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## ADRIAN WOLL: FRENCHMAN IN THE MEXICAN MILITARY SERVICE

By JOSEPH MILTON NANCE\*

THIS is a biographical sketch of a rather prominent and influential "soldier of fortune" whose integrity, honesty, attention to duty, and gentlemanly conduct most Texans of the days of the Republic respected, even if they disliked the government he so often represented.

Adrian Woll was born a Frenchman on December 2, 1795, in St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris, and educated for the military profession. He served under the First Empire as a lieutenant of a regiment of lancers of the imperial guard.<sup>1</sup> Since his regiment was composed largely of Poles, Woll has sometimes mistakenly been represented as being of Polish nationality. In 1815 he was captain adjutant major in the 10th Legion of the National Guard of the Seine.<sup>2</sup> Upon the restoration of the Bourbons in France, Woll went to New York, thence to Baltimore, Maryland, with letters of introduction to General Winfield Scott who befriended him and, no doubt, pointed out to him the wonderful opportunities offered by the revolutionary disturbances in Mexico to a young man of energy, skilled in the arts of a soldier. Woll was

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1. *Diario del Gobierno* (Mexico City), Feb. 8, 1843, pp. 218-19.

2. Gustave Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel des Contemporains Contenant Toutes les Personnes Notables de la France et des Pays Etrangers* (Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette, 1865, 3rd ed.), p. 1849; Miguel Angel Peral, *Diccionario Biográfico Mexicano* (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial P. A. C., n.d.), 870. Pictures of Woll may be found in Egon Corti, *Maximilian and Charlotte of Mexico* (New York: A. Knopf, 1929), I, 150, 262; Vicente Riva Palacio, *México á través de los Siglos* (Mexico: Publicaciones Herrerias, c1939), V.

not slow in taking advantage of these opportunities, for on July 3, 1816, we find him commencing his Mexican military career at Baltimore as a lieutenant-colonel on the staff of General Francisco Xavier Mina to aid in the establishment of Mexican independence. With Mina he disembarked near the mouth of the Santander River on April 21, 1817, and assisted in taking possession of Soto la Marina three days later. Woll escaped Mina's fate in the revolutionary movement and thus began a half century of active participation in Mexican military and political affairs, adhering from first to last to the fortunes of General Santa Anna. After the achievement of Mexican independence, he continued in the army, became a naturalized citizen of Mexico, and married Lucinda Vautrey Griggi.<sup>3</sup>

Commissioned a colonel in the Mexican army in 1828, Woll served with distinction as an aide-de-camp to Santa Anna in the siege and capture of Tampico from the Spaniards in 1829. For bravery displayed on that occasion, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in 1832 and awarded the Cross of Tampico.<sup>4</sup> Along with several other officers, he was commissioned by Santa Anna to conduct and place in the hands of the Supreme Government at Mexico City the flag taken from the Spaniards. In the same year Woll took part in the *pronunciamiento* against President Anastasio Bustamante which brought General M. Gómez Pedraza to the presidency of the republic. From Guadalajara he was detached with a small, well organized force to proceed quickly to Colima, whose authorities had refused to aid the revolt. At Taxinastla

3. Averiguación sobre el contrabando de 30 bultos de muebles introducidos por Lucinda Vautrey Griggi y denunciado por Jesús María de Ibarra, administrador de rentas de Coahuila, 24 de agosto de 1841, Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Saltillo, exp. 86, leg. 39; Averiguación sobre el contrabando de 30 bultos de muebles introducidos para venderlos en la feria de Saltillo, por Lucinda Vautrey Griggi, mujer del general Adrian Woll, 24 de agosto de 1841, in *ibid.*, leg. 39, carp. 86. 1841. Vito Alessio Robles reports that Lucinda Vautrey Griggi was the "lover" of General Woll: Robles, *Coahuila y Texas, 1821-1848* (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos de La Nación, 1946), II, 322. John Henry Brown, the Texas historian, reports that Woll's son was operating a hotel in Mexico City in 1869-70 when he (Brown) was in Mexico. Brown, *History of Texas from 1635 to 1892* (St. Louis: L. E. Daniell, c1893), II, 222n.

4. Heinrich August Pierer, *Universal-Lexikon der Gergangenheit und gegenwart oder Neuestes encyclopädisches wörterbuch der wissenschaften, kunste und Gewerbe* (New York: L. W. Schmidt, 1865), XIX, 338.

Woll defeated Lieutenant Colonel Joaquín Solórzano and entered Colima on November 15, where he freed the prisoners and established in office persons loyal to the revolutionary movement before moving on to Morelia with his troops.<sup>5</sup>

Woll served as quartermaster general under Santa Anna during the latter's victorious campaign in 1835 against the Federalist uprising under the pure-blooded Indian Juan Álvarez in the south and Francisco García in the State of Zacatecas. As quartermaster of the army in the Texas campaign of 1836 he reached San Antonio de Béxar on March 8<sup>6</sup> and served under General Vicente Filisola, second in command of the army. Among the detachments sent out from San Antonio by Santa Anna after the fall of the Alamo was one of seven hundred and twenty-five men under Generals Ramírez y Sesma and Woll to pass through Gonzales to San Felipe de Austin and thence to Harrisburg and Anahuac. This force was composed of the battalions of Aldama, Matamoros, and Toluca, supported by two six-pounders and forty dragoons from the regiment of Dolores. These troops confronted the Texan army under General Sam Houston on the opposite bank of the Colorado at Beason's Ferry,<sup>7</sup> nearly opposite the site of the present town of Columbus. Arriving at the Atascosito Pass of the Colorado on April 5 and finding a part of Ramírez y Sesma's force already across but only one canoe available for crossing, Santa Anna ordered the regular battalion of Aldama, under the direction of General Woll, to construct rafts to facilitate the crossing of the remainder of the army under Filisola's supervision while he set out with the divisions under Ramírez y Sesma and Tolsa for San Felipe.

General Filisola made Woll his chief of staff on April 26. The next day, Erastus (Deaf) Smith reached Filisola's camp with despatches from President Santa Anna concerning the latter's capture at San Jacinto. On the following day (April 28) Woll was dispatched to the Tèxan army as an emissary

5. Peral, *Diccionario Biográfico Mexicano*, 870.

6. Robles, *Cohuila y Texas, 1821-1848*, II, 140.

7. Brown, *History of Texas*, II, 3.

under the pretext of learning the terms of the armistice, but actually for the purpose of gaining information on the strength, armament, and resources of the enemy.<sup>8</sup> He entered the Texan camp on April 30 under a flag of truce and conferred freely with the Mexican prisoners; but was retained because, as Santa Anna later reported, the Texans "feared he would disclose the strength of the conquerors," although the Texans tried to claim that he had been retained in order to protect his life from lawless persons.<sup>9</sup> After a brief period, the new commander-in-chief of the Texan army, General Thomas J. Rusk, ordered him transferred as a prisoner to Velasco, where he was eventually given a passport for his safe conduct, escorted to Goliad,<sup>10</sup> and permitted to return to Mexico. Woll rejoined the retreating Mexican army on June 12, the day that Filisola resigned his command to General Juan José Andrade, who served as *ad interim* commander of the troops until they could be placed under General José Urrea as ordered by the Mexican government. Woll claimed in 1842 that during the Texas campaign of 1836 he had convinced Santa Anna of the impropriety of the order to shoot Colonel James W. Fannin and his men, but the order had departed and could not be recalled.<sup>11</sup>

For several years after the Texas revolution, while Santa Anna lived in quiet seclusion in Mexico, Woll seems to have played a rather inconspicuous role in Mexican affairs. During the short-lived "Pastry War" with France in 1838-39, he sent his resignation as an officer in the Mexican army to General Santa Anna to avoid the necessity of fighting against

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8. Robles, *Cohuila y Texas*, II, 165; Bancroft, H. H., *History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1889), II, 244, 266-68.

9. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, *Manifiesto Relative to His Operations in the Texas Campaign and His Capture*, translated by Carlos E. Castañeda in *The Mexican Side of The Texas Revolution* (Dallas: P. L. Turner, 1928), p. 85; W. C. Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence of the Texas Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), II, 716-17.

10. Thomas J. Rusk to William Strickland, Head Quarters, Texian Army, May 28, 1836, in Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence of the Texan Revolution*, II, 716-17; David G. Burnet to Santa Anna, Velasco, May 20, 1836, in Guerra, Frac. 1, Leg. 1, Op. Mil. Texas, 1836-37, no. 6, Mexico. Secretaria de Guerra y de Marina. Archivo General (Transcripts, Archives Division, University of Texas Library).

11. E. W. Winkler (ed.), "The Bexar and Dawson Prisoners—Hutchinson's Diary," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, XIII, 296.

his countrymen,<sup>12</sup> but the Government refused to accept it. Instead, he was permitted to retire from active service during the war. With the withdrawal of the French, Woll emerged in the struggle between the Centralists and the Federalists as an important supporter of the former and especially the Santa Anna group. Late in November 1840, Woll was in New Orleans to negotiate for military supplies and other items, some of which possibly became involved in a smuggling operation conducted by his wife at Saltillo.<sup>13</sup> He returned to Matamoros early in December on an American vessel and thereafter saw service on the northern frontier.

Upon General Mariano Arista's renunciation of the command of the Army of the North, General Isidro Reyes, who had served as second in command of that army since February 1842, was made commander-in-chief on May 28 of that year and assumed his command at Saltillo on June 2.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Woll was appointed second in command of the Army of the North and Commandant General of the Department of Coahuila. Reyes' command included the departments of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila. As commander of the Second Division of the northern army, Woll was ordered to capture San Antonio de Béxar, westernmost outpost of the Republic of Texas, and to make a reconnaissance to the Guadalupe River and down its west bank to the town of Gonzales. Under no condition was his raid into Texas to last more than a month. Woll's division completed its crossing of the Río Grande on August 30, 1842, and the next day began its march toward San Antonio by a new route above the old road from Presidio de Río Grande to San Antonio. San Antonio was captured on September 11 and evac-

12. *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), Feb. 13, 1839; *Diario del Gobierno* (Mexico City), Feb. 8, 1843, pp. 218-19.

13. James Campbell to David G. Burnet, Austin, Dec. 28, 1840, in *Domestic Correspondence* (Republic of Texas), Texas State Archives; James Love to Anson Jones, New Orleans, Nov. 30, 1840, in Anson Jones, *Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas, Its History and Annexation* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1859), pp. 156-57; *Averiguación sobre el contrabando de 30 bultos de muebles introducidos para venderlos en la feria de Saltillo, por Lucinda Vautrey Griggi, mujer del general Adrian Woll, 24 de agosto de 1841*, in *Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Saltillo*, leg. 39, carp. 86. 1841.

14. *El Cosmopolita* (Mexico City), June 25, 1842.

uated by Woll on the 20th after his repulse in the Battle of the Salado on the 18th.<sup>15</sup> For his Texas campaign, hailed as a success in Mexico and as a defeat in Texas, he was decorated by his government with a Cross of Honor and promoted to the rank of major general.<sup>16</sup>

When Reyes left his command early in February 1843 to appear before a court martial in Mexico City to answer charges of failure to prevent the Texans occupying and sacking Laredo and Guerrero the preceding December, Woll was made commander-in-chief of the Army of the North by Acting President Nicolás Bravo, having previously received that command *ad interim* at Guerrero from General Reyes on January 31, 1843.<sup>17</sup> Having on several previous occasions rejected the command, Woll now accepted it and served as commander-in-chief until a revolt led by José Joaquín Herrera and General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga resulted in the northern army pronouncing for the revolution on December 6, 1844, and arresting Woll,<sup>18</sup> one of the staunchest supporters of the late government under Santa Anna. After a few months Woll was freed under a general amnesty decree of May 24, 1845.

While serving as commander of the northern frontier, Woll was designated by his government to represent it in treating with commissioners appointed by Texas to arrange the terms of an armistice for the negotiation of a permanent settlement of differences based upon the proposals made to

15. Woll's reports and journal of his campaign in Texas in 1842 were published at Monterrey under the title of *Expedicion hecha en Tejas por una parte de la 2.<sup>a</sup> Division del Cuerpo de Egercito del Norte* (Monterrey: Impreso por Francisco Molina, 1842). For a translation of this work, see Joseph Milton Nance, "Brigadier General Adrian Woll's Report of His Expedition into Texas in 1842," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LVIII, 523-52. For additional information on Woll's capture of San Antonio, see *Diario del Gobierno*, Feb. 8 and 9, 1843; *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), LXIII, 177-78; Emmanuel Henri D. Domenéch, *Histoire du Mexique* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1868), II, 177-78.

16. *El Cosmopolita*, March 11, 1843; *Diario del Gobierno*, Feb. 8 and 9, May 14, 1843; *Niles' Weekly Register*, LXIII, 177-78.

17. Adrian Woll, General en jefe del ejército del Norte, al Ministro de la guerra, Cuartel general en Ciudad Guerrero, Enero 31 de 1843, No. 38, in *Diario del Gobierno*, Feb. 17, 1843, p. 254; see also, *ibid.*, March 10, 1843, p. 340.

18. Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 276. General Mariano Arista was restored to the command of the northern army on December 6, 1844.

Santa Anna by James W. Robinson, who had been captured by General Woll at San Antonio and was at the time of making the proposals a prisoner at Perote Castle. After a conference with Santa Anna, Robinson was appointed a commissioner by the Mexican government to go to Texas to open negotiations. Houston proclaimed a truce on June 15, 1843, and in the Fall both governments selected commissioners to negotiate. They met at Salinas on the Río Grande, and on February 15, 1844, signed an armistice. Finding that the Texans were negotiating in Washington for annexation to the United States and that the Texan commissioners to Mexico had been instructed to conclude terms and conditions of a general armistice, rather than for a permanent peace based on the Robinson proposals, the Mexican government ordered the negotiations dropped; and on June 19, 1844, Woll sent Houston a formal declaration of war, stating that he had been directed by the President of Mexico to renew hostilities and that they had been resumed as of the 11th of the month.<sup>19</sup> Woll then ordered all communications with Texas to cease and announced a plan suggesting the most vindictive warfare.

During the war with the United States, Woll served in the Mexican army, but with Santa Anna's failure and enforced withdrawal from Mexico, he, too, left the country in 1847 and lived in Europe for a short period. In 1852 he left France for Havana, Cuba, preparatory to re-entering Mexico with Santa Anna, who had grown tired of living in New Granada. With the latter's return to Mexico on April 1, 1853, and his installation as President on April 20 with the support of a group of militarists and clerics, Woll was appointed a division general and served during 1853 and 1854 as governor and commandant general of the State of Tamaulipas.<sup>20</sup> His authority was soon extended over Nuevo León and Coahuila during the revolutionary disturbances, but the rebels almost

19. Adrian Woll to Sam Houston, June 19, 1844, in *Gaceta del Gobierno de Tamaulipas* (Victoria), July 3, 1844.

20. Richard A. Johnson, "The Mexican Revolution of Ayutla, 1854-1855" (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Texas, 1938), pp. 90-91, 101.



forced him out. Santa Anna declared himself a dictator on December 16, 1853. The dictatorship, however, soon collapsed and the wily "Napoleon of the West" once more fled Mexico, in August 1855. Woll left too.

About three and a half years later, however, Woll returned to cast his lot with the conservative (Centralist) party under the leadership of President Miguel Miramón against the liberal element (Constitutionalists) under Benito Juárez. Along with several prominent reactionaries (Díaz de la Vega, Víctor Blanco, and two sons of Santa Anna), Woll was landed by a British steamer at Mocambo on March 22, 1859, and from there repaired to Miramón's headquarters at Veragra. During the ensuing tragic, fanatical Guerra de la Reforma, Woll commanded a division of troops. He administered a severe defeat to one of the Liberal leaders, General S. Degollado, near León on August 30, 1859.<sup>21</sup> Woll occupied Zacatecas in November 1859 and in May of the following year defended Guadalajara<sup>22</sup> for General Félix Zuloaga, but the city would have fallen to the Juárez supporters if José L. Uruga, who was besieging it had not been seriously wounded in the thigh and taken prisoner in removing the last barricades.<sup>23</sup> The collapse of the Miramón government, December 24, 1860, and the success of Juárez in establishing himself in the presidency caused General Woll to seek safety abroad, fleeing by way of Matamoros to New Orleans and thence to France.

Later, in 1862, when the French government of Napoleon III declared war on the administration of Juárez, Woll returned to Mexico with the French troops, where, as a result of the influence of Juan N. Almonte, he was named commandant general of the State of Vera Cruz. In his efforts to persuade the French in Mexico to seize Matamoros, A. Superrière, agent of the Southern Confederacy, held several inter-

21. E. M. Caldwell, "The War of 'La Reforma' in Mexico, 1858-1861" (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Texas, 1935), p. 179.

22. *Ibid.*, 199.

23. Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 3rd ed., 1849; Alberto M. Carreño, *Jefes del Ejército Mexicano en 1847* (Mexico: Imprenta y Fototipia de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1914), pp. 114-16; Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, V, 773, 781-82.

views with General Woll in March 1863 with an eye to the future, knowing that Woll stood high in French circles.<sup>24</sup> Woll served also as one of thirty-five members of the *Junta Superior de Gobierno*,<sup>25</sup> formed under French influence, to choose three citizens to act as the chief executive authority, pending the establishment of a permanent government. The *Junta* was to select two hundred and fifteen Mexican citizens to serve as an *Asamblea de Notables* to decide upon a definitive form of government for Mexico. The *Asamblea* was appointed on June 29, 1863, and jointly with the *Junta Superior* determined on July 10 upon the establishment of a monarchy. The executive of three men was now made into a *Regencia del Imperio Mexicano* until a sovereign could be installed.<sup>26</sup> Along with eleven others, Woll was appointed by the Regency a member of the Deputation to offer the Mexican imperial crown to Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria. He sailed from Vera Cruz on August 16, 1863, going by way of San Nazario for Trieste, Austria, which he reached early in October.<sup>27</sup> On October 3 the Mexican delegation, headed by José María Gutiérrez de Estrada, longtime leader of the monarchists in Mexico then in exile in Europe, offered the Mexican throne to Maximilian at his beautiful home, Miramar, near Trieste upon the shores of the Adriatic.

At Miramar Woll was requested by Maximilian to draw up a project of organization for the armed forces which the new emperor thought he might have occasion to form.<sup>28</sup> Maximilian officially accepted the crown of Mexico on April 10, 1864, and on the same day appointed a number of high officials, including Woll as adjutant general. Maximilian landed in Mexico on May 28, and Woll was taken into the inner circles of the Emperor as an approved warrior and an ex-

24. J. Fred Rippy, "Mexican Projects of the Confederates," in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXII, 305-06.

25. Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, VI, 78n.4, 104n.7, 138.

26. *Ibid.*, VI, 46n.44, 78n.4, 87, 104n.7, 138; Corti, *Maximilian and Charlotte of Mexico*, I, passim.

27. Percy F. Martin, *Maximilian in Mexico: The Story of the French Intervention, 1861-1867* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 125.

28. Ferdinand Max to Napoleon III, Miramar, November 7, 1863, No. 28, in Corti, *Maximilian and Charlotte of Mexico*, I, Appendix, pp. 391-92.

perienced soldier who knew the country and its outstanding personalities. He was named chief aide-de-camp<sup>29</sup> and promoted to commander in the French order of knighthood, the Legion of Honor. Maximilian, becoming displeased with Marshal Francois Achille Bazaine, addressed a letter in February 1865 to Napoleon demanding the Marshal's recall from Mexico. This ill-feeling later prompted Maximilian to dispatch General Woll upon a secret mission to Napoleon.<sup>30</sup> He remained in Europe, because a few months later (January 1866) Napoleon III commenced to withdraw the French troops from Mexico.

Having worn out his "welcome" in Mexico by aiding and abetting a foreign power to establish its political system over his adopted land, Woll never returned to Mexico but continued to live in his native land, where he died in February 1875 at Montauban, in southern France, just north of Toulouse.<sup>31</sup>

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29. Martin, *Maximilian in Mexico*, 157; Bertita Harding (Señora B. Leonarz de Harding), *Phantom Crown: The Story of Maximilian and Carlota of Mexico* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., c1934), p. 120. The *Almanaque Imperial para el año de 1866* (México: Imp[renta] de J. M. Lara, 1866), p. 10, lists Woll as an Aide-de-Camp to Maximilian with the following honors: "Sr. General de Division D. Adrian Woll, Gran Oficial de la Orden Imperial de Guadalupe, Gran Cruz de la orden de San Gregorio Magno, Gran Cruz de la Orden Imperial de Francisco José de Austria, Comendador de la Orden Imperial de la Legion de Honor de Francia, Cruces de la primera época de la Independencia, de Tejas, de Tampico, en Europa."

30. Martin, *Maximilian in Mexico*, 282.

31. Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel*, 4th ed., II, p. lxxviii.