

To Lt. Gen. Richard C. Stilwell (Ret'd)
Under Secretary of Defense.

November 10, 1981

Dear Dick,

You have been extremely tolerant of my habit of sending you ideas that the Administration might wish to implement, and passing them on to the appropriate authorities. Here is one that, I firmly believe, has merit and which may commend itself to others.

First, a little background. About 30 years ago I concentrated for a time on Mexican affairs, writing area studies and reading deeply into Mexican history. I lived in Mexico for eight months in 1957-58. Becoming very involved with the country and its people, I remember thinking, in a Walter Mitty way, of what an American Ambassador could do, as a gesture, to put US-Mexican relations on a favorable level never yet attained. Needless to say, I never became the Ambassador, but the idea still intrigues me, and someone might now want to carry this idea out, particularly since President Reagan has already so improved the atmosphere between the two countries.

At Chapultepec, in Mexico City, is a national shrine, namely the monument to the "Ninos Heroes." These were young Mexican military academy cadets who fought to the last man against the US troops that finally overran Chapultepec in the Mexican War. Some of them, to avoid capture alive, are said to have thrown themselves from the cliffs, etc. Mexicans, like other Latins, are very sensitive to symbols and gestures, hence the following proposal:

We should propose to the Mexican Government that, at the next reunion of President Reagan and President Lopez Portillo, the West Point Corps of Cadets, in their most resplendent uniforms but without arms, should be flown to Mexico City with their band, or with an excellent military band if the West Point one is not good enough. Their mission would be to place a wreath, honoring their Mexican cadet counterpart heroes of the past, at the monument at Chapultepec. They would march to and from the monument along the Reforma and other great avenues of the central city, and the band would play carefully selected Mexican music, with several renditions of the "Adelita", the great song of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, which is one of the most stirring of military marches. The music, the impeccable marching of the cadets, and above all the gesture of honor and homage from young Americans of this generation to young Mexican heroes of the past would, in my opinion, create an atmosphere of emotion and reconciliation which Mexicans would respect and remember long after favorable trade deals or political concessions were forgotten. It would also create a setting in which President Reagan could, if he wished to attend in person, make an unforgettable impression. Whoever the US spokesman might be, he should either be a Spanish speaker, or someone who has been thoroughly coached so as to be able to render that address in well-accented Spanish, this being still another gesture of respect for Mexican language and culture.

If the foregoing plan were carried out, with meticulous attention to nuance and taste, with the music carefully selected as indicated above, the result could be a truly historic occasion. People today who have never heard of Soissons or St. Mihiel remember the "Lafayette, we are here" gesture of World War I. Or "Ich bin ein Berliner", etc.

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I would be most grateful if you could get this idea to wherever it would receive a serious hearing, if you agree that it has merit. I never got to implement it myself, but would be enormously pleased if someone did it, as I am sure it could make a very real impact!

All the best,

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