

# "South of the Border"

By GORDON PASCOE



**A** rattle of musketry - several bodied crumpled against an adobe wall. An officer stepped forward and gave the coup de grace. The scene was Mexico, on the outskirts of Tampico. According to J.A. Pohl, Superintendent of the Gulf Division of the Radio Corporation of America, New Orleans office; this scene was enacted at a number of locations in Mexico, near cities where the Mexican National Radio Stations were installed.

These were the times of the Villa Revolution. Villa and his Generals had come to the conclusion that the reason so many of his well planned surprise attacks were stalemated was due to wireless intelligence transmitted by the Federals. The solution, capture all the wireless stations on the outskirts of the cities, shoot the wireless operators and appropriate the equipment. This left the Mexican Government very short of wireless telegraphers. The Mexican Government through "World Wide Wireless" (RCA) asked for U.S. volunteers to help out in the crisis. The writer volunteered, and was assigned to the Mexican Naval Auxilliary, "JALISCO." Mexico had three of these fine "sister" ships, at this time. They were named after states. They were used as passenger ships, but had been built so as to be converted into cruisers when emergency demanded.

Here I was in the Mexican Navy, finally making the ward-room, which I had tried so hard, unsuccessfully, in the U.S. Navy. Our first trip was for the Isthmus of Tehnantepec where Villa's activities had become particularly active. Cruising through Gulf waters was very enjoyable, especially the meals aboard the JALISCO. At every meal, we knew how many different courses would be served, by the number of plates stacked at each place at the table. For lunch and dinner, there was always three main courses, a fish, a fowl and a meat. I forgot to mention the hors-d 'oeuvres which in this case consisted of tortillas, ensulatas and many other

Mexican goodies. You could make a meal on these alone.

When we arrived at Puerto Mexico, the Captain announced we were to proceed up the Coatzacoalcos River to the town of Minatitlan which reports stated was due to be attacked by the Villistas and remove some valuable cargo and civilians, in case the town fell to capture. I heard Coatzacoalcos means "snake" in Toltec or Aztec, and this river lived up to its name for crookedness.

Docking in the afternoon, all seemed "Quiet on the Coatzacoalcos." That night several of the officers who were off duty decided to go to a dance hall a short distance out of town. I was invited and accompanied them. We were dancing with the señoritas and generally enjoying ourselves, when very silently, due to being in bare feet, soldiers filed in, ranged themselves around the perimeter of the hall, took seats, resting on their carbines, as if to watch and be entertained. My partner, whispered to me "Vaya, pronto, Villistas." Obviously, the other Mexican officers in our company had received the message loud and clear. As if we all had the same thought, we danced our partners over to the wide doorway entrance and practically in unison, called out "Buenos Notches, Lindas Señoritas, Gracias" and et cetera, and beat a hasty retreat, in as orderly manner as possible.

As we traversed the trail to town, our pace was one of a fast walk, but as one of the party glanced over his shoulder, he sung out that the Villistas were coming after us, double time. This spurred us on to triple time and pretty close to quadruple time. We made it in, past the Federal lines.

The Rebels attacked the next day, but we had our cargo and our evacuees aboard, and shoved off for down river. We performed a number of similar missions, sometimes under rebel fire. But, soon my assignment was over. Life was exciting "South of the Border."