

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



Loyal Legion Vignettes



US PARTICIPATES IN MEXICO'S CINCO DE MAYO SESQUICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION

By
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(May 2012)



The United States was proudly represented by a delegation lead by the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) during the Sesquicentennial observance of the Cinco de Mayo Battle of Puebla in Mexico on May 5, 2012. On February 12, 2011, in Washington DC the MOLLUS was invited by Puebla State Education Secretary Luis Maldonado on behalf of C. Rafael Moreno Valle, Governor of the state of Puebla, to participate in the Sesquicentennial Cinco de Mayo Commemoration of the Mexican/French Battle of Puebla, Mexico.

It is a little known fact in both Mexico and the United States that the 1862 Battle of Puebla, Mexico had a significant impact on our American Civil War. Some historians have argued that France's real

goal with its 1860s excursion into Mexico was to help break up the United States, in the midst of its Civil War, by helping the Confederacy. However, the Mexican victory at Puebla derailed Napoleon III's time table and denied him the opportunity to continue to supply the Confederacy, thus allowing the United States to eventually build the greatest army the world had ever seen. The United States, in turn, helped the Mexican struggle with President Lincoln's formal recognition of President Juarez's government, sending him arms and money and eventually, through President Johnson (following the end of our Civil War), by authorizing General Philip Sheridan to take to the Texas - Mexico border 50,000 Union Army volunteers, known as the American Legion, to threaten the French and to help President Juarez and the Mexican people reclaim their country.

The 19-person MOLLUS delegation, which was the guest of the Mexican government, was composed of representatives of the MOLLUS, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), 4th Texas and 7th Michigan reenactors including MOLLUS Commander-in-Chief (CinC) Jeffry Burden, Senior Vice CinC Kinny Post, Junior Vice CinC Jim Simmons, Chancellor-in-Chief Eric Rojo, and Companions Lee Stone, Peter Dixon and wife Joan, Linn Malaznik and his wife Maria, Adam Gaines, and Will Tisch; MOLLUS and SUVCW Past CinC Keith Harrison and SUVCW members Eugene Mortorff, Tom Helmantoler, Mace Gjerman, and Jamin Gjerman; reenactors John Fross and Tony Cobb; and Lincoln Impressionist Michael Krebs. The participants came from California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Texas, Virginia, Washington DC, and Canada.

The threat of ash from Puebla's erupting volcano on May 3 changed the delegation's arrival from Puebla's airport to that of Mexico City. Once through customs, the weary group was bused to Puebla, arriving in the early morning. Turn-around was swift, as the MOLLUS hosted a formal breakfast for our Mexican hosts just a few hours later. Chief among our guests were Mexican Congressman Mario Riestra, and Alejandro Montiel-Bonilla, representing the State of Puebla Education Secretary. Companion Rojo presented a series of special gifts on behalf of the MOLLUS, including busts of Lincoln and a special painting commissioned by the MOLLUS, to mark the events of the weekend. Puebla State Education Secretary Luis Maldonado, an Honorary Companion of the MOLLUS and the individual who had helped make the trip possible, unavoidably missed the breakfast. He was able to join us, however, for coffee later that afternoon. During this time, we had the chance to show our appreciation and exchange gifts.

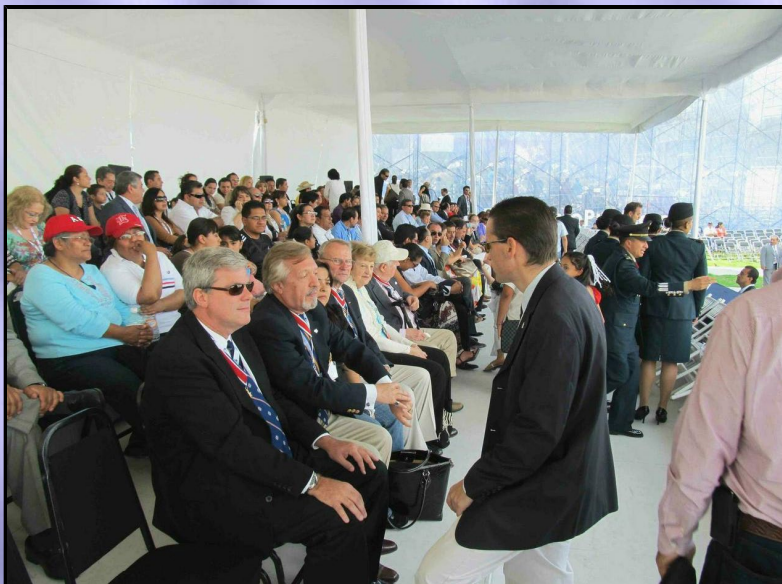
A walking tour of the streets and architecture of Puebla followed. The city was built by the Spanish as a new settlement rather than on the foundations of an older Aztec city and the street and architecture reflected a strong and consistent European continental influence. Stops included the Puebla State Congress; a busy civic artists' colony; the Rosary Chapel in the Church of Santo Domingo (the Chapel largely decorated with 21-carat gold leaf); the Palafox Library (oldest library in the Americas); and the Museum Jose Luis Bello y Zetina, a home-turned-museum, which provided a glimpse of upper class life in Puebla in the late 19th through mid-20th century. A well-earned lunch was had at "Que Chula es Puebla."



That evening we made our way through tight security to the Cathedral of Puebla for a gala concert. We, along with President C. Felipe Calderon and a host of other dignitaries, listened to the Puebla Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Alondra De La Parra, which performed selections of Beethoven, Debussy, and Mexican composer Jose Pable Moncyo Garcia. The program was brought to a spectacular close with Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture (written to commemorate another French defeat.) The bells of the Cathedral pealed as the 1812 Overture reached its dramatic finish. The program was absolutely stirring with the sights and sounds never to be forgotten.

Later that evening we again found ourselves in the company of President Calderon, this time at a gala state dinner in the city convention center. Music, song, dancers, and the words of General Zaragoza, the victor of Puebla, filled the night. An eight-course meal enthralled us, washed down finally with servings of sorbet and mixcal (a distillate of the agave plant - very potent).

The following morning, nine of our delegation pushed through huge crowds and again tight security to take seats in the reviewing grandstands near the two forts that were the principal battleground on May 5, 1862. To watch the parade was to see a representative display of Mexican military pride, her elite troops, her young army and navy cadets, and her various other military components, including a heavy dose of rolling and flying military firepower. That portion of the parade was followed by floats and costumed participants telling the story of Mexico, from the earliest days of settlement into the 21st Century, with a heavy emphasis on the French Intervention of the 1860s.



The marching contingent of the delegation was taken initially to one of the many staging areas for the participants of the parade. At the staging area, there were easily 500 middle school kids who also were going to be in the parade. While there, we must have had our pictures taken with just about every one of those kids because as soon as one picture was taken, we had a request for another. This lasted just about an hour and a half. Finally, we were taken to our position of the parade. Our section was composed of about 100 teens dressed as paperboys announcing the results of the battle and its significance to Mexico, the Confederacy, the Union, and Presidents Lincoln and Juarez. That was followed by about 20 middle school girls carrying banners with pictures of Lincoln and Juarez. Following the kids were Abraham Lincoln (portrayed by screen and television celebrity Michael Krebs) and Will Tisch and Eugene Mortorff, serving as guards for the President. This was followed PCinC Harrison leading the 7-man color guard composed of Linn Malaznik, Lee Stone, Tom Helmantoler, Mace Gjerman, Jamin Gjerman, John Fross, and Tony Cobb (Adam Gains succumbed to the high altitude of Puebla and could not march).



The parade was two miles in length with one very steep climb. We were very well received by an enthusiastic and large (close to a million spectator) crowd. In fact, everytime we stopped during the parade (which was frequent) and even a couple of times when were still marching, we would have people come out of the crowd to have their picture taken with us. This included young kids, teenagers, parents bringing their children out, and even parents bringing their parents out just to have their picture taken. In addition to the pictures, several people came out of the crowd to hug

and/or kiss us. We represented the United States well as we marched by and presented honors to the Mexican President and Puebla Governor, their cabinets, the Mexican military, and other the dignitaries. Following the parade, all of us were absolutely exhausted as we made it slowly back to our staging area all the while we were continually being stopped to have more pictures taken with the citizens of Puebla.





The entire delegation subsequently was taken to the Casa de Talavera Celia, where we had dinner inside the workshop of one of Puebla’s three authentic producers of “Talavera” pottery, perhaps Puebla’s proudest export. Toasts were made in celebration of our hosts and of the fine appearance of the marching contingent of our delegation. Later that evening, a portion of the contingent who still had the energy, enjoyed farewell mixcal tasting and socializing at El Mural de los Poblanos, one of the highlight establishments of a thriving dining and entertainment scene in Puebla.



Sunday morning we attended a special meeting of Puebla City Government to acknowledge our participation in the Cinco de Mayo commemoration and to receive a special presentation from the Mayor and City Council of Puebla. We each were provided with a beautiful certificate as “Visitante Distinguida En el marco de los festejos por el 150 Aniversario de la Batalla del 5 del Mayo en Puebla.” Following the ceremony, we were whisked off to the Puebla bus station for a two-hour bus trip to the Mexico City airport and connections to our various flights home.



The Puebla, Mexico trip and the Cinco de Mayo celebrations in addition to being historic were absolutely fantastic. Never in our lives have we ever been treated so well by so many people let alone a city, state, and federal government. Also, close to million people on the parade route were thrilled with our participation in their parade and celebration. We thank our Mexican sponsors and hosts and hope that our participation will lead to a better understanding of how the histories of our two countries are intertwined.

Sources:

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