Villa's Columbus Raid: Practical Politics or German Design?

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Francisco (Pancho) Villa
Detail from photograph in Aultman Collection.
Courtesy Southwest Reference Dept., El Paso Public Library.
Although the Columbus Raid and Francisco Villa have been popularized by journalistic, entertaining myths; there has been little attempt to procure evidence for the reasons for the Raid. Historians of the Wilson era have concentrated chiefly on the war with Germany and the issues of domestic reform, on neutrality and the submarine thesis.

The real significance of the Columbus Raid is related to the role of the Mexican Revolution within the larger world-wide conflagration. Did the American intervention in Mexico in 1916-1917 trigger German unrestricted submarine warfare and, ironically, American intervention in Europe? Was the decision for unrestricted submarine warfare influenced by prior American and Mexican maneuvers? Was there a connection among the Columbus Raid, Pershing’s Expedition, and the new unrestricted German submarine policy?

Was American, Mexican, or German participation responsible for the Columbus Raid? The evidence suggests that Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico, combined Mexican-American provocations with a Mexican-German conspiracy.

**MEXICAN-AMERICAN PROVOCATIONS**

On March 9, 1916, Francisco Villa crossed the international border and raided the sleeping American town of Columbus, New Mexico. Many motives have been suggested for a seemingly irra-
tional provocation against the United States, but sifting of the evidence shows that the assault on Columbus was a natural result of previous events—arising from both United States foreign policy and conditions within the Mexican border states of Sonora and Chihuahua.

Early in 1915 the United States looked on Villa with favor as a possible—even probable—savior of Mexico. Venustiano Carranza, on the other hand, had taken a definite anti-American attitude, especially in reference to United States business interests within Mexico. Villa was consistently friendly toward Americans and cooperative with the United States until October 1915. The beginning of 1915 saw Villa as the outstanding soldier of the Mexican Revolution. Then his good fortune vanished and reverses at Celaya and León started him on the long downgrade to final defeat. Villa was quickly reduced from a national power to a regional chieftain; then squeezed into Chihuahua, and on into the Sierra Madre Occidental by Álvaro Obregón and American border policies.

Despite considerable popular support in Chihuahua, Villa needed the favor of the United States. Before the recognition of Carranza he requested a closed border; he demanded an open border afterwards. Woodrow Wilson gave him neither. Successful revolutionaries had always depended on favorable United States border conditions. The worst possible situation was to be constricted within a small, semi-arid, frontier area near a tightly closed international border. By October 1915, Villa was rapidly approaching this state of affairs.

The United States formally recognized the Carranza regime as the de facto government of Mexico on October 19, 1915. In the future the United States would be distinctly more partial toward Carranza than it had ever been toward Villa. This was evident on the very day of recognition, when an embargo was placed on arms and munitions for Villa, while the export of munitions consigned to the de facto government was permitted. As a result of the embargo smuggling increased; this in turn intensified border tension.

Although Villa had been informed of the probability that the United States would recognize Carranza, the news did not reach
him until he was approaching Agua Prieta, Sonora. George C. Carothers, State Department Special Agent with Villa, and Colonel Herbert Slocum, 13th Cavalry, both reported that Villa became very angry and declared that he would have no further dealings with the United States. The recognition of Carranza changed Villa into an open enemy of the United States. It was Wilson’s first overt maneuver against the bandit of Chihuahua.

Several weeks later President Wilson approved a request from the de facto government to reinforce Agua Prieta, Sonora, via the United States. Five thousand Carranzista troops were transported from Piedras Negras, Coahuila, over the Southern Pacific Railroad through Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, to defeat Villa in Sonora. Not only trainloads of soldiers but also artillery, munitions, and equipment poured through Douglas, Arizona, into Mexico. General Plutarco Elías Calles surrounded Agua Prieta on three sides with deep entrenchments, aprons of barbed wire, and machine guns emplaced to sweep all approaches. By intensive labor and with the privilege of shipping munitions and matériel through the United States, the defenders were able to make Agua Prieta almost impregnable before Villa appeared in the mountain passes to the east.

Weapons and Carranzista entrenchments were not the only tactical features of the battlefield that contributed to Villa’s defeat. The battlefield was illuminated. Previously Villa had had great success in night attacks, but at Agua Prieta powerful searchlights turned night into day. They not only revealed the oncoming attack but blinded the attackers. These searchlights caused much bitterness among the Villistas and quickly added to the grudge building against the United States. As it became apparent during the next few days that their defeat was helped, if not entirely caused, by the new policies of the United States, rumors began to circulate among the Villistas that the searchlights had been furnished by the United States Army and manned by American soldiers.

Villa was very angry and declared “that he was through with any dealings with the United States.” Before Agua Prieta, from the outbreak of the Revolution, the United States had been careful not
to give any official material aid to any faction. Armed Mexican forces were never permitted on American soil, even during the period when the United States was openly hostile to Victoriano Huerta and favorable to the Constitutionalists. Later, after the Columbus Raid, two wallets containing official records were captured. In a letter to Emiliano Zapata, Villa denounced the permission granted Carranza to transport troops through American territory. After Agua Prieta, Villa announced that he intended to seize all horses and saddle equipment regardless of ownership. Moreover, he demanded a forced loan of twenty-five thousand dollars from each of four American companies in his territory and threatened to confiscate all the cattle of the Cananea Cattle Company.

Another cause of Villista extortion was the decline in his finances. In early October the purchasing power of Villa money had dropped almost to zero. By November the exchange rate of his money was two hundred fifty to one. In December it was no longer in circulation. Villa's garrisons, especially in Ciudad Juárez, complained that they were paid with worthless notes, and this created the possibility of mass defections. As Villistas became increasingly hard pressed for bare essentials they became more desperate in their acquisition of them.

Villa became a forager and a looter—a bandit—after his defeat at Agua Prieta. In Sonora, Villa "absolutely cleaned out all available food." Reports from Cananea, Imuris, Magdalena, and Santa Cruz state that "all stores have been looted" and even private dwellings were "cleaned out of everything of value" and "the whole country denuded of everything edible or of any value." On the way back from Sonora, Villa personally directed looting in La Colorada and San Pedro. All stores were cleaned out and all livestock and wagons were taken. This banditry continued in Chihuahua during 1916, and the looting was so complete that "not a grain of corn nor article of clothing" was left behind.

Since December 1915 Villa had been squeezed into the northwestern part of Chihuahua. Consequently, his Villistas broke up into many small bands which roamed in every direction and dev-
astated transportation and food supplies. This not only reduced Villa’s control as military chief but also increased anti-American provocations. While looting, Villistas claimed that Villa had given orders to kill every gringo. In his attempts to better his shaky finances, Villa also engaged in smuggling. He traded surreptitiously through Mexican cattle dealers, especially the Terrazas family. United States Customs officials estimated that during November 1915 Villa collected $500,000 gold in export taxes on cattle and sheep from the Terrazas interests. In December he was still receiving arms, ammunition, and coal as well as bringing the last of the Terrazas cattle into El Paso for sale.

Villa’s defeat at Hermosillo was the key determinant of his new occupation as guerrilla and his desperate raids in Sonora and Chihuahua. Here Villa suffered losses that completely destroyed the morale of his army. The attack on Agua Prieta resulted in defeat; the attack on Hermosillo was a disaster. By the end of November 1915 Villa was finished as a major factor in Mexican politics. The remnants of Villa’s army, drifting northward toward Nogales, committed all the atrocities which seem to be inseparable from a breakdown of army discipline.

Hermosillo further hardened Villa’s attitude toward the United States. The Villistas were certain that they would have been victorious at Agua Prieta if the garrison had not been reinforced through the United States, and their defeat at Hermosillo would not have occurred. On November 25, 1915, two Villista colonels shouted insults at United States Consul Frederick Simpich near the Nogales Customhouse. The uproar attracted a large group of mounted Villistas who threatened Simpich with their drawn guns. Several of them rode across the boundary waving their pistols. Later, at three different times, Villistas opened fire from the Mexican side. Carlos Randall, the Villista governor of Sonora, excused the disorder on the grounds that it was caused by the prohibition on exporting food from the United States.

The most important result of the Sonoran debacle was the destruction and disorganization of the División del Norte. After Villa struggled back over the Sierra Madre in December, he arrived in
Chihuahua to find some of his generals in disagreement with him. After Hermosillo, Pancho Villa did not have an army, and he was not in command of its disorganized remnants. Even before American recognition of Carranza in October, there had been indications that Villa did not have complete control over his followers. Most of Villa's representatives replied for themselves, without consulting their leader. Every one of Carranza's lieutenants referred matters to their First Chief.

The massacre at Santa Ysabel on January 10, 1916, was a result of Hermosillo. A semi-autonomous Villista band, led by Colonel Pablo López, stopped a Mexican Northwestern train and systematically robbed, then shot, seventeen American mining engineers on their way to reopen the American-owned La Cusi Mining Company. These Villista bands were practically independent. López was bitterly anti-American. According to an eyewitness account by José María Sánchez, a Mexican employee of the La Cusi Mining Company:

They rifled our pockets, took our blankets and even our lunches, then Col. Pablo López, in charge of the looting of our car, said: "If you want to see some fun, watch us kill these gringos. Come on boys," he shouted to his followers. They ran from the coach, crying "Viva Villa!" and "Death to the gringos!" I heard a volley of rifle shots, and looked out the window.

All bodies were completely stript of clothing and shoes.

Though the bandits at Santa Ysabel were Villistas, the degree to which Francisco Villa was personally involved has never been determined. Pablo López was captured by the Carranzistas in April and promptly executed. After his death, the Carranzista governor of Chihuahua, Don Ignacio Enríquez, quoted López as having said: "Villa ordered me to commit the Santa Ysabel massacre. Villa was behind a hill near the scene." Clendenen says that it is only fair to state that Villa denied this vehemently. Villa admitted ordering the seizure of the payroll, but not having given any orders to
molest the Americans. In any case, the act was perpetrated by men who, nominally at least, acknowledged his authority. They shouted, “Viva Villa!” while the murders were being committed. Clendenen concludes that “Villa’s ultimate, and legal, responsibility is beyond question.”

Another reason for Villa’s increasingly desperate situation in Chihuahua and for his intensified frustration was the constant diminution of his forces. Such support was not only a military but a psychological necessity for Francisco Villa. The chieftain Villa—to exist—had to command. Americans had scuttled him by recognizing Carranza in October. As a result, Mexicans had been fleeing the Villa standard. Already in October, reports had indicated that Villa’s forces were disintegrating and deserting to Carranza. In November the number of bands which deserted to Carranza without battle, but with the promise of amnesty, increased. During December a virtual flood of defections took place, including Ciudad Juárez, vital to Villa’s smuggling operations. Here Villista General Tomás Ornelas, together with the Secretary of State for Chihuahua, Sylvestre Terrazas, surrendered the town and garrison to General Obregón. The former Villistas were immediately paid and mustered out. Many did not return to their homes but re-enlisted with the Carranza forces. Villista troops continued to defect in small groups during January 1916, principally at Chihuahua City, Casas Grandes, and Palomas.

The seriousness of these defections was reflected in German foreign policy as well as in Villa’s personal reactions. Germany recognized the Carranza government. Faced with the task of regaining not only his lost military power, but his own personal prestige, Francisco Villa had to prove to the world that he was still a force to be respected. Moreover, Villa’s desperate position, exacerbated by the moves of Customs Officer Zachary Cobb, forced the Chihuahuan guerrilla to consider practical measures to regain his lost power. But if Villa was already desperate, Carranza’s position in early 1916 was beginning to decline, especially in Chihuahua. The First Chief was not in control, and his financial and military hold
was decidedly weak. Villa knew Carranza’s strength in Chihuahua and tapped telegraph wires for additional information concerning American reaction to the seemingly impotent First Chief. 41

As early as December 1915 American government officials noted the political difficulties in Chihuahua. The State had “sometimes gone for [Pascual] Orozco, sometimes for Villa, but never outright for Carranza.” 42 In early January 1916 Carranza was expropriating American property in Durango to sustain his military forces. Nevertheless he was unable to establish complete control. 43 According to American authorities, Carranza appeared to have lost the opportunity to improve conditions along the border. 44 By late January 1916 there was definite lack of American confidence in the Carranza government’s ability to establish order in Northern Mexico. Carranza money was worth four cents on the dollar, less than Villa currency six months earlier. 45 Furthermore, not a single member of the López band had been captured. 46

The Carranza government did not have enough troops to accomplish what was expected, and its resources were scanty. Emiliano Zapata was still in the field, and a large-scale campaign against the Yaqui Indians was under way. 47 The State Department, however, saw only the failure of the First Chief to control the political and alleviate the economic situations. 48 The financial basis of the de facto government was becoming even more unstable. By March 1916 Carranza money was worth only three cents on the dollar. 49 On the very day of the Columbus Raid, dispatches to the Secretary of State claimed that the First Chief lacked the forces necessary to disperse Villa. 50

In March 1916 Villa could count on the fact that an American intervention in Mexico had great prospects of shaking Carranza’s already weakened position. If Carranza did not oppose such an intervention, he would no longer be First Chief. If Carranza did oppose an American intervention, he could well lose de facto recognition and vital diplomatic support. Villa would have a chance to recoup his losses. 51

While aware of these possibilities, Villa was primarily concerned with the more immediate matter of survival, which was made in-
creasingly difficult by Zachary Cobb and later by George C. Carothers. Cobb’s unfavorable reports seemed to be inspired by personal hatred. In August 1915 Cobb opposed measures to reopen the Juárez packing houses to enable Villa to raise funds without imposing taxes or forced loans upon foreigners (and Terrazas cattle). He fought the scheme on the grounds that the slaughtered cattle would be stolen animals. By October Cobb had become a one-man diplomatic and consular force whose driving concern was to bring about Villa’s complete and final downfall:

Cobb made it his immediate mission to cut off supplies for Villa passing through El Paso, to prevent Villa’s gaining any revenue by exports through Juárez, and by these means to render Juárez untenable for the Villista garrison. If he could accomplish this, Cobb would succeed in closing Villa’s last gateway to the outer world.  

To achieve these ends, Cobb was determined that no coal should cross from El Paso into Villa territory. He recommended that the State Department obtain an injunction to prevent rolling stock of the Mexican National Railways from returning to Mexico. The Alvarado Mining Company, however, continued to operate in Mexico, thereby helping Villa by paying taxes. Cobb asked that the anticipated complaint by the Company be ignored until Ciudad Juárez was taken from Villa. Shortly afterwards, Cobb informed the State Department that he had ordered all cattle shipments held on the Mexican side of the border pending surety that no Villa export tax would be paid. He later recommended an embargo on all cattle importations from Mexico.

George C. Carothers, Special Agent for the State Department, then began to report on Villa’s growing desperate situation. He suggested that the measures recommended by Cobb be applied at other places. Coal and anything else that would benefit Villa should be embargoed. There is evidence that the Cobb-Carothers campaign against Villa’s finances and transportation achieved gradual success. Cobb even went so far as to find an American purchaser for the coal destined for Villa. In November the suspension of rail-
road operations in Sonoran territory held by Villa, for lack of coal from the United States, was a sore point with Villistas. A report from the Navy Department strongly indicated that Villa was “unable to secure supplies from the United States, and there are no supplies in Sonora from which he can draw.”

El Paso, however, continued to be troublesome to Cobb. In several reports he complained of the inability of the Treasury Department to enforce a complete embargo on arms and munitions. He complained that munitions were stored in many places in El Paso, and that such shipments were impossible to watch without an adequate number of customs officials. Cobb’s efforts were matched by Villa’s smuggling, sale of cattle, and gambling-house profits—all in Ciudad Juárez—until the Villista garrison defected to Carranza in December 1915.

On March 9, 1916, Villa crossed the border to loot Columbus, New Mexico. It is obvious that the raid was well planned. There is no question that Villa was a man of keen intelligence. For several days before the border crossing, Villa had laid plans for his foray as well as for his retreat into Chihuahua. Arriving near Palomas, Mexico, he began slaughtering large numbers of cattle for provisions. Prior to the raid, great gaps were cut in fences near the border. Villa also sent spies into Columbus to report on the possibilities of success without serious American military opposition. While Villa’s informers were in Columbus, he discussed possible objectives with his staff. He had misgivings concerning the failure of a surprise attack. When his spies returned and reported, Villa “after a long wait” made his decision. At approximately four A.M., his force of 485 men halted at an arroyo in the dark, five hundred yards from the sleeping town. Mounted columns converged and each column was assigned certain objectives.

The Mexicans followed a definite plan. They made simultaneous attacks ... into the town. ... Their patent familiarity with the terrain argues that the plan was based on accurate information and had been made well in advance.
An analysis of what actually happened at Columbus clearly shows that Villa raided for loot, and this was the explanation given by the United States 13th Cavalry stationed in the town. The Army camp had exactly the supplies Villa needed: machine guns, munitions, and many horses, hybrids of Arabian stock. The town contained all kinds of provisions, food, clothing, money, mainly located in Sam and Louis Ravel’s general store. Villa had previously carried on an extensive business with the Ravel brothers, purchasing large quantities of guns and ammunition. Thus, familiar with the largest general store in Columbus, the Villistas concentrated there for a thorough looting. In the course of three hours, the Villistas confined their attention chiefly to looting. They inflicted only such casualties and destruction as would seem inevitable in such a desperate robbery. Had Villa been thinking in terms of inflicting casualties, Fort Bliss would have been his objective. Columbus was isolated, sparsely guarded—an ideal place for guerrilla foraging.

The real situation of El León del Norte was this: He was constricted into a small, semi-arid, unproductive area bordered by the United States. The border ports were Villa’s only means of survival at this stage in his political-military career. He had to raid to exist. Villa’s retreat was unexpectedly hurried by Major Frank Tompkins. For fifteen miles south of Columbus, the trail was littered with quantities of loot, along with two abandoned machine guns.

In conclusion, the international provocation made by Francisco Villa at Columbus, New Mexico, March 9, 1916, was motivated primarily by physical necessity. As long as he was hemmed in and alive, Villa would raid for survival—in Mexico or in the United States. Raids into the United States, in fact, were commonplace along the Texas border in 1915-1916. But Villa’s raid on Columbus clearly showed his desperate condition.

The driving passion of the Villistas was their need—the unremitting need of money, clothes, arms, ammunition, and, as the mainstay of
their profession, horseflesh. Money and clothes from ricos like rich Sam Ravel—and from the militares, arms, ammunition, and horses.\(^{72}\)

In addition, there was the possibility of American intervention—a possible double revenge on both the Wilson and Carranza governments. Carranza’s fall could only mean Villa’s rise. Villa had little left to lose; there was much to gain, then and in the future.

**MEXICAN-GERMAN PROVOCATIONS FOR THE COLUMBUS RAID**

A sifting of the evidence also indicates that Germany was partially responsible for the assault on Columbus—owing to the intrigue by Villa’s agent in the United States, Felix Sommerfeld, with German Secret Service agents.\(^{73}\) By 1915 German policy toward the United States was twofold: American arms and munitions must be diverted from the Entente powers; the United States must not enter the European War. Within the United States, the German Secret Service, aided by the clumsy Franz Rintelen von Kleist, proved unable to stop the flow of weapons. Emphasis was then placed on Mexico as a potential trouble spot.

An American-Mexican war would not only interrupt the export of weapons but keep the United States fully occupied at home.\(^ {74}\) With this aim, several conspiracies were entered into with various Mexican officials, revolutionaries, and exile groups.\(^ {75}\)

The German reasoning was basically sound. The eventual entry of the United States into World War I, even in the spring of 1915, was a strong possibility. A friendly government in Mexico could give Germany a base of operations in the Western Hemisphere and at the same time would keep the government of Woodrow Wilson occupied with matters closer to home. If United States arms and ammunition could be diverted away from the Allies because of the threat of a hostile government to the south this would constitute an added benefit.\(^ {76}\)
Carranzista troops at Agua Prieta.
COPYRIGHT International Film Service, Inc.
Villa in the field (center, wearing white hat).
Aultman Collection. Courtesy Southwest Reference Dept., El Paso Public Library.
From left to right: George C. Carothers, 3rd from left, hands on railing; Villa and Gen. Hugh Scott, seated center; Rodolfo Fierro, behind Scott; Felix Sommerfeld, standing with elbow on railing.

Aultman Collection. Courtesy Southwest Reference Dept., El Paso Public Library.
From left to right in foreground: Gen Eugenio A. Benavides, Villa, Obregón, Rodolfo Fierro, Dr. Lyman B. Raschbaum (German agent), Gen. José Ruiz. Aultman Collection. Courtesy Southwest Reference Dept., El Paso Public Library.
Columbus, N.M. Unloading equipment prior to Punitive Expedition.
Aultman Collection. Courtesy Southwest Reference Dept., El Paso Public Library.
Battery of Mexican machine guns.
Copyright International Film Service.
Robert Lansing, United States Secretary of State, was convinced that the German Government was making every effort to stir up trouble between the United States and Mexico.\textsuperscript{77} In his diary, before the de facto recognition of Carranza, he wrote that Germany wanted to maintain the chaos in Mexico until the United States was forced to intervene. The Secretary warned that the United States must not intervene, that she must recognize the dominant faction in Mexico in order to promote stability, and that German-American relations rated first priority.\textsuperscript{78} After the Columbus Raid, President Wilson remarked to his secretary, Joseph Tumulty, that German agents had been hard at work to provoke an American intervention in Mexico.\textsuperscript{79} One of the Mexican-German conspiracies was introduced at the same time as the Huerta-Orozco plot.\textsuperscript{80} In April 1915 Villa’s agent in the United States, Felix Sommerfeld, entered into a conspiracy with the German Secret Service, originally on his own initiative.\textsuperscript{81}

During the next month Bernhard Dernburg, German Agent of Propaganda in the United States, sent a report to Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff. Holtzendorff promptly referred the report to Secretary of German Foreign Affairs, Gottlieb von Jagow, for comment.\textsuperscript{82} Though mostly concerned with the American export of arms to the Entente powers, part of the dispatch dealt with a previous conversation of Dernburg and Sommerfeld. It read:

All the contracts [with the Entente] of the arms factories have a clause in which these [contracts] become null and void in the same moment that the United States becomes involved in war [Mexican]. The policies of the United States in respect to Mexico are known to all. And one can be completely convinced that the government of the United States will do everything possible to avoid an intervention in Mexico. The military of the United States, however, strongly supports intervention, as well as the state governments of Texas and Arizona which lie directly on the Mexican border. Approximately two months ago, there occurred an incident on the border of Arizona [Naco], which almost came to an intervention [by the United States]. As a consequence, the American Chief of General Staff [Hugh Scott] was sent to the border by President Wilson on the suggestion of the Minister of War, [Lindley] Garrison, to negotiate with Villa. These con-
ferences resulted through the mediation of Felix A. Sommerfeld, and at that moment, as he told me many times, it would have been very easy for him to provoke an intervention. Such an intervention represented for Germany the following: An embargo on all munitions to the Allies. Since the Allies depended on such munitions, the embargo would bring as a consequence rapid victory to Germany [in Europe]. A limitation of credits [for the Allies] and a change in policy of the United States would also profit Germany. On the other hand, Felix A. Sommerfeld had reservations against forcing intervention at that time through Villa, since he did not know the intentions of Germany with respect to the United States nor did he know what Germany desires in the future with respect to the United States, and therefore, he did not want to run the risk of working against German policy or make a hasty step, aggravating instead of bettering the situation. It appears that this opportunity will come again in the very near future, and Felix A. Sommerfeld discussed this with me. He is completely convinced that an intervention in Mexico by the United States can be brought about. With the exception of Mr. Sommerfeld, the instigator of this idea, I am the only one to know of his plans. We both agreed not to discuss this subject with the German Ambassador [Count Johann von Bernstorff] here [Washington, D.C.] because we are of the conviction that the fewer people that know about it the better it is, and besides, this delicate opportunity can only be directed to the appropriate decision-making office. I ask you, that after having read this report, you give Mr. Sommerfeld, either through me or directly, a yes or no. In concluding, I must mention that we, Felix A. Sommerfeld and I, both give our word of honor as German citizens, that whatever your decision, we will communicate this to no one. 83

Bernhard Dernburg's request for a "yes or no" to Sommerfeld's plan for American intervention in Mexico was immediately considered by von Jagow:

My answer must be unquestionably 'yes.' Even if the munitions supply cannot be stopped [to Europe], which doesn't appear to me very certain, it would be very desirable that America, more friend of the English, should be occupied in war [in Mexico] and should be turned away from Europe. It [the U.S.] will not intervene in China and because of this an action against Mexico, provoked by the situation, would be the only possibility to divert the American government. 84
Felix Sommerfeld, a native German who had emigrated at the turn of the century to the State of Chihuahua, was the key figure in the Mexican-German conspiracy. He became Francisco Madero's chief press agent in the United States. Following Madero's assassination, Sommerfeld sought asylum in the German Embassy, and Paul von Hintze, German Ambassador to Mexico, helped him flee to the United States. Here, Sommerfeld made contact with Villa and soon became Villa's chief unofficial diplomatic agent in the United States. He also became active in buying weapons for Villa, lining his own pockets at the same time. If Sommerfeld cannot be directly related to the Columbus Raid, his intrigue on behalf of Germany and the material benefits of this intrigue made available to Villa prove that the German government was partially responsible. Germany directly provided support to the Villista movement—and helped keep Villa alive.

Sommerfeld's contacts with the German Secret Service were indeed close. American agents from the Justice Department established definitely that Sommerfeld was in contact with Franz Rintelen von Kleist and that from April to August 1915, over $340,000 had been deposited in his St. Louis account from a bank in New York City. It was not known who had deposited the money in New York. It was established, however, that on the same day, from the same bank in New York, money had been deposited into a second account in St. Louis—the same bank which carried Sommerfeld's account. Both accounts were closed on the same day. The second account belonged to the German Embassy in the United States. Justice Department agents concluded that there had to be a connection between the two accounts. They proved that the total amount of money in Sommerfeld's account had been withdrawn in favor of the Western Cartridge Company to purchase weapons for Villa.

Whatever Sommerfeld's motives, if he did not work specifically for an attack on Columbus, New Mexico, he did indeed conspire for American intervention in Mexico. This could best be accomplished by violation of the international border. The fact that
Villa acquired increased German help after the Columbus Raid does support the following thesis:

German foreign policy as carried out by the Admiral Staff and the Greater General Staff was partially responsible for the Columbus Raid. 90

NOTES

1. Francisco Villa crossed the border but did not personally participate in the raid/attack on Columbus. He was, however, personally responsible. Organizing his mounted Dorados on the outskirts of the town, he remained there as the reserve and rear guard. See Haldeen Braddy, “Pancho Villa at Columbus: The Raid of 1916 Restudied,” Southwestern Studies III, Monograph 9 (Spring, 1965), pp. 15-16, 30-31.

2. Braddy considers events prior to the Columbus Raid “minor incidents.” Ibid., p. 3.


8. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929, National Archives Microfilm Publication (hereinafter cited as NA-RDS). Microcopy 274, Special Agent Colonel Herbert Slocum, 13th Cavalry, to Major General Frederick Funston, Southern Department Commander, 812.00/16679, Nov. 1, 1915. It should be noted that Villa had been informed that the United States had found the Carranza regime the only one qualified for recognition as a de facto government. Clendenen (p. 207) notes that Villa took the news quietly, remarking that the war had just begun. This statement disagrees with accounts that Villa felt betrayed. See Isidro Fabela, Historia diplomática de la Revolución Mexicana 1912-1917 (México, 1959), vol. 2, p. 189, and José López Portillo y Weber, “Cómo perdió Carranza el apoyo de Estados Unidos y cómo se relacionó esto con la proposición que a México presentó Alemania en 1917,” Memorias de la Academia Mexicana de la Historia, vol. 19 (1960), p. 25. Tompkins, p. 36, says that he vowed vengeance. Larry A. Harris,


13. U.S. Foreign Relations, 1915, p. 775. Francisco Villa was not a man who went halfway; his hatred was as strong as his friendship. He was capable of stern self-discipline, but he had a temper. He was unpredictable, and revenge was constant in his make-up. Clendenen, pp. 316-17.

14. Clendenen, p. 209; NA-RDS, George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/17401, March 10, 1916. There is disagreement, however. Braddy, “Pancho Villa at Columbus,” p. 40, n. 40: “It is sometimes asserted that Villa’s papers lost in the action contained vengeful exhortations. A long and careful search has failed to uncover any trace of these so-called lost papers of Villa. Mr. Jack Breen . . . was born in Columbus and lived there until recently. Having made a painstaking study of the Raid, Mr. Breen has concluded that no such papers ever existed and that the operation was more or less improvised. His conclusion echoes that of his deceased father and that of the late Colonel Rodríguez (both of whom were also interviewed by the author of this study years ago). The elder Breen lived in Columbus at the time of the Raid; Colonel Rodríguez was a Villista who took part in the attack.”

15. NA-RDS, George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/16717, Nov. 5, 1915.

16. NA-RDS, “Brief Statement of Present Political Situation in Mexico Based on Official Reports,” Division of Mexican Affairs, Department of State, 812.00/16962, Oct. 6, 1915.

17. NA-RDS, “Report of Operations, U.S. Pacific Fleet From Conditions on West Coast of Mexico, Sept. 12, 1915 to Nov. 9, 1915;” Josephus Daniels to Secretary of State, 812.00/16843, Nov. 22, 1915.

18. NA-RDS, Collector of Customs at El Paso, Texas, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, 812.00/16902, Dec. 2, 1915; U.S. Customs Service, Treasury Department to Leon J. Canova, Department of
State, 812.00/17083, Dec. 9, 1915; United States Consul at Hermosillo, Louis Hostetter to Secretary of State, 812.00/17053, Dec. 27, 1915.


20. NA-RDS, "Brief Statement of Present Political Situation in Mexico Based on Official Reports," Division of Mexican Affairs, Department of State, 812.00/16962, Oct. 6, 1915; "Report of Conditions Along the Border," 812.00/16803, Nov. 6, 1915. The last refers to scarcity of food at Palomas, just south of Columbus.

21. NA-RDS, "Report of Conditions Along the Border," 812.00/16890, Nov. 20, 1915; Attorney Frank L. Peckham to Secretary of State, 812.00/16953, Dec. 11, 1915; "Report of Conditions Along the Border," 812.00/16979, Dec. 11, 1915; Louis Hostetter to Secretary of State, 812.00/17053, Dec. 27, 1915; American Consulate, Chihuahua, Mexico [temporarily at El Paso] to Secretary of State, 812.00/17268, Feb. 9, 1916.


23. NA-RDS, U.S. Customs Service, Treasury Department to Leon J. Canova, Department of State, 812.00/17083, Dec. 9, 1915; Frank L. Peckham to Secretary of State, 812.00/16953, Dec. 11, 1915. Smuggling was soon to be stopped by the end of the Terrazas cattle and by the personal crusade against Villa by Zachary E. Cobb, Collector of Customs at El Paso.


25. NA-RDS, United States Consul at Nogales, Sonora, Frederick Simpich to Secretary of State, 812.00/16854, Nov. 24, 1915; Major General Frederick Funston to Adjutant General of the Army, 812.00/16855, Nov. 24, 1915; George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/16860, Nov. 26, 1915.

26. NA-RDS, Frederick Simpich to Secretary of State, 812.00/16856, Nov. 24, 1915; Major General Frederick Funston to Adjutant General of the Army, 812.00/16858, Nov. 24 and 25, 1915.

27. Clendenen, p. 219. Many were of the opinion that Villa would take Nogales or another American border port, and a circumstantial story from a deserting staff officer of Villa that Villa was going to get even by waging a guerrilla war against the Arizona border seemed to give grounds for this fear. NA-RDS, Major General Frederick Funston to Adjutant General of the Army, 812.00/16893, Nov. 30, 1915; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/16894, Dec. 1, 1915; Counselor of the State Department, Frank L. Polk to Secretary of War, 812.00/16893, Dec. 6, 1915; "Report of
Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/16803, Nov. 6, 1915. This last source mentions that November 6 had been set by Villistas across the border to attack Nogales, Arizona, and loot the banks and stores. These rumors were many and directly tied to food shortages resulting from the United States embargo. Another example of such rumors, dealing with Columbus, New Mexico, somewhat later in 1916 can be cited. See NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17066, Jan. 8, 1916. The prohibition on food exports was due in large measure to that indefatigable opponent of Villa and Collector of Customs, Zachary Cobb.

30. Clendenen, p. 225. That this event was not untypical at this time can be seen from a similar atrocity. On January 11, 1916, a short paragraph in the newspapers told that one P. Keane, a bookkeeper on the Hearst ranch at Babicora, Chihuahua, had been taken from the ranch by a band of Villistas and shot. New York Times, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 1916, 9:3, as quoted in Clendenen, p. 224. Clendenen says: “There was no marked reaction on the part of the American people, nor does any official notice seem to have been taken of the murder.”

31. It should be noted that a Villista band held up a Mexican Central train on January 31, 1916, between Sauz and Chihuahua City. The passengers, including several Americans, were robbed, but not molested. Loot seemed to be the primary concern of the bandits. See NA-RDS, United States Consul at Ciudad Juárez, Thomas Edwards to Secretary of State, 812.00/17189, Feb. 1, 1916; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17190, Feb. 1, 1916.
35. Clendenen, p. 227. Clendenen seems to have missed the point in assessing personal responsibility to Villa and leaving it at that—merely adding: “At a later date, and within our own times, American and allied military commissions have condemned and executed as war criminals men whose responsibility for atrocities committed by subordinates was far less clear than Villa’s on this occasion.” Clendenen does not investigate the relationship between López and Villa. First, did Villa plan and order a robbery? Second, did he have control over López and his Yankeeophobia?
Would the massacre have taken place if Villa had been there? The third question, depending on the answer to the first two, concerns responsibility. Though it was a favorite technique of Villa to wait in reserve not far away, as he did at Columbus, N.M., and later in Mexico during simultaneous attacks on Carranzista garrisons at Guererro, Mina, and San Ysidro, there is no proof that Villa was at Santa Ysabel on January 10. In fact, on January 31, Villa stopped a train on the Kansas City, Mexico, Orient Railroad between Chihuahua City and Ojinaga, and himself shot former Villista General Tomás Ornelas, who had turned Ciudad Juárez over to Carranza. Villa did not harm Americans on the train. See NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17197, Feb. 1, 1916. Other sources are: Braddy, Pershing's Mission, p. 14; Arthur S. Link, Wilson: Confusions and Crisis 1915-1916 (Princeton, 1964), vol. 4, p. 201. Pinchon (pp. 335-36) says Villa was several hundred miles to the south on January 10. 36. NA-RDS, “Brief Statement of Present Political Situation in Mexico Based on Official Reports,” Division of Mexican Affairs, Department of State, 812.00/16562, Oct. 6, 1915; “Report of Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/16842, Nov. 13, 1915; American Consulate San Luis Potosí, Mexico, to Secretary of State, 812.00/16892, Nov. 24, 1915. 37. NA-RDS, “Report of Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/17048, Dec. 15, 1915. 38. NA-RDS, “Report of Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/17078, Jan. 8, 1916; Langsford, p. 280. 39. NA-RDS, United States Ambassador to Germany James Gerard to Secretary of State, 812.00/17035, Dec. 30, 1915. 40. This “comeback” theme to prove the worth of Francisco Villa seems to be of increasing importance after the defection of his troops at Ciudad Juárez. See Clendenen, p. 307; Harris, pp. 81-82; Cline, p. 175; Mahoney, p. 161. Villa not only felt the troop defections as personal rejections, but many of his former close friends had “betrayed” him. General Felipe Angeles had retired to the United States. General Tomás Urbina rebelled and was shot by Villa. General Luis Herrera had defected to Carranza. By accident, General Rodolfo Fierro, Villa’s trusted “butcher,” had been drowned. 41. Villa constantly tapped telegraph lines for information, especially for train movements and persons aboard trains, e.g., General Ornelas. See NA-RDS, United States Consul at Chihuahua, Marion Letcher to Secretary of State, 812.00/17269, Feb. 9, 1916. 42. NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Leon J. Canova, Department of State, 812.00/17083, Dec. 9, 1915. 43. NA-RDS, United States Vice-Consul at Durango, Homer C. Coen

44. NA-RDS, United States Customs Service, Treasury Department, El Paso, Texas, to Robert Lansing, 812.00/17193, Jan. 24, 1916.

45. NA-RDS, Brigadier General John J. Pershing [Department of War] to Secretary of State, 812.00/17158, Jan. 25, 1916; “Report of Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/17239, Jan. 29, 1916; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17191, Feb. 1, 1916; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17249, Feb. 9, 1916.


47. Clendenen, p. 229.

48. NA-RDS, “Confidential Memorandum for Use at the Conference with the Secretary and the Counselor,” Division of Mexican Affairs, Department of State, 812.00/17271 1/2, Feb. 14, 1916; United States Consul at Aguascalientes, Gaston Schmutz to Secretary of State, 812.00/17326, Feb. 17, 1916.

49. NA-RDS, United States Vice-Consul at Coahuila, William P. Blocker to Secretary of State, 812.00/17327, Feb. 22, 1916; Department of War to Secretary of State, 812.00/17334, Feb. 29, 1916; Zachary Cobb to Robert Lansing, 812.00/17342, Feb. 23, 1916; George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/17417, March 7, 1916.

50. NA-RDS, United States Consul at Ciudad Juárez, Thomas Edwards to Secretary of State, 812.00/17389, March 9, 1916; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17385, March 9, 1916. See also Kahle, pp. 367-68; Cline, pp. 175-76; U.S. Foreign Relations, 1916, pp. 479, 481, 484; Braddy, “Pancho Villa at Columbus,” pp. 35-36.

51. Friedrich Katz, Deutschland, Diaz und die mexikanische Revolution: Die deutsche Politik in Mexiko 1870-1920 (Berlin, 1964), p. 332. See also NA-RDS, “Report of Conditions Along the Border,” 812.00/17152, Jan. 15, 1916. Only five days after Santa Ysabel, this report stated that “an ex-officer of Villa’s army” claimed Villa wanted “to provoke intervention.” On March 6, 1916, the Carranzista commander in Ciudad Juárez, General Gabriel Gavira, informed George L. Seese, Associated Press representative, that Villa intended to cause some incident to force the United States to intervene in Mexico. This information is accepted by Clendenen, p. 237; Link, p. 205; Tompkins, p. 42; Cline, p. 175. Braddy, Pershing’s Mission, p. 65, indicates that Villa certainly was aware of nationalism.


53. NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/16636, Oct. 29, 1915.
54. NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/16674, Nov. 2, 1915.
55. NA-RDS, George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/16739, Nov. 8, 1915.
58. NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of the Treasury, 812.00/17483, Nov. 24, 1915; Zachary Cobb to Secretary of the Treasury, 812.00/17083, Dec. 9, 1915; Zachary Cobb to Leon J. Canova, 812.00/17083, Dec. 9, 1915.
59. NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/16851, Nov. 24, 1915.
60. There is evidence (or I should say—there was evidence) that Villa had planned a foray into the United States in the vicinity of Columbus as early as Jan. 8, 1916. Two large wallets containing official Villa records were captured. They were examined by George C. Carothers late on March 9, and he found a letter from Villa to Zapata dated January 8, 1916, inviting Zapata to come north with his army and join in a concerted attack on the United States. See NA-RDS, George C. Carothers to Secretary of State, 812.00/17401, March 10, 1916. Link (p. 205, n. 47) also cites this letter: “See F. Villa to E. Zapata, January 8, 1916, from San Gerónimo Ranch, Chihuahua, State Department Papers. A copy of this letter was found in the saddle bags of one of Villa’s officers later killed at Columbus, New Mexico. What was apparently another copy, dated January 6, 1916, was dropped by Villa at Columbus and printed in the New York Times, March 11, 1916.” Carothers later testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Mexican Affairs to the existence of the letter and other such documents lost during the raid. Investigation of Mexican Affairs (Washington, 1920), vol. 2, p. 1781, as cited in Braddy, Pershing’s Mission, pp. 69-70, n. 8. See also Robert L. Thomas and Inez V. Allen, The Mexican Punitive Expedition Under Brigadier General John J. Pershing, United States Army, 1916-1917, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army (Washington, 1954), vol. 1, p. 14; Clendenen, p. 244.
61. Harris, p. 84. It should be noted that later, while eluding Pershing’s pursuit, the fleeing guerrilla used every trick he had learned through years of experience in Chihuahua. He marked waterholes by blinding cattle and releasing them close by. With their eyes gouged out, the animals would stay near the water. See Braddy, Pershing’s Mission, p. 71, n. 20.
62. Mahoney, p. 163.
64. Ibid., pp. 15-16, 43, n. 108. For example, one detail was sent to the corrals to drive horses into Mexico.
67. Ibid., pp. 10, 17, 24; Harris, pp. 88-89. Rumors that Villa had paid Sam Ravel for a shipment of arms which was never delivered simply do not hold up. Alberto Calzadiaz Barrera, Villa contra todo y ... en pos de la venganza sobre Columbus, N.M. (México, 1960), pp. 17-28, puts forth this interpretation of the Columbus Raid. He states that Samuel Ravel refused on Feb. 16, 1916, to hand over the arms and ammunition that had already been paid for in advance and refused to sell any guns in the future to "bandits." Calzadiaz states that the very next morning, Feb. 17, 1916, Villa selected his best dorados to attack Columbus in pursuit of vengeance. Braddy, "Pancho Villa at Columbus," pp. 10-11, 13, places Villa some distance to the south in Chihuahua at Hacienda San Gerónimo until Feb. 27, 1916. Clendenen (pp. 236-37) says that in "late February" Villa moved "slowly" northward toward the border. At any rate, it would have been impossible to cover the distance between Columbus, N.M. and Hacienda San Gerónimo, Chihuahua, on Feb. 16, 1916, and relate Villa to Sam Ravel's supposed rebuff. Zachary Cobb adds further evidence, stating that Villa was near Madera, Chihuahua, on March 1, 1916. See U.S. Foreign Relations, 1916, p. 478. The youngest of the three Ravel brothers, Arthur, told his son, Ira J. Ravel, that there had never been any business dealings between Villa and Sam Ravel—from private interview of Mr. Ira J. Ravel by Lawrence M. Grossman, May 5, 1968, Omaha, Nebraska.
68. Pinchon, pp. 338-39.
70. Tompkins, pp. 55-57; NA-RDS, Major General Frederick Funston to Adjutant General of the Army, 812.00/17396, March 10, 1916. That looting was Villa's primary concern can be seen from actions immediately before and after the Columbus Raid. Before the Columbus Raid, Villa looted the Edward J. Wright ranch. Mrs. Wright was taken captive but released on March 9. She reported that Villa was short of ammunition. See NA-RDS, Zachary Cobb to Secretary of State, 812.00/17402, March 10, 1916. After the Columbus Raid, the J. J. Moore ranch was looted. Both Wright and Moore were killed. See Clendenen, p. 237, and Mahoney, pp. 163-64, 168-69. Prisoners taken at Columbus state Villa was "very bitter, vowing death to all Americans." U.S. Foreign Relations, 1916, p. 481.
72. Braddy, "Pancho Villa at Columbus," p. 34.

73. Clendenen maintains that there was no German influence on, or intrigue with, Villa before March 9, 1916. He is in error. Villa, through his agent Felix Sommerfeld, had maintained contacts with German Secret Service agents since April 1915. Friedrich Katz, Deutschland, takes the word of Sommerfeld himself that after the American recognition of Carranza, he no longer maintained contact with Villa. Katz is also in error. There are strong indications that Felix Sommerfeld was in contact with Villa until Jan. 1, 1916. "Sommerfeld telegraphed to General Scott that rumors of Villa's resignation and flight from Mexico were 'fakes' and an interview that Villa was supposed to have given to the correspondent of the New York American was fraudulent." Hugh Lenox Papers. Cf. "Villa's 'First Aid' to Washington," Literary Digest, vol. 52 (Jan. 1, 1916), p. 5, as quoted in Clendenen, p. 223. The time span, then, during which Sommerfeld acted either as contact or agent for or with both Villa and the German Secret Service was April 1915 to January 1916. It should also be noted that Sommerfeld had contacts with American business interests in Mexico. After the Santa Ysabel massacre on January 10, 1916, he claimed to have sent to Villa a protest telegram which called the massacre the greatest crime ever executed in Mexico and challenged Villa to condemn this act publicly. Sommerfeld further claimed to have demanded guarantees not to molest foreigners and their property. See Colegio de México, Scott Papers, Box 21, Sommerfeld to Scott, Jan. 16, 1916 (COPY) as cited in Katz, Deutschland, p. 345. Sommerfeld's protest would seem to indicate that he truly had left the employ of Villa by January 16, 1916. Much later, however, after the Columbus Raid, Carranza's agents informed the U.S. government that Sommerfeld was still buying weapons for Villa. If this is true, there was no break between Sommerfeld as agent of Villa and Sommerfeld as contact for the German Secret Service between April 1915 and April 1917. See AREM Mexico, Le 803 R, Monteverde to Consul in Los Angeles, March 7, 1917, as cited in Katz, Deutschland, p. 345.

74. Katz, Deutschland, pp. 337-38, "Alemania y Francisco Villa," Historia Mexicana, vol. 12 ( Julio-Septiembre, 1962), p. 88. That this was a policy of the German government through 1915 can be seen in NA-RDS, American Consul at Havana, Cuba, William Gonzales to Secretary of State, 812.00/16963, Dec. 14, 1915. See also Cline, p. 184.


76. Ibid., p. 82.

77. Kahle, pp. 353-54.

78. Documentos históricos de la Revolución Mexicana: Revolución y régimen Constitucionalista III, Carranza, Wilson y el ABC. Editados por


80. For a thorough treatment of the Huerta-Orozco plot see Meyer, "The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915," pp. 76-89 as well as Meyer, *Mexican Rebel: Pascual Orozco and the Mexican Revolution 1910-1915* (Lincoln, 1967), Ch. 7, pp. 115-35. In "The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915," p. 88, Meyer writes that the German government was far from shattered by the failure of Huerta and Orozco: "With characteristic efficiency a secondary plan was put into operation almost immediately. Even during the period of intense negotiations with Huerta and Orozco, German intelligence agents, fully aware that the scheme might prove abortive, had initiated similar negotiations with Felix Sommerfeld, one of Pancho Villa's representatives in the United States." He notes that this intrigue lasted well into 1916. There is evidence that German intelligence agents had not initiated negotiations with Felix Sommerfeld, but that Sommerfeld took the initiative. See German Foreign Office, Bonn, Mexico 1 SECR., vol. 1, Dernburg to Holtzendorff, May 1915, as cited in Katz, *Deutschland*, p. 343.


83. German Foreign Office, Bonn, Mexico 1 SECR., vol. 1, Dernburg to Holtzendorff, May 1915, as cited in Katz, *Deutschland*, pp. 342-43; "Alemania y Francisco Villa," pp. 89-90. Sommerfeld undoubtedly was referring to the border incident at Naco. Battles between Villistas and Carranzistas in Naco resulted in several dead on the American side of the border. General Hugh Scott was sent to obtain a withdrawal of both Mexican factions. Scott's negotiations with Villa were very heated. Katz, "Alemania y Francisco Villa," pp. 94-95; sees a deterioration in the relations between Villa and the U.S.—an outcome of the Naco conferences. Katz presents the thesis that as relations between Villa and the American government became colder in 1915, German relations with Villa grew correspondingly closer—and that the ebb and flow of diplomatic support given to the various Mexican leaders always found the American and German governments in opposition. Meyer, "The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915," pp. 88-89, seems to indicate also that as relations between the U.S. and Pancho Villa cooled, German interest in Villa increased. Meyer also notes
the corresponding American switch to Carranza. "President Wilson, long antagonistic toward Venustiano Carranza, began to temper his censures of the Mexican regime." However, late March 1916 brought a new relationship between Carranza and Germany after Pershing's entry into Mexico. Of interest is the first sentence of the quotation from Dernburg's dispatch to Holtzendorff, which is not dissimilar to wording in the later Zimmermann Telegram.


85. NA, StDF 812.00/13232, Letcher to Bryan, August 25, 1914, as quoted in Katz, Deutschland, p. 344.


87. NA, StDF 812.00/13232, Letcher to Bryan, August 25, 1914, as cited in ibid. The question must be raised: What motivated Sommerfeld to initiate contacts with German Secret Service agents in April 1915, and to offer them his services? Sommerfeld was known to be unduly concerned with personal gain. Explanation for his actions possibly can be found in his contacts with American business interests in Mexico—interests which in 1915-16 were clamoring for American intervention in Mexico. There is strong circumstantial evidence that Sommerfeld was in the employ of the German Secret Service, American business corporations, and Francisco Villa to promote American intervention—but for different reasons. See NA, StDF 812.00/12706, Cobb to Bryan, August 1, 1914, as cited in Katz, Deutschland, pp. 344-45.


89. This is not to say that Villa was a stooge. Acceptance of such help in no way meant any obligation or entrance into German services. Villa, like other revolutionaries, exploited the contradictions of the greater powers to achieve his own ends. See Katz, Deutschland, pp. 345-46; Clendenen, p. 317; Federico Cervantes M., Francisco Villa y la Revolución (México, 1960), p. 538.