through competitive examinations from all branches of the Mexican military as well as from the civilian world. Men from various walks of life (e.g., former college students, mechanics, cooks, and bakers) hoped to join the unit, with the majority of its members

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<sup>3</sup> Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 4th ed., (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 630-631; Luz de Guadalupe Joseph, “Avila Camacho los Despidio,” *Impacto* 1665 (January 27, 1982): p. 38, noted that by the time the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron left for training in the United States in mid-1944, the oil tankers *Tuxpan*, *Amatlan*, and *Choapas* had gone down in flames in the Gulf of Mexico with dozens of lives lost.

<sup>4</sup> Meyer and Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, p. 631.

<sup>5</sup> I.C.B. Dear, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 741. In *Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1973), p. 607, T.R. Fehrenbach noted that, “There was never any intention of sending the Mexican army of fifty-two thousand men overseas; only a volunteer air squadron went to the Pacific.”

coming from Mexico City and its environs. Roughly two-thirds of the pilots selected had received flying training in the United States through scholarships offered to Latin American aviators by the U.S. Army and Navy, and had accumulated many hours of flying time (from 800 to 3,000 hours), while the rest had acquired their training in Mexico City having received primary, basic, and advanced training. Several of the pilots who joined the squadron had been rated senior pilots.<sup>6</sup>

The physical organization of the Mexican Fighter Squadron was to be the same as an American P-47 *Thunderbolt* fighter squadron, and its pilots had to meet the same proficiency standards as their U.S. counterparts. The Mexican Commanding Officer, Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriguez, was to oversee the training of the Squadron. Once again, he had to meet the criteria set forth for the commanding officer of a Fighter Squadron in the United States Army Air Forces. Arrangement was also made for a senior officer to join the Squadron in the United States and assist the commanding officer. His role was two-fold: to aid the Squadron's CO, and U.S. authorities in making the unit more administratively efficient, and to encourage good relations with fellow allies. Discipline for the Squadron was the responsibility of the CO. Mexican trainees were expected to adhere to the rules and regulations of the post, as well as to

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<sup>6</sup> "History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron," recorded the following about what Lend-Lease would cover:

Through the medium of Lend-Lease (Mexican Lend-Lease Requisition Number M-2000), Mexico was able to use American airplanes, equipment, instructors, and training facilities to prepare her first expeditionary force for combat duty overseas. The cost of housing and messing the enlisted men, costs incurred by reason of survey of individual equipment, and the cost of necessary official transportation of Mexican personnel within the continental limits of the United States were all covered by Lend-Lease. Normal costs of training were for the account of the Army Air Forces. The use of organizational equipment belonging to the Army Air Forces as might be necessary was authorized. The Mexican Government was to furnish pay and allowances, insurance, and Mexican uniforms for enlisted personnel. All individual equipment needed in training, including training clothing, was to be issued on Memorandum Receipt. Mexican officers were to be housed, uniformed, and messed at their own expense.

orders from above (e.g., Second Air Force, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

The members of the 201st, known officially as the *Fuerza Aerea Expedicionaria Mexicana (FAEM)*, were ready to undertake their mission to the United States by 21 July 1944. In a farewell ceremony held at Campo de Balbuena and attended by the President of the Republic, General Manuel Avila Camacho, Secretary of Defense, General Lazaro Cardenas, the under secretary, General Francisco L. Urquizo, as well as other high officials of the Defense Department, the 53 officers and 257 men of the squadron paraded by in review. They were young, vigorous, and well-equipped to carry out their orders.<sup>8</sup>

By order of General Cardenas, General Cristobal Guzman Cardenas, Chief of the General Staff, said:

If the joint effort with our allies in the war requires the human cooperation of our country; if the government of the nation decides that our fatherland be represented by units of its Armed Forces on the fronts in which there is a fight taking place for liberty, and finally, if our glorious flag should be borne with honor to take part beside the nations in the struggle, it shall be the members of the 201st Air Squadron who will make up the first combat unit which will march off to Europe following their improvement course in training camps in the United States, which will last from three to five months.<sup>9</sup>

Later, the Mexican president, General Avila Camacho, spoke:

Citizens, officers, NCOs, and enlisted men of the 201st Squadron of the Mexican Air Force: the general, Chief of the General Staff of the Department of National Defense, has stated to you the decision of the government that you go to Randolph Field [San Antonio], in the State of Texas, United States, so as to take improvement courses in your respective specialties of service.

Upon your arrival at your destination, you shall be assigned to camps, factories and other centers of training to become acquainted with and operate the equipment which will be assigned to you, in accordance with the latest advancements in modern warfare.

You have noticed that since our country entered into a State of War, embracing the cause of the allied nations, the Army has been giving its valuable cooperation to her [i.e., Mexico], safeguarding its territorial integrity with its efficacious vigilance. Till today, the war has not reached our shores; however, we are allied with belligerent nations

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<sup>7</sup> In "201st Mexican Fighter Squadron," *Small Air Forces Observer* (cited henceforth as *SAFO*), vol. 4, no. 4, July 1980, p. 91, the author wrote that, "For purposes of internal administration in the Squadron, however, the personnel were not subject to the civil or military law of the United States, but only to the rules, regulations, and codes of Mexican military law. Disciplinary action was administered by Mexican commanders, and not by United States authorities. Cases involving offenses of a military nature committed by the Mexican Trainees could be handled only by their own commanders and courts martial."

<sup>8</sup> Joseph, "Avila Camacho los Despidio", p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

who fight for liberty. We should be ready to respond to any war need, participating, if it's necessary, on the battle fronts. Already our brothers from the Republic of Brazil fight in the fields of Italy. You shall attend a training/improvement course lasting from three to five months in order to enable you to operate new equipment and become better acquainted with advanced techniques; and if it is necessary, you shall proceed to Europe, representing the Mexican Army.

I am aware of the enthusiasm with which all of you applied to form part of this Squadron. There was no space for everyone. You were the lucky ones to be selected, and for that you should be proud. Do not forget that you are the trustees of the fatherland's and the Army's dignity. I am certain that you will always carry the flag of the Mexican people very high.

I have come to greet you; I have not come to say goodbye, because we shall be with you wherever you find yourselves. For now I wish you the best of luck. If possible, in the event that your expedition to the theater of battle, I shall be there to see you off, or in my place, it will be done by the Secretary of Defense.

Without a doubt when you depart, you shall have no more worries except for your families worrying about you. Moreover, you can go calmly because we will watch over them.<sup>10</sup>

This would be “the first time in Mexican history that troops would be sent to fight on foreign soil”<sup>11</sup> and the 201st Fighter Squadron would have that honor. Hundreds showed up at the Central Train Station in Mexico City on the morning (07:00 hours) of 25 July 1944 to bid them farewell on their trip to Texas. The crowd composed of military men (including Generals Guzman Cardenas and Urquizo), government officials, workers, family members, and average citizens were overcome with emotion and pride as the songs “*Adelita*” and “*Las Golondrinas*” filled the air. Mixed with the tears of family members and friends seeing their loved ones off were the shouts of *¡Viva México!*

The special express train transporting the 201st arrived at 10:30 hours in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila to a warm reception. They were treated by local officials to a luncheon in their honor at one of the principal hotels in town. They continued their journey arriving in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, at 12:30 hours where they were greeted with the same enthusiasm. After a one hour stay, the train continued, arriving in Nuevo Laredo at 18:00 hours to a joyous welcome. There they waited to cross the border into Laredo, Texas and then on to Randolph Field, San Antonio.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Arriving at Randolph Field under the overall command of Brigadier General Luis Alamillo Flores, the Squadron spent the last days of July and the first days of August being processed. During the war, San Antonio's Randolph Air Field, dedicated in 1930, was known as the 'West Point of the Air' and served as a major base for pilot instruction during the war.<sup>13</sup> However, for the 201st, Randolph Field would not to be the place where they would receive their flight training, but were the unit was divided into smaller units. Thirty-six pilots were assigned to Foster Field in Victoria, Texas for a ten-week proficiency training course, while at the same time ground crew members were sent to schools (mechanic, armorer, radio, and radar) throughout the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

On 6 August 1944 the thirty-six pilots began their training at Foster Field. Thirty-four pilots successfully completed the course and received a Certificate of Proficiency awarded by the Army Air Forces Training Command (for advanced and transition training) at a graduation ceremony held on 16 October 1944. One pilot washed out of the course due to “insufficient preparatory training,” while the other “was not adapted to the type of training given.” Both were sent to Laredo, Texas and then on to Mexico. During the ten-week course, pilots received “64 hours in AT-6 [*Texan*] transition, acrobatics, formation, and instruments; 10 hours in P-40 [*Hawk*] transition, and 17 hours of gunnery training at Matagorda Island. The training was uniformly given except in the instrument course, which was based on proficiency of the individual.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ron Tyler, ed., *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), vol. 6, s.v. “Texans in World War II”, p. 1081.

<sup>14</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron”

<sup>15</sup> “201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” File 2166-9, History, Army Air Forces Central Flying Training Command, Randolph Field, Texas, vol. 4, 1 Sept.1944-31 Oct.1944, HQ USAFHRC/AD, Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, AL, Document 223.01. This document also details the difference in “training standardization” between those officers who had received prior training in the United States (having flown planes more advanced than the AT-6), versus those who had been trained exclusively in Mexico. Moreover, there is high praise for the outstanding record of the Mexican pilots attributable to the fifteen American instructors from the Central Flying Training Command who besides speaking Spanish, were excellent teachers as well. For the curriculum followed by the Mexican pilots, see W.G. Tudor, “Flight of Eagles: The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force *Escuadron* 201 in World War II” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 1996), pp. 72-73.

A thorny issue which was not overlooked was the question of race relations while the Mexican unit trained at Foster Field. In a letter dated 14 September 1944, the Commanding General of the Training Command revealed his personal solicitude regarding “the possibility of any unfavorable reaction resulting from local Mexican racial disturbances which might have affected the training of the Mexican flying officers at stations in this Command.” He also went on to express “a desire for those stations undertaking this program to be very watchful and to see that the situation was kept in hand.”<sup>16</sup>

Relations between the Mexican airmen and the citizenry of Victoria (both Tejanos and Anglos) were most cordial. In “Flight of Eagles: The Mexican Expeditionary Air Force *Escuadron 201* in World War II,” W.G. Tudor wrote:

Mexican-Americans living in and around Victoria welcomed the airmen on the day of their arrival. As if to establish some sort of cultural bonding, the local Tejanos warned the airmen to be wary of the whites, especially the women. A unique cultural revelation developed during this interchange. The Mexican pilots recognized that the similarity between them and the local Mexican-Americans was confined primarily to language. A local Mexican-American businessman welcomed them to Victoria as Latin Americans, and Captain Radames Gaxiola Andrade straightaway informed them [*sic*] that they were Mexicans--not Latin Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Following their ten week training course at Foster Field in Victoria, the thirty-four pilots were to immediately relocate to the Pocatello Army Air Field, a Replacement Training Unit in Pocatello, Idaho. Prior to their arrival at the Pocatello Army Air Field, a Section “I” under the command of Captain Paul B. Miller (a former employee of Pan American Airlines in South America), had been established in August of 1944. This section comprised American instructors and interpreters who were assigned to aid in the training and administration of the Mexican squadron. Section “I” personnel had been carefully chosen from throughout the Second Air

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<sup>16</sup> “201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” p. 489.

<sup>17</sup> Tudor, p. 71.



Force for their technical skill and know-how, as well as for their knowledge of Spanish.<sup>18</sup>

The ground echelon of the 201st, composed of nine officers and 160 enlisted men, arrived at Pocatello on 6 August 1944. The first couple of weeks of training were set aside for English lessons, and basic military subjects. They would receive specialized training in a variety of military specialties such as: Maintenance, Armament, Squadron Supply, Motor Pool, Photo Laboratory, Statistical, Parachute Maintenance, Medical Classification, Personnel, Communications, Technical Supply, Weather, Ordnance, Intelligence, and Engineering.<sup>19</sup>

The language barrier was the most difficult obstacle to surmount for the members of the 201st (less than half of the enlisted men understood English) and their American instructors, but through patience and perseverance progress was being achieved by early September. “English was being used in all air-to-ground radio transmissions by Mexican pilots, except in emergencies involving pilots not yet sufficiently fluent in the language.”<sup>20</sup> While training and instruction was uppermost in the minds of both Mexicans and Americans, the opportunity to celebrate Mexican Independence Day (16 September) was not overlooked. In a two-day affair which began on Friday, 15 September, both Mexican and U.S. Army personnel joined in the celebration. The Mexican Consul in Salt Lake City, Carlos Grimm, was on hand to witness a flag-raising ceremony held in the area of the base occupied by the 201st. This was followed by a banquet for the officers of the Mexican squadron and U. S. Army staff officers of the base, while in the evening, the enlisted men of the 201st hosted a dance in the recreation hall for their American counterparts. The traditional “*Grito de Guerra*” was sounded at 2300 hours. On Saturday night, the officers of the 201st hosted a dance at the Officer's Club for American officers. Mexican

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<sup>18</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” noted that Spanish-English translations and English classes were given to the squadron members by WAC Privates Mary U. Martin and Mary L. Fuge of Section “I”. Both women were born in Mexico, but had emigrated to the U.S. and become American citizens in order to serve. Tudor, 86-90.

<sup>19</sup> *SAFO*, 92. The author noted that Major Ricardo Blanco was trained as the Flight Surgeon for the squadron, and on January of 1945, he was sent to the School of Aviation Medicine, at Randolph Field in San Antonio for additional training.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



food and drinks were served up at both functions.<sup>21</sup>

Major General Gustavo C. Salinas, Commanding General of the Mexican Air Force, visited Pocatello Army Air Field on 21 September. There he was met by Brigadier General George P. Tourtellot, Commanding General of the 72nd Fighter Wing, and Colonel George Champion, U.S. Military Air Attaché at Mexico City. The party returned to Colorado Springs, Colorado on 23 September where the two generals (Salinas and Tourtellot) deliberated with Major General Uzal G. Ent, Commanding General of the Second Air Force. Generals Salinas and Tourtellot both stated how content and satisfied they were with the progress being made by the Mexican squadron.<sup>22</sup>

Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriguez, Commanding Officer of the 201st Mexican Squadron, and the thirty-four pilots who had successfully completed the ten week proficiency course at Foster Field (Victoria, Texas) arrived in Pocatello on 20 October 1944. The squadron now numbered fifty officers and 237 enlisted men, but still missing were Captain Jesus L. Blanco, the Combat Intelligence Officer, who was in Orlando, and six radar operators who were being trained in Boca Raton, Florida. Flying training for the aviators began two days after their arrival. According to “201st Mexican Fighter Squadron:”

The training program for Mexican pilots, instituted at Pocatello and later carried on at Majors Field [Greenville, Texas], was the standard one for fighter pilots in the Second Air Force. Combat veterans from the United States Army, chosen for their ability to speak Spanish, instructed students in the rough-and-tumble style of air tactics required in war theaters. The Mexican pilots learned to dogfight, to attack and escort bombers, to dive-bomb and strafe, to navigate by instrument through the thickest weather, to fly night formations, to execute level and skip bombing, to lay smoke screens, and to navigate across long stretches of unfamiliar terrain or trackless water. The principle features of the course were those outlined in the 120-hour fighter training program, which included

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<sup>21</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron;” Joseph, “Avila Camacho los Despidio,” 39, observed that in September of 1944, during Independence Day festivities, Lieutenant General Joseph MacNarney, assistant chief of the U.S. Army's General Staff, and Major General Henry C. Platt, commanding general of the Southern Defense Command of the United States, witnessed the traditional ceremonies and customary military parade featuring troops from all parts of Mexico. According to *SAFO*, 92, the townspeople of Pocatello warmly welcomed the Mexican trainees during their stay, inviting them to numerous parties and dinners in their homes. Mexican Independence Day was also celebrated by the pilots undergoing training at Foster Field in Victoria. For more, see Tudor, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> *SAFO*, 92.

low altitude gunnery, high altitude formation, fighter transition, camera gunner, and combat tactics at thirty-five thousand feet.<sup>23</sup>

Poor flying weather led to the transfer of the 201st from Pocatello, Idaho to Majors Field in Greenville, Texas. The entire unit, pilots, ground officers, and enlisted personnel boarded a troop train on 27 November and arrived at Majors Field on 29 November to a warm welcome from officials there. The following day, twelve P-47s assigned to the squadron arrived and they along with all pertinent equipment was unpacked and checked. Much valuable flying time had been lost due to inclement weather in Pocatello, as well as to the relocation to Texas. Moreover, one-third of the squadron's planes had been delayed in Pocatello due to bad flying weather. Unfortunately for the squadron, poor weather had followed them to Texas and it would not be until mid-December when their *T-bolts* would once again roar down the runway. Nevertheless, on 16 December, Captain Miller reported that “the general proficiency of the Mexicans was excellent and that their formation flying ranged from excellent to superior.”<sup>24</sup>

General Gustavo Salinas, Chief of the Mexican Air Force, visited Majors Field on 18 December to bring Christmas presents for the squadron from their families in Mexico, and to prepare for the graduation ceremony to be held early next year upon completion of the course. During his scheduled two-day visit, the General conferred with Colonel Antonio Cardenas, the CO of the unit, as well as to inspect their new training site. He was pleased with the program and facilities in place at Majors Field.

On 24 December, a Squadron and Section “I” Christmas party, attended by both Mexican and American personnel, was held at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas. The year (1944) ended on an upbeat note when on 29 December, the Mexican Senate, authorized President Avila Camacho to “send Mexican troops [i.e., the 201st Aviation Squadron] to the battle fronts whenever he

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; Tudor, pp. 74-75.

<sup>24</sup> *SAFO*, 92; Tudor, pp. 103-105; “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron.”

deemed it advisable ...”<sup>25</sup> Following the squadron's arrival at Majors Field, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico (Mr. Messersmith) discussed with President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull assigning the 201st to a fighting front. When the president asked where the Mexicans were to be sent, the ambassador responded that President Avila Camacho had “officially expressed his desire that the 201[st] fight in the Pacific Theater. His reasoning involved a great admiration for General Douglas MacArthur whom he had met several years before.”<sup>26</sup> Roosevelt thought it was a great idea and stated that he would contact MacArthur personally. On 21 December 1944, the president instructed General Henry (Hap) Arnold (Chief of the Army Air Forces) to cable MacArthur inquiring what his reaction would be to this request by the Mexicans.<sup>27</sup>

In early January 1945, the Mexican squadron composed of pilots, some enlisted men, and ground officers were sent to Abilene Army Air Field (Texas) for a course in Ground Gunnery (i.e., air-to-ground). The training lasted four days and consisted of four days of Ground Gunnery, three days of strafing, three days of strafing-rockets, and a course on navigation. With the course successfully completed, the squadron returned to Majors Field.<sup>28</sup>

Upon its return to Majors Field, tragedy befell the squadron when 2nd Lieutenant (*Subteniente*) Crisoforo Salido Grijalva was killed on the afternoon of 23 January 1945 when he crashed his plane during a take-off attempt. The unfortunate death of Lieutenant Salido Grijalva was the first fatality for the Mexican squadron.<sup>29</sup>

Preparations were made in late January for the squadron to undergo several weeks

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* For more on how the members of the 201st celebrated Christmas, 1944, see Tudor, p. 116.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114. Another reason for the Mexicans preferring the Pacific Theater of Operations, which Tudor noted on page 118, was “because the European front, with its heavy concentration of Allied troops, offered less opportunity for combat... As opposed to the many nations fighting for the Allied cause in Europe, only the Americans, Australians, and Filipinos fought on this front. Mexicans [*sic*] officials believed that their participation in the final offensive campaign in the Pacific, now gaining momentum, offered the greatest opportunity for combat and to make their presence felt.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* On 29 December 1944, General MacArthur agreed to have the Mexican squadron under his command.

<sup>28</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” Tudor, pp. 121-122.

<sup>29</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron”; Tudor, pp. 134-136, has all the details regarding the untimely death of 2nd Lieutenant Salido Grijalva who is referred to here as Lieutenant Christopher Salido Grijalva. On 10 March 1945, 1st Lieutenant Javier Martinez Valle was killed during aerial gunnery practice off Padre Island. See Tudor, pp. 136-138, for more details on the death of Lieutenant Martinez Valle.

(twenty-one training missions were scheduled) of gunnery training. This would bring their training in the United States to a close, with only the flag presentation ceremony to be held in February. On 2 February 1945, the squadron departed for Brownsville Army Air Field for air-to-air gunnery training. The Mexican pilots flew their airplanes from Majors Field in Greenville, to Kelly Field in San Antonio, and then on to Brownsville, while the rest of the squadron drove (car or bus) down to meet them there. Once again, poor weather interfered with the training schedule. During their stay in Brownsville, every enlisted man was issued a pass to travel to Matamoros, Mexico during his off-duty hours.<sup>30</sup>

In preparation for their graduation ceremony, the majority of the squadron left Brownsville for Majors Field on 17 February. Inclement weather twice caused the postponement of the flag presentation ceremonies. Originally scheduled for 20 February 1945, it was actually held on 22 February with great fanfare. The event was to honor the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron, and was well-covered by the leading newspapers in Mexico City and Texas.

The day's program featured a formal review of the squadron, followed by Lieutenant General Francisco L. Urquizo's, Under Secretary of National Defense, Secretariat of Mexico, presentation of the Mexican battle flag to Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriguez, the commander of the Mexican Expeditionary Forces, and Lieutenant General Barton K. Yount, representing General Arnold, presenting the squadron with a battle flag. After the presentation of the battle flags, the Mexican aviators showed off their flying skills to the dignitaries in attendance. They put their P-47 *Thunderbolts* through every tactical manoeuvre taught to them by their American instructors. The day's celebration concluded with a formal luncheon at the base's Officer's Club.<sup>31</sup>

The State of Texas paid homage to the Mexican Squadron during the ceremony when the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Tudor, p. 125, noted that on 20 February 1945, *Flight Report*, Majors Field's newspaper, reported on the success of the Mexican squadron during its gunnery training period in Brownsville.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-134 has all the details regarding the flag presentation ceremonies at Majors Field; "History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron." *SAFO*, 94, noted that both American and Mexican newsreel companies were present, and that Lieutenant Colonel Albert E. Holland, Liaison Officer for Coordination of Inter-American Affairs, Motion Picture Branch, Washington, D.C., was in attendance for the purpose of making a feature which was to be released in Mexico and other Latin American nations.

following Resolution from the Texas Legislature was read aloud by Senator Penrose Metcalfe of San Angelo:

... Whereas, all of the young men who make up this squadron have received a large part of their flying training in Texas, and they have courageously and patriotically volunteer for overseas service against the common foes of our two nations, and

Whereas, it has been an honor for the State of Texas to have this first unit of the Mexican Expeditionary Forces as its guests for part of their training, it is fitting that an official expression of approval of the people of this state be extended to these brave and unselfish men who are voluntarily offering their lives for the protection of those noble things which mean more to the people of our countries than life itself, now therefore be it

Resolved, by the State of Texas, the House of Representative[s] concurring, that a committee of three members of the House of Representatives be appointed [House members Fred Jones of Live Oak, Jake Mabe of Eagle Pass, and Cecil Barnes of San Angelo] to attend the ceremonies to convey in person the best wishes of the people of Texas for the welfare and success of these distinguished aviators.<sup>32</sup>

With the flag presentation ceremonies completed, the squadron resumed its gunnery training in Brownsville. This course was wrapped up by 14 March, and the squadron returned to Majors Field where it began its preparations to go overseas.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that, “During its training at Majors Field, the 201 established a slightly higher proficiency record than the average U.S. fighter squadron.”<sup>34</sup>

The ground personnel departed Majors Field on 18 March for Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, California, while Colonel Cardenas Rodriguez and the pilots left for Topeka, Kansas by train for final processing by the 21st Bombardment Wing. On 8 April 1945, the 201st shipped out for the Philippines (Manila) from the port of San Francisco. Colonel Cardenas Rodriguez carried credentials and messages from Mexican President Avila Camacho to General Douglas MacArthur and to Philippine President Sergio Osmena. Their participation in the war against the Japanese empire was about to begin.<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, the Mexican squadron joined the 58th Fighter Group, of the Vth Fighter Command, 5th Air Force (General Orders No. 67, 5 April 1945) flying P-47s. They were

<sup>32</sup> Tudor, pp. 130-131. The text of the Resolution appeared in the *Majors Field Flight Report* on 20 February 1945.

<sup>33</sup> “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron,” *SAFO*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Tudor, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139; *SAFO*, 95; “History of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron.”

stationed at Porac, Luzon, near Clark Field. From 4 June to 9 August, the 201st Mexican Squadron flew a total of 59 combat missions (906:45 total hours flown). The squadron provided air support (bombing and strafing) for Army divisions in the battle to reconquer the Philippine Islands. Later, they would participate in bombing enemy targets on the island of Formosa.

During the time that the squadron was in action, it lost five pilots while dropping 1,038 lbs. of bombs (1,000 lbs. and 500 lbs.) and firing 152,668 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition on enemy targets. The squadron left Manila on 22 October for California. They returned to a heroes' welcome in front of the Presidential Palace in Mexico City. The squadron was officially disbanded on 22 November 1945. In looking at the big picture, the participation of the Mexican squadron in defeating Japan was rather insignificant. However, its contribution was invaluable when one considers the publicity and goodwill that was fostered between the United States and Latin America (i.e., Mexico and Brazil). It truly demonstrated the solidarity of the Western Hemisphere in defeating the Axis Powers. Moreover, the Mexican airmen, in addition to their combat record, served as a valuable social asset in regards to the Spanish-speaking Filipinos. The bonds of friendship and comradeship, forged in the crucible of World War II between both Mexican and American warriors, remains strong till today.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; SAFO, p. 95; "Mexican 201st Fighter Squadron (Aztec Eagles), 1944-1945," *Military Collector & Historian: Journal of the Company of Military Historians* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 37. For more on the combat record of the Mexican Squadron see, "201st Mexican Fighter Squadron," pp. 2-6, and Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, vol. 5, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki June 1944 to August 1945* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), frames 251677 1-25167716. An excellent, first-person account of the 58th Fighter Group, and the 201st Mexican Squadron while in the Philippines, can be found in: Anthony J. Kupferer, *No Glamour... No Glory!: The Story of The 58th Fighter Group of World War II* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 255-266.