

Spring 2013

# The Plan de San Diego

Charles H. Harris III

Louis R. Sadler

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# THE PLAN DE SAN DIEGO

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Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler  
University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

The Mexican Experience | William H. Beezley, series editor

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# THE PLAN DE SAN DIEGO

Tejano Rebellion, Mexican Intrigue

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*To William H. Beezley*



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# Preface

There appeared in South Texas in January 1915 a most remarkable document—the Plan de San Diego. Ostensibly written in the small town of San Diego in Duval County, it called for nothing less than a Hispanic uprising designed to achieve the independence of the Southwest as a Hispanic republic. The Plan proclaimed a genocidal war without quarter against Anglos. The most striking feature of this revolutionary manifesto was a call to kill all Anglo males over the age of sixteen. Predictably, attempts to implement the Plan produced a massive Anglo backlash, and during 1915–16 conditions in the lower Rio Grande valley of Texas deteriorated to the point that a race war seemed imminent. The Plan de San Diego of course had no chance of succeeding, but it left a legacy of racial animosity that endures to the present day.

The Plan and its subsequent modifications remain controversial, both because of their racial aspects and because some events are still obscure. In discussing the Plan, the first question to be addressed is whether the manifesto should even be taken seriously. Especially among Hispanics, the answer is yes, focusing on the oppression endured by Hispanics in Texas. Second, was the insurrection in fact a homegrown Tejano liberation movement? Third, was there substantial involvement from Mexico, guiding, supplying, and manipulating the insurgents? If so, were revolutionary factions or the Mexican government involved? In this connection, some historians have attributed the Plan to the followers of the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón, others to the followers of the exiled strongman General Victoriano Huerta, still others to the regime of President Venustiano Carranza. There is particular disagreement over whether Carranza himself was involved.<sup>1</sup> The main things in dispute about the Plan de San Diego are who wrote it and when, where, and why it was written. Thus, the definitive study of the Plan has yet to appear.

As far as Anglos and the authorities were concerned, the *sediciosos* (those engaged in sedition) were bandits. Hence, the troubles have been referred to as the “Bandit War.” Hispanics quickly point out that many of those involved in the Plan weren’t bandits. True, but then many of them weren’t freedom fighters either. The Plan de San Diego affair defies simplistic treatment, especially when some of the violence had nothing to do with the Plan. The manifesto provided a splendid umbrella for paying off old scores and seizing new opportunities.

There has developed a considerable literature concerning the Plan de San Diego. However, some of it has been ideologically driven, with disregard for inconvenient facts, or characterized by superficial research and glittering generalities. For instance, there has been no effort made even to determine whether the Plan was actually written in San Diego. In addition, the literature has focused on a few of the *sediciosos*’ leaders, with little or no attention to the rank and file. Heretofore, writers have emphasized the background—that is, the conditions that produced the Plan. A number of works have exhaustively addressed these conditions—oppression of and discrimination against Tejanos, loss of their land, abuse by peace officers, especially the Texas Rangers, and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

Our approach is significantly different. From our perspective, what is important isn’t who wrote the Plan or when it was written but the use to which it was put and who benefited by that use.<sup>3</sup> What hasn’t been investigated is the Mexican connection, and that is our emphasis. As the United States has learned in Afghanistan, when the enemy can operate from a privileged sanctuary, in this case Pakistan, the enemy is much harder to defeat. Regarding the Plan de San Diego, had the *sediciosos* not enjoyed a base of operations in Mexico, the Plan would have been merely a curiosity. But those Mexicans supporting the Plan had their own agendas, and sometimes they differed considerably from the aims of the *sediciosos*. Unfortunately, most of those who have written about the Plan de San Diego do not understand the complexities of the Mexican Revolution. This understanding is crucial to understanding the course of the Plan conspiracy.

Our thesis is that the Plan de San Diego became an instrument of Mexican government policy. In a brilliant covert operation, President

Venustiano Carranza manipulated the *sedicioso* insurgents as pawns in order to gain desperately needed diplomatic recognition in 1915 of his regime by the United States. That objective achieved, Carranza immediately suppressed the Plan and stopped financing it. In an unexpected development, when in 1916 Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico, resulted in the dispatch into Chihuahua of General John J. Pershing's Punitive Expedition, plunging the United States and Mexico into a confrontation, Carranza revived the Plan de San Diego in an effort to force the withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition. The result was the crisis of June 1916, in which the two countries literally came to the brink of outright war. Happily, the war crisis was defused by diplomacy; Carranza promptly shut down the Plan de San Diego once again. The *sedicioso* leadership hiding in Mexico had little alternative but to dance to Carranza's tune. These refugee Tejanos could only watch their movement disintegrate.

We propose to treat not only the insurrection itself but also aspects such as the subsequent careers of some of the protagonists, the continuing controversy over the number of casualties, and some of the more interesting interpretations of the Plan.

The principal United States source we utilize is the archive of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (at the time named the Bureau of Investigation), the agency most directly involved in investigating the Plan. The key files are those available since 1977 on microfilm in what's called "Old Mex 232,"<sup>4</sup> supplemented by files the bureau has recently made available on the Web as "232-84." The bureau's archive provides almost a day-to-day picture of the troubles in South Texas. Like any other law enforcement agency, the bureau relied heavily on informants. An extremely useful source is the affidavit in the Department of State's Office of the Counselor by one Juan K. Forseck, an important Carranza agent who had intimate knowledge of the conspiracy. Supplementing these sources are federal court cases, the Texas Ranger archive, the State Department's Matamoros post records, and the U.S. Army's reports.

As for Mexican sources, there is the multivolume *Documentos Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana* and the papers of General Pablo González. Whereas Forseck's affidavit provides an invaluable window

into the conspiracy, by far the most significant Mexican source is the archive of Agustín de la Garza Solís, the leader of the Plan de San Diego and the tragic hero of this affair. The Museum of South Texas History, in Edinburg, recently acquired the Agustín Garza Collection, and this archive lays to rest much of the conjecture and speculation that characterize what has been written about the Plan de San Diego.

In short, the Plan de San Diego affair has significance far beyond just the events in South Texas. It is a striking example of Venustiano Carranza, the leader of a country wracked by revolution, outmaneuvering the Wilson administration. The Plan thus has a direct bearing on the history of U.S.-Mexican relations. Moreover, it had an important impact on the preparedness of the United States for World War I. Whereas we do not presume to have written the definitive account of the Plan, the present work does illuminate heretofore unknown aspects of this fascinating conspiracy.

# Acknowledgments

We owe a considerable debt of gratitude to our colleague Jeff Brown, who informed us that the Museum of South Texas History had recently acquired the papers of the Plan de San Diego leader, which was the impetus for writing this book.

Thirty-five years ago (in January 1977 to be precise) one of the authors (Charles Harris) was plowing his way through dozens of reels of microfilm of the Pablo González archive at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Buried in the reels was a letter to González from one of his officers with an extraordinary handwritten postscript explaining that he had sent dozens of cavalry disguised as vaqueros across the Rio Grande into Texas to penetrate the interior of the state with plans to attack after midnight on June 10, 1916. A few months later one of the authors (Louis Sadler), after digging through thousands of telegrams in the Carranza archive in Mexico City, found two key telegrams that tied the invasion to the Carranza administration.

Since that time we have persistently pursued the Plan de San Diego, which was what the invasion was about. A number of institutions and individuals have greatly assisted our endeavors. The Weatherhead Foundation, New York City, provided generous financial support for our early research. The Arts and Sciences Research Center at New Mexico State University supported our initial investigation and assisted us in obtaining funding. As indicated above, our earliest work was at the Nettie Lee Benson Collection, arguably the finest collection on Mexico in the United States. We had the great good fortune to both know and consult with the late Dr. Benson. Her staff, including Laura Gutiérrez Witt, Jane Garner, Wanda Turnley, and Carmen Sacomani, was of great assistance over an extended length of time.

Most recently the staff of the Museum of South Texas History were

of exceptional help. We thank Shan Rankin, the executive director, Barbara Stokes, the senior curator of archives, and Esteban Lomas, the IT specialist and archives assistant.

At the Lorenzo de Zavala Texas State Library, senior archivist Donaly Brice has for decades patiently answered queries and found documents for us. Photo archivist John Anderson has combed their extensive photo collections on our behalf. The staff of the Texas National Guard at their headquarters at Camp Mabry in Austin allowed us access to their Texas Ranger holdings.

At the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco, director Byron Johnson has been more than helpful. His assistant director and archivist Christina Stopka and librarian Christy Smith handled dozens of requests for photographs and documents with unfailing good grace. The staff of the Centro de Estudios Históricos Carso (formerly Con-dumex) in Mexico City guided us in our research in the huge Venustiano Carranza archive.

At the National Archives (I and II) a number of archivists, including Timothy Nenninger, Sue Falb (before she became FBI historian), Rick Cox (now retired), the late John Taylor, George Chalou, Rebecca Livingston (now retired), Trudy Peterson (now retired), and Mitchell Yokelson, were extraordinarily helpful over a period of decades. The archivists at four Federal Records Centers were most helpful. At Fort Worth the late George Youngkin was extraordinarily helpful; more recently Barbara Rust and Rodney Krajca went out of their way to find court records for us. At the Federal Records Center, Denver, archivist Marene Sweeney Baker helped locate documents for us, as did archivists at the Federal Records Center Laguna Niguel, California, and the Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia.

We thank the archivists at the British National Archive, Kew (formerly the Public Record Office), for their courtesy to a non-British historian. In Austin, Texas, Paul Harris obtained for us an extremely important and virtually unobtainable document some years ago. We are extraordinarily indebted to him for his assistance. In addition, he intervened in our behalf to enable us to copy key court documents in Brownsville and Laredo.

This manuscript required some unique assistance. Our friend David

Kahn, the historian of American cryptanalysis, was consulted regarding how we might attack the coded messages in the Garza archive. We took David's advice and had the good fortune to obtain the assistance of Colonel John Smith, U.S. Army, Retired. Colonel Smith, as we noted in our footnotes, was an Army Security Agency cryptanalyst during his army career, and he cryptanalyzed a key coded telegram in the Garza papers.

We thank the courteous and highly competent staff of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, who made several weeks of recent research both productive and pleasant.

For a number of years we compiled lists of documents relating directly and indirectly to the Plan de San Diego found in the name indexes in the Mexican Foreign Relations Archive (Archivo de Relaciones Exteriores de México). Elena Albarrán, who took her PhD at the University of Arizona under Professor William Beezley, copied these documents for us while she was doing her dissertation research. She has graduated and is now teaching Mexican history at Ohio University. We thank her for her assistance. A former graduate student, Bill Boehm, whose thesis Ray Sadler directed, was of considerable help in locating documents in various Washington archives. Bill is now a National Guard historian in Arlington, Virginia.

We benefited from discussions with colleagues Colin MacLaughlin, Friedrich Schuler, Lawrence Taylor, Jeff Pilcher, Daniel Newcomer, José Garcia, Tim Kraft, Jim Hurst, Theo Crevenna, Frank Rafalko, Floyd Geery, and Jack Wilson. We miss our friends Michael Meyer, Ricardo Aguilar-Melantzon, Bill Timmons, Thomas F. McGann, and Jack McGrew, all of whom assisted us over a period of decades; we mourn their absence.

A decade ago David Holtby, who edited our first two books before he retired, talked to us about this one. At the Department of History at New Mexico State, department head Jon Hunner tolerated with good grace two emeritus historians whose office was slightly overgrown with documents.

History Department secretary Mary Herrera was a constant help clearing paper jams on departmental printers, among other things. We thank her. Finally, our former student and now colleague Mark

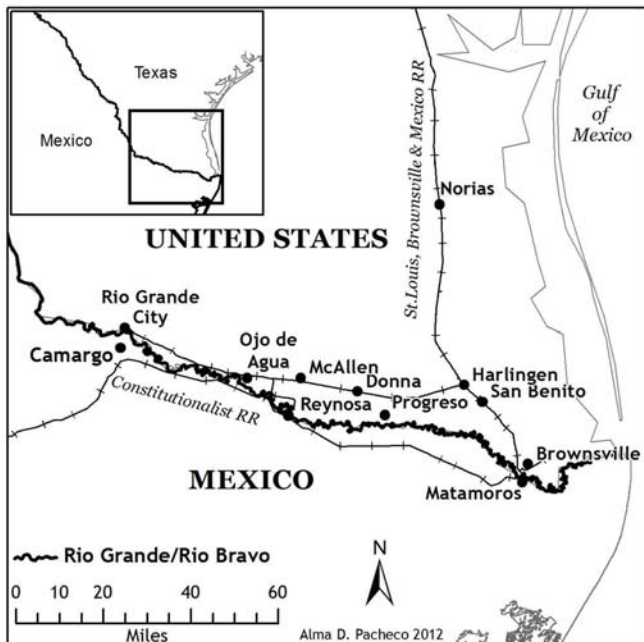


Milliorn, a computer genius and historian par excellence, pulled us out of more computer jams than either of us is willing to admit. What we will admit is that this manuscript would not be going off to the press without his extraordinary assistance.

We end these acknowledgments by thanking our friend and colleague William Beezley of the University of Arizona, who encouraged us to write the book years ago and invited us to place it in the Latin American series he edits for the University of Nebraska Press.



MAP 1. South Texas and northeastern Mexico. Created by Alma D. Pacheco, 2012.



MAP 2. Lower Rio Grande, Texas side (*above*) and Mexican side (*below*). Created by Alma D. Pacheco, 2012.

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## The Plan de San Diego

The most extraordinary indictment ever handed down in an American court was issued in Laredo, Texas, on May 13, 1915, charging nine individuals with conspiring “to steal certain property of the United States of America, contrary to the authority thereof, to wit, the states of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California.”<sup>1</sup> Their offense was being the signers of the Plan de San Diego, a manifesto allegedly promulgated in the South Texas town of San Diego (population approximately 2,500 and 75 percent Hispanic), on January 6, 1915. The manifesto called for nothing less than a Hispanic insurrection and the creation of an independent Hispanic republic in the Southwest:

### TRANSLATION<sup>2</sup>

#### **PROVISIONAL DIRECTORATE**

#### **OF THE**

#### **PLAN OF SAN DIEGO, TEX.**

#### **PLAN (PLOT) OF SAN DIEGO, STATE OF TEXAS,**

#### **JANUARY 6TH, 1915**

We who in turn sign our names, assembled in the REVOLUTIONARY PLOT OF SAN DIEGO, TEXAS, solemnly promise each other, on our word of honor, that we will fulfill, and cause to be fulfilled and complied with, all the

clauses and provisions stipulated in this document, and execute the orders and the wishes emanating from the PROVISIONAL DIRECTORATE of this movement, and recognize as military Chief of the same, MR. AGUSTIN S. GARZA, guaranteeing with our lives the faithful accomplishment of what is here agreed upon.

1. On the 20th day of February, 1915, at two o'clock in the morning, we will arise in arms against the Government and Country of the United States of North America, ONE AS ALL AND ALL AS ONE, proclaiming the liberty of the individuals of the black race and its independence of Yankee tyranny which has held us in iniquitous slavery since remote times; and at the same time and in the same manner we will proclaim the independence and segregation of the states bordering upon the Mexican Nation, which are: TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, ARIZONA, COLORADO, and UPPER CALIFORNIA, of which states the REPUBLIC OF MEXICO was robbed in a most perfidious manner by North American imperialism.
2. In order to render the foregoing clause effective, the necessary army corps will be formed, under the immediate command of military leaders named by the SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY CONGRESS OF SAN DIEGO, TEXAS, which shall have full power to designate a SUPREME CHIEF, who shall be at the head of said army. The banner which shall guide us in this enterprise shall be red, with a white diagonal fringe, and bearing the following inscription: "EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE," and none of the subordinate leaders or subalterns shall use any other flag (except only the white flag for signals). The aforesaid army shall be known by the name of: "LIBERATING ARMY FOR RACES AND PEOPLES."
3. Each one of the chiefs will do his utmost, by whatever means possible to get possession of the arms and funds of the cities which he has beforehand been designated to capture, in order that our cause may be provided with resources to continue the fight with better success, the said leaders each being required to render an account of everything to his superiors, in order that the latter may dispose of it in the proper manner.
4. The leader who may take a city must immediately name and appoint municipal authorities, in order that they may preserve order and assist

in every way possible the revolutionary movement. In case the Capital of any State which we are endeavoring to liberate be captured, there will be named in the same manner superior municipal authorities, for the same purpose.

5. It is strictly forbidden to hold prisoners, either special prisoners (civilians) or soldiers; and the only time that should be spent in dealing with them is that which is absolutely necessary to demand funds (loans) of them; and whether these demands be successful or not, they shall be shot immediately, without any pretext.
6. Every stranger who shall be found armed and who cannot prove his right to carry arms, shall be summarily executed, regardless of his race or nationality.
7. Every North American over sixteen years of age shall be put to death; and only the aged men, the women, and the children shall be respected; and on no account shall the traitors to our race be spared or respected.
8. The APACHES of Arizona, as well as the INDIANS (Redskins) of the territory, shall be given every guarantee; and their lands which have been taken from them shall be returned to them, to the end that they may assist us in the cause which we defend.
9. All appointments and grades in our army which are exercised by subordinate officers (subalterns) shall be examined (recognized) by the superior officers. There shall likewise be recognized the grades of leaders of other complots which may not be connected with this, and who may wish to co-operate with us; also those who may affiliate with us later.
10. The movement having gathered force, and once having possessed ourselves of the States above alluded to, we shall proclaim them an INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC, later requesting (if it be thought expedient) annexation to MEXICO, without concerning ourselves at that time about the form of government which may control the destinies of the common mother country.
11. When we shall have obtained independence for the negroes, we shall grant them a banner, which they themselves shall be permitted to select, and we shall aid them in obtaining six States of the American union, which states border upon those already mentioned, and they may form



4 *The Plan de San Diego*

from these six States a republic, and they may be, therefore, independent.

12. None of the leaders shall have power to make terms with the enemy without first communicating with the superior officers of the army, bearing in mind that this is a war without quarter; nor shall any leader enroll in his ranks any stranger, unless said stranger belong to the Latin, the Negro, or the Japanese race.
13. It is understood that none of the members of this COMLOT (or any one who may come in later), shall, upon the definite triumph of the cause which we defend, fail to recognize their superiors, nor shall they aid others who, with bastard designs, may endeavor to destroy what has been accomplished by such great work.
14. As soon as possible, each local society (junta) shall nominate delegates who shall meet at a time and place beforehand designated, for the purpose of nominating a PERMANENT DIRECTORATE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT. At this meeting shall be determined and worked out in detail the powers and duties of the PERMANENT DIRECTORATE, and this REVOLUTIONARY PLAN may be revised or amended.
15. It is understood among those who may follow this movement that we will carry as a singing voice the independence of the negroes, placing obligations upon both races; and that, on no account will we accept aid either moral or pecuniary, from the Government of Mexico; and it need not consider itself under any obligations in this, our movement.

“EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE”

San Diego, Texas, Jan. 6, 1915

President. [Signed] L. Ferrigno.

Secretary. [Signed] A. González.

[Signed] A. S. Garza

[Signed] A. A. Saenz

[Signed] Manuel Flores

[Signed] F. Cisneros

[Signed] B. Ramos, Jr.

[Signed] Porfirio Santos

[Signed] A. G. Almaraz

This visionary Plan is interesting in several respects. First is the matter of whose ox is being gored. Hispanic militants were outraged that Americans stole Texas from the Mexicans—“who stole it from the Spaniards, who stole it from the Indians, who stole it from each other.”

Second, the social justice envisioned virtually ignored Indian claims. Aside from a nod toward Arizona Apaches, there was no reference to other tribes whose claims to land presumably had equal merit. Third, the future of blacks lay not in a Southwest ruled by Hispanics but in an independent South. However, blacks would be permitted to select a flag of their very own. Last, and most intriguing, was the reference to Japanese. The Plan embodied no concern for Asians in general, for it mentioned only Japanese.<sup>3</sup>



## The Plan Surfaces

The Plan de San Diego came to light on January 23, 1915, at the town of McAllen in Hidalgo County, Texas, with the arrest of one Basilio Ramos Jr. He was a Mexican citizen, single, twenty-four years old, five feet eleven inches tall, with dark hair and black eyes, weighing about 140 pounds, and having a mole on the upper left corner of his mouth and a small one on his nose. He had two suitcases filled with expensive clothing and about twenty-five dollars in cash. An immigration inspector described him as having an “intelligent-looking face.”<sup>1</sup> Ramos was one of the signers of the Plan and was in town trying to persuade Dr. Andrés Villarreal to support the manifesto.

Villarreal was a wealthy physician who had been Pancho Villa’s chief medical officer and was currently the principal *villista* representative in the lower Rio Grande valley. Villarreal was busy organizing filibustering expeditions of *villistas* to cross the Rio Grande and strike at the *carrancistas* in northeastern Mexico.<sup>2</sup> According to Bureau of Investigation agent Frank McDevitt, certain Mexicans, assisted by some Anglo local and county officers, were busily recruiting *villistas* in Brownsville, Mercedes, Donna, McAllen, Mission, Sam Fordyce, and Rio Grande City for military service in Mexico. Their problem was that Carranza forces controlled the border across the Rio Grande from these towns.

Those allegedly the most active were:

Dr. Villarreal, McAllen, Texas

Deodoro Guerra, McAllen, Texas

Ysidro Valli [Ballí?], Deputy Sheriff, Donna, Texas

A. Y. Baker, Hidalgo County Sheriff

José Castillo, residing between Mission and Sam Fordyce, Texas

Everett Anglin, former Customs officer, now city marshal at McAllen<sup>3</sup>

These people played rough. The bureau agent emphasized that “They have an active and efficient secret service system and do not hesitate to kill to preserve their organization and their ‘concentration camps.’” Recently one Eloy, a Carranza operative masquerading as a U.S. agent, was held up and searched on the main street of McAllen by City Marshal Everett Anglin, who released Eloy when an army patrol approached. But Anglin warned Eloy that “We will get you yet.” Since then Eloy had mysteriously disappeared and it was suspected that he’d met with foul play at the hands of the *villistas*.<sup>4</sup>

The bureau agent also reported that “The telegraph and telephone system of this whole section seems to be at the service of this organization. The Texas State Rangers and Military authorities find that all their orders given in that manner ‘leak’ and find their way to these people, making their efforts abortive.” The term “concentration camps” referred to the *villista* technique whereby a sympathizer obtained a contract to clear a section of land of brush for farming. The workers, supposedly Mexican refugees, were actually recruits, and when a sufficient number had assembled they were slipped across the river at night.<sup>5</sup>

The bureau managed to insert an informant into this *villista* network. And the *carrancista* consul in Brownsville, José Z. Garza, of course also had secret agents operating against the *villistas*.<sup>6</sup>

On occasion Villa sympathizers made no effort to conceal their activities. According to the army, during the *villista* siege of Matamoros in the spring of 1915, “the banking and business arrangements for their supply through Hidalgo has been reported as made at Pharr and McAllen by D. Guerra and city Marshal Anglin of McAllen and the Villista Generals entertained by them by a banquet given yesterday [March 26] at Pharr.”<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the general situation, Agent McDevitt observed that this section of the border had historically been a lawless area infested with desperados, of whom there was still an excessive number. Filibustering expeditions, traffic in stolen cattle, and the marketing of loot from Mexico constituted the order of the day. “Most of the support of Americans is bought and paid for in cash.”<sup>8</sup> His colleague Charles E. Breniman characterized the locals as “a suspicious and curious lot, and among them many dangerous and vicious men.”<sup>9</sup>

With regard to Basilio Ramos’s arrest, Dr. Villarreal was staying at the Rio Grande hotel in McAllen and went by night to inform Everett Anglin that Basilio Ramos had been to see him and had shown him the Plan de San Diego. Ramos said he’d been sent by unspecified parties to confer with Villarreal, whom Ramos wanted to join the Plan. Anglin arranged with Villarreal to meet Ramos the next morning at 9:00 and take him to Deodoro Guerra’s store in McAllen. In the meantime, Villarreal had informed Guerra, who was not only a merchant and saloon keeper in McAllen but the political boss of Hidalgo County and a strong *villista* sympathizer, about Ramos and his mission.<sup>10</sup> Guerra in turn notified the Hidalgo County sheriff, A. Y. Baker, who instructed Deputy Sheriff Tom Mayfield that Ramos be arrested and held until Baker could arrive on the scene. When Ramos appeared for the meeting the next day, January 23, Mayfield, who also held a Special Ranger commission, duly arrested him.<sup>11</sup> Guerra searched Ramos and kept all the documents Ramos had on his person. Mayfield and Guerra were stunned by what they’d discovered. Sheriff Baker transported Ramos to jail in Edinburg, the county seat, while Guerra secured the papers in the safe in his store.<sup>12</sup>

As was the case with a surprising number of Mexican revolutionists arrested in the United States, Ramos’s pocket litter included a number of incriminating documents. The papers included a carbon copy of the Plan de San Diego and a copy of a memorandum dated at Monterrey on January 6, 1915, recording the election of the Provisional Directorate of the Plan, with L. Ferrigno as president and Agustín S. Garza as supreme leader of the movement. Signing the memorandum were A. S. Garza, L. Ferrigno, B. Ramos Jr., D. A. Peña, A. Durán, Raymundo Ferrigno, E. Cisneros, A. Garza Almaraz, Lic. Amado González,<sup>13</sup>

Manuel Flores, Porfirio Santos, and A. A. Saenz. A notation on the memorandum stated that the original copy was in Monterrey in the archives of the secretary of the Provisional Directorate, Amado González. Moreover, there was Ramos's commission from the Provisional Directorate as organizer in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, California, Texas, and along the northern border of Mexico, also dated at Monterrey on January 6 and signed by L. Ferrigno, A. González, and A. G. Almaraz. And there was a letter of introduction for Ramos to one Ignacio Ríos in Eagle Pass signed by A. S. Garza, who assured Ríos that "I am convinced that his testicles are in the proper place." Another letter of recommendation was to Serafin Benavides in San Pedro, Zapata County, Texas, signed by Arturo A. Saenz, both dated at Monterrey on January 7. Ramos also had a letter of introduction to Ignacio Rodríguez, the head of a fraternal organization known as the "Mexican Knights of Honor," in Brownsville. Lastly, Ramos carried a small code book and a coded letter.<sup>14</sup>

Realizing that this was something important, Sheriff Baker became anxious to be rid of Ramos, who was being held incommunicado in the Edinburg jail, fearing an attempt to rescue him. Accordingly, Baker telephoned Captain T. B. Bishop, a deputy U.S. marshal for the Southern District of Texas at Brownsville, urging him to come to Edinburg to interrogate Ramos and take charge of him and the documents.<sup>15</sup> Bishop arrived three days later, on January 27, accompanied by federal Bureau of Investigation special agent Frank McDevitt. After questioning Ramos and reviewing the documents, the officers immediately transported the prisoner to Brownsville. They held him secretly in Marshal Bishop's office in the federal building rather than in the jail because all the jailers were Hispanics, and Bishop and McDevitt feared they would warn others involved in the Plan de San Diego. Uncertain of how to charge him, Agent McDevitt hesitated to swear out a complaint against Ramos.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Bishop dumped Ramos on the Immigration Service, delivering him to E. P. Reynolds, the immigration inspector in charge, for possible deportation proceedings.

At Brownsville on January 28, immigration inspectors informed Ramos that he could make a voluntary statement but warned that it could be used against him. Ramos made a sworn and signed statement

about his activities and was interrogated by E. P. Reynolds, the inspector in charge of the Brownsville immigration station. Inspector S. B. Hopkins acted as interpreter, for Ramos spoke in Spanish, and Inspector J. R. Harold functioned as stenographer. Also present was Agent McDevitt.<sup>17</sup> Ramos gave his complete name as Basilio Ramos Jr., stating that sometimes he'd used Basilio Ramos García to differentiate himself from his father. Moreover, he'd called himself B. R. García in Mexico because he'd been jailed in Nuevo Laredo and had been freed on the condition that he never return to Mexico. He had, however, entered that country through Piedras Negras, and to avoid arrest had used the name B. R. García. Ramos said he was a native of Nuevo Laredo, was twenty-four years old, was a Mexican citizen, was single, and had never been married.

Ramos claimed he had last entered the United States sometime between January 13 and 15, 1915, via the international bridge at Brownsville. Asked if the immigration inspector at the bridge had registered him, Ramos said that when the inspector on duty asked him where he was from, he answered that he lived in San Diego, Texas, and was en route there, planning to leave that night for Laredo, where some of his relatives lived. Asked why he'd gone to Mexico, Ramos told the inspector that he had planned to travel to Tampico but hadn't been able to get there. The inspector had allowed Ramos to pass without further ado. Ramos's interrogator asked if he had told the inspector that he'd been born in San Diego; Ramos responded that he had told the inspector that he'd been born in Nuevo Laredo but had lived in San Diego for four to five months.

Ramos stated that after having been arrested in Nuevo Laredo, he had been arrested in Monterrey while on his trip to Tampico for the same reason as in Nuevo Laredo—because he was a *huertista*, a follower of the conservative General Victoriano Huerta, who had seized power in Mexico in 1913 but had been defeated and driven into European exile in 1914. Ramos claimed to have been a secretary in the Nuevo Laredo customhouse during the administrations of General Porfirio Díaz and of Huerta and to have lived in the United States since May 20, 1914, the date when he was expelled from Mexico. He was in Laredo about a month without a job. Later he worked in San Diego, Texas,

as an agent of the Royal Brewing Company of Kansas City, which had an agency in Laredo. On December 28, 1914, he left his job with the company to travel to Tampico via San Antonio, Piedras Negras, and Monterrey. He got as far as Monterrey, where he was arrested as a *huertista*. From Monterrey he came to Matamoros and Brownsville.

Reynolds showed Ramos his copy of the Plan de San Diego. Ramos admitted that his signature was on the document. Asked if he'd been in San Diego on January 6, Ramos said no, he'd been in jail in Monterrey on that date. According to Ramos, the Plan de San Diego was prepared by "a friend of ours." When pressed on that point Ramos said that a friend of the signers, from Monterrey, had prepared the document; the friend had also previously been arrested, but Ramos declared that he didn't know the man's identity. The Plan de San Diego was brought into the jail by the servant who delivered the meals, and it was there that he and the other eight *huertistas* signed it. Ramos said that on January 7 or 8 he was freed, along with A. S. Garza, another of the document's signers. Ramos didn't know if the rest of the signers were still in prison.

Asked who among the signers were from Monterrey, Ramos named A. L. Ferrigno, A. G. Almaraz, and A. S. Garza, a Mexican citizen who operated a commission business in Monterrey. The other signers were also Mexican citizens. Ramos didn't know if they had been born in Monterrey, but they'd lived there a long time. The rest of the signers, like Ramos, were natives of Nuevo Laredo. Ramos stated that two copies of the Plan had been smuggled into the Monterrey jail and that he and the other signers had read the Plan secretly in jail after signing it. When the interrogator asked if the document marked "Exhibit 1" was the original, Ramos replied that it was a carbon copy but was identical to the original; both were typed at the same time. All nine men had signed both the original and the copy. When asked where the original was, Ramos said he didn't know. "They gave me this carbon copy when I was freed, and I suppose they still have the original." Asked who gave Ramos the carbon copy when he was freed, he replied that it was A. L. Ferrigno, the president. "He had the two documents, and when I was freed he gave me one."

Asked if any of the other signers were now in the United States, Ramos said he didn't know. A. S. Garza had been freed the same day



as Ramos, and there was no reason for Garza not to return to the United States via Laredo. Ramos couldn't take the same route, because he'd previously been arrested in Nuevo Laredo. He traveled by way of Matamoros and Brownsville, while Garza remained in Monterrey awaiting the first train from Monterrey to Laredo. Ramos didn't know the current whereabouts of Garza.

Ramos stated that he'd been named an organizer for the Plan and was the only one so designated until now. Asked if he'd assembled any recruits or signers for the movement in the vicinity of Brownsville, Ramos lied, stating that he'd made no effort to interest anyone in that connection.<sup>18</sup> (It would be interesting to learn how Agustín Garza acquired both the English and Spanish versions of Ramos's statement, which are in Garza's personal papers.)

Some writers have accepted that the Plan was promulgated at San Diego, Texas, but to our knowledge there has been no effort to determine whether this was indeed the case.<sup>19</sup> There is evidence that the Plan was in fact written in San Diego. A Mexican revolutionary manifesto, or plan, was generally named for the place where it was promulgated. (An exception was Francisco Madero's Plan de San Luis Potosí, which touched off the Mexican Revolution on November 20, 1910. That Plan was actually written in San Antonio, Texas.)

One B. H. Hall of Sabinal, Texas, claimed in June 1916 that Agustín Garza, while in San Diego "about two years ago, was preparing what is said to be known as the 'Plan of San Diego.'"<sup>20</sup>

Bureau agent Robert Barnes wrote in November 1916 that the agency's investigation revealed that in early 1915 several Mexicans arrived in San Diego and rented a saloon, using it as cover while they organized Tejanos in support of the Plan de San Diego. "Sufficient witnesses can be provided to show their operations in San Diego."<sup>21</sup>

Another bureau agent reported in January 1917 that he'd interviewed one Evaristo Barrera in San Diego. Barrera denied any contact with Basilio Ramos and his associates Daniel Vela and Marcial Rodríguez; the three had formed a partnership, D. Vela and Co., in the beer business. The enterprise had failed because it was only a front for their nefarious activities—formulating the Plan de San Diego.<sup>22</sup> If in fact the Plan de San Diego was written in that town, it was done at the Casa

Blanca building, a one-story stone structure built in the 1850s that served as the headquarters for the Royal Brewing Company.<sup>23</sup>

However, evidence is still inconclusive. What writers about the Plan de San Diego have failed to consider is the context in which the Plan supposedly appeared. Duval County was run with an iron hand by the Democrat political boss Archie Parr from 1912 until his death in 1942. His son, George, continued as political boss until he committed suicide in 1975.<sup>24</sup> As an example of Archie Parr's techniques, in 1914, when his political enemies demanded an audit of the county's books, the courthouse mysteriously burned down, destroying all kinds of official records. And when his Republican and Independent enemies demanded an audit of the county's finances and announced that they were prepared to take Parr to court, Parr and the sheriff forcibly seized the account books from the grand jury. For this egregious offense, a judge sentenced Parr to a hundred-dollar fine and a whole hour of jail time.<sup>25</sup> Archie Parr was supremely confident of his control over the majority Hispanic population, who duly voted as they were told in blatantly fraudulent elections.<sup>26</sup> Were Ramos and company clever enough to plot figuratively under Archie Parr's nose? Or did Parr consider their plotting too preposterous to be of concern?<sup>27</sup> Besides the D. Vela and Co. beer business, the only recent connection to San Diego was Ramos's stint representing the Royal Brewing Company there.

Previous writers have overlooked the Royal Brewing Company connection. This Kansas City, Missouri, brewery maintained an agency in Laredo, Texas, and employed Ramos in San Diego for four or five months until December 28, 1914, when he said he left for Tampico. The Royal Brewing Company was owned by a certain Jack Danciger and his brothers, prominent Kansas City businessmen. Their principal market was Mexico. The exclusive distributor along the Texas border from Val Verde through Dimmit Counties (roughly from Langtry to Carrizo Springs) and in the entire state of Coahuila was J. K. Forseck & Company, a partnership consisting of John Kwake Forseck, who will feature prominently in the Plan de San Diego affair, and Colonel Sebastián Carranza Jr., one of First Chief Venustiano Carranza's nephews.<sup>28</sup>

Danciger and Sebastián Carranza met in Laredo in July 1915.<sup>29</sup> According to Danciger's sympathetic biographer, Sebastián Carranza

inquired whether the Royal Brewery could provide at least one hundred boxcar-loads of beer for sale through Veracruz. Danciger replied that he could, and he suggested that they charter a ship instead. Sebastián traveled to Kansas City to conclude the deal, and he formed a close friendship with the Danciger brothers. Jack Danciger and Sebastián left New Orleans with the beer on August 3, 1915, aboard the Wolvin Line *City of Mexico*, traveling via Tampico to Veracruz, where they arrived ten days later. Veracruz was at the time Sebastián's base of operations as well as the temporary capital of Venustiano Carranza, the first chief of the Constitutionalist Army, who was fighting for the survival of his regime against the forces of Pancho Villa. A transaction involving one hundred boxcar-loads of beer required the payment of serious money, and it would be interesting to know whether Carranza subsidized his nephew's enterprise in order to supply Constitutionalist soldiers with a beer ration. Through Sebastián, Danciger was soon introduced to the first chief, whom he greatly admired. Venustiano Carranza proved friendly, and in short order Danciger was one of Carranza's most enthusiastic supporters in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Among his various enterprises, Jack Danciger acquired a Spanish-language weekly in Kansas City, *El Cosmopolita*, which became a principal organ of Carranza propaganda in the United States, frequently receiving exclusive information.<sup>31</sup> And Carranza was keenly aware of the value of good publicity in the United States, employing one George Weeks as his publicity chief<sup>32</sup> as well as utilizing the talents of the prominent journalist Lincoln Steffens. Through his political contacts Danciger even secured an audience with President Woodrow Wilson to sing Carranza's praises.<sup>33</sup> In recognition of his considerable efforts, Carranza appointed Danciger as honorary Mexican consul in Kansas City, on September 23, 1915.<sup>34</sup> However, many members of the Mexican colony in Kansas City bitterly resented the appointment of Danciger, an American Jew, instead of a deserving Mexican national.<sup>35</sup>

The connection between Basilio Ramos, the Royal Brewing Company, Jack Danciger, John Forseck, Sebastián Carranza Jr., and Venustiano Carranza is suggestive. Why, for example, is the contract and agreement between J. K. Forseck & Co. and the Royal Brewing Company in the personal papers of Agustín S. Garza?

Ramos's examining trial was held in Brownsville on February 4, 1915, before U.S. commissioner E. K. Goodrich.<sup>36</sup> Ramos announced that he had nothing to say, except that the documents found on his person were made and executed in Monterrey; everything else he'd said in his statement on January 28. Immigration inspectors E. P. Reynolds and S. B. Hopkins, Deputy U.S. Marshal T. P. Bishop, Sheriff A. Y. Baker, and Deodoro Guerra testified at the examining trial. Bureau agent Charles E. Breniman asked Ramos whether it was his and his associates' intention to carry out the Plan. Ramos replied that it wasn't his intention but he didn't know what the others would do.<sup>37</sup>

Bureau agent Breniman, accompanied by city marshal of McAllen Everett Anglin, interviewed Deodoro Guerra, who recounted the events leading up to Ramos's apprehension. Guerra also speculated that A. A. Saenz, one of the Plan's signatories, lived in San Diego, as possibly did Porfirio Santos, another of the signers. Guerra added that he was acquainted with Benacio Salinas, who had signed one of the documents found in Ramos's possession, and that Salinas lived in San Diego and was connected with many revolutionary movements in Mexico. Among Ramos's papers was a letter from "A. S. or Agustín S." Garza to one Risa in El Paso.<sup>38</sup> Guerra stated that Risa was notorious and had been mixed up in many criminal acts in Mexico. Guerra also claimed that a certain Joaquín Herrera of Mission, Texas, was associated with Ramos and allegedly told Ramos not to mention his plans to any of the Mexicans in McAllen.<sup>39</sup> The Bureau of Investigation developed information that one R. S. Herrera, 404 South Alamo Street in San Antonio, had corresponded with Ramos, and that Eufrasio Pérez, of Brownsville, had probably assisted him. Pérez had been a consul during Porfirio Díaz's administration, and his name appeared in a little notebook taken from Ramos, with whom he was apparently corresponding.<sup>40</sup>

After investigating the whole matter, immigration inspector E. P. Reynolds informed his superiors that the Ramos case was a criminal matter—conspiracy to commit treason—rather than a deportation case. Were Ramos to be convicted, deportation could be considered after he'd served his sentence. Accordingly, on January 29, Agent Breniman filed a complaint before the U.S. commissioner charging Ramos

and the other signatories. Ramos was the only one apprehended so far, and he was arraigned the same day. His bond was set at five thousand dollars, which he was unable to post, and he was remanded to the Cameron County jail, to await trial at the May term of the federal court, his maintenance expense to be charged to the Department of Justice. There was even some doubt as to Ramos's sanity. Federal Judge Waller T. Burns declared that Ramos needed "a hospital rather than a jail."<sup>41</sup>

As it turned out, immigration wasn't through with Ramos. Inspector Reynolds conducted a hearing in his office on March 20, 1915, with Inspector Harold again serving as interpreter. Reynolds informed Ramos that he could be released on bail if he could furnish a thousand-dollar bond. Ramos couldn't. When advised that he had a right to counsel, Ramos declined on the ground that he had no money for a lawyer. The object of the hearing was to determine whether in fact Ramos had entered Brownsville via the international bridge or had crossed illegally by a skiff several miles above the town. The immigration inspector on duty at the bridge at the time testified, but he was unable to resolve the matter.

When interrogated about his activities, Ramos proceeded under oath to furnish some personal information. He recapitulated his January 28 statement, including having been a secretary and clerk in the Nuevo Laredo customhouse for about two years. Ramos said he'd stayed at the San Carlos Hotel in Brownsville for one day, then rented a room at the home of a Mrs. Rodríguez, on Adams Street, for the rest of his stay in Brownsville. Asked whether he had carried a letter of recommendation to Ignacio R. Rodríguez, P.O. Box number 5 in Brownsville, relative to his mission in the United States, Ramos admitted having the letter but claimed he'd not been able to meet with Rodríguez. As to why he'd been in McAllen, Ramos claimed that he'd gone to Mission because he had a letter of recommendation to a man in Mission and had stopped in McAllen on his way back. Ramos claimed he didn't remember the name of his contact in Mission but had his name written down in a little memorandum book. When asked who was financing his mission, Ramos stated that he had about fifty dollars of his own money and had written to Agustín S. Garza for additional funds.

As to his imprisonment in Monterrey, he had been incarcerated for about five days. General Felipe Angeles, Pancho Villa's brilliant subordinate, was conducting the military campaign against the *carrancistas* in northeastern Mexico. He was driving on the strategic city of Monterrey, third largest in the country and a major industrial center. To halt Angeles's advance, the *carrancistas* concentrated their forces at the town of Ramos Arizpe, ten miles from Saltillo. Angeles won a ferocious battle at Ramos Arizpe on January 8, 1915.<sup>42</sup> On January 15 the *villistas* occupied Monterrey. Carranza troops began massing to retake the city, which they finally did on May 22.<sup>43</sup>

In his statement Ramos alleged that he and his *huertista* companions in prison signed the Plan de San Diego on January 6—while the city was still under *carrancista* control. And Deodoro Guerra testified at Ramos's examining trial that "after his arrest, he told me that he was a prisoner at Monterrey, and that when he was a prisoner there some parties, friends of some other prisoners then in jail, had taken them these papers for them to sign, and that on account of these papers the authorities let him out of jail."<sup>44</sup> How very odd—*carrancista* authorities freeing supposed *huertistas* immediately after the latter signed the Plan de San Diego.

Ramos said his education consisted of having completed primary public school in Nuevo Laredo and then having attended a Catholic school in Norman, Oklahoma, for several months. He said he'd learned to speak a little English while at the Catholic school and from his work along the border as a clerk. He also gave the names of his parents, Basilio Ramos Sr. and Refugia García, and of four brothers, Eduardo, Juan, Ernesto, and Alfonso, all of whom lived at 905 Zaragoza Street in Laredo, Texas. Another brother, Antonio, lived in Tampico, Mexico, and an uncle, Epignacio Cuéllar, lived in Piedras Negras.<sup>45</sup> Inspector Reynolds recommended that Ramos be deported, deportation being deferred pending the outcome of the criminal charge against him. The hearing transcript concluded with a note: "This alien is rather stubborn and evasive in his answers, and gives the impression of not desiring to tell all that he knows in reference to the charges against him."

At the hearing, Ramos had been particularly reticent when questioned about the letters seized from his person. Besides not remem-

bering the name of the man in Mission or having contacted Rodríguez in Brownsville, for both of whom he had letters of recommendation, he flatly refused to explain a letter to him from “F. H. U.” addressed from 575 Zaragoza Street, Laredo, on February 2, 1915, and apparently referring obliquely to the acquisition of weapons.<sup>46</sup> The letter was mailed from Laredo on February 4. It was delivered to the jailer in Brownsville, who opened it on February 16 and turned it over to a deputy U.S. marshal. A bureau agent in Laredo made several unsuccessful efforts to learn who F. H. U. was and found that there was no 575 Zaragoza Street address.<sup>47</sup>

While Ramos languished in the Cameron County jail, the authorities were busily searching for the other signatories of the Plan de San Diego. They particularly wanted to apprehend Agustín S. Garza, whom they suspected was using the alias “León Caballo.” That worthy had evidently been released from prison in Monterrey the same day as had Ramos and had traveled to Laredo by train. He wrote to Ramos from there on January 15, answering the letter Ramos had written to him from Brownsville the previous day and expressing his chagrin at not being able to send Ramos any money, explaining that he’d had to pawn his watch to pay for his room and meals, but promising to send funds immediately if he received any. However, “since my arrival I have been at work, and it appears that everyone accepts the idea in the highest degree, and therefore I think that much may be done in a short time. Before such a cloud on the horizon, pregnant with the crimes of the damned big-footed creatures against our poor race, to be quiet is a crime against one’s country, because it is the homesick hour of the weak, and it ought to be announced to them. Therefore I wish you happiness on the arid rocky road which we shall traverse. Equality and Independence. Your friend [signed] A. S. Garza.”<sup>48</sup>

The next day, January 16, Garza again wrote to Ramos, this time a letter in cipher, which the authorities broke and translated. Addressing the letter to Ramos as Garza’s “Esteemed Companion and Friend,” Garza requested that in any documents Ramos was producing, after they had been signed, aliases be used to ensure security. Further, “When you write to me, use my assumed name, and I will sign the name ‘León Caballo.’ We will continue working. I trust that today everything will

be finished in this city, in order to leave soon. Equality and Independence. [signed] León Caballo.”<sup>49</sup> Garza emerges as the key figure in the Plan de San Diego.<sup>50</sup>

While the American authorities tried to determine whether the Plan represented a real threat and, if so, which agency should deal with it, they kept Ramos’s arrest secret in hopes of apprehending his fellow conspirators. They especially wanted to track down Garza, the signer of the Plan who was also commander of the “Liberating Army of Races and Peoples.” Garza was described as being slender, weighing 110 pounds, being five feet six inches tall with a beak nose and a fair complexion. He had a glass eye, wore glasses, was clean shaven, a neat dresser who carried a cane. Garza spoke very little English and had a family living at or near San Diego.<sup>51</sup>

The manhunt centered on Laredo, but it proved fruitless. The authorities also searched for A. A. Saenz, another signer of the Plan, whom Sheriff A. Y. Baker and Deodoro Guerra thought might be in San Diego. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Saenz and Garza, but there was no definite information as to their whereabouts, although Garza was allegedly spotted in San Diego on January 25. In early March, U.S. Marshal J. A. Herring suggested that he be searched for in San Antonio and Waco. In early May, Garza was reportedly in Corpus Christi. In short, the authorities hadn’t a clue where he might be.<sup>52</sup>

To the authorities’ dismay, the Associated Press broke the Plan de San Diego story on February 2, and Texas newspapers began carrying it. On February 4 the *Brownsville Daily Herald* had a front-page banner headline, ATROCIOUS PLOT UNEARTHED, and a lengthy article described developments stemming from Ramos’s arrest.<sup>53</sup> General Emiliano Nafarrate, the *carrancista* commander of the garrison in Matamoros, stormed into the American consulate and indignantly denied a newspaper account that he knew of the Plan de San Diego and supported it. In fact, Nafarrate claimed that it was he who’d furnished the U.S. consul in Matamoros, Jesse H. Johnson, the information that led to the uncovering of the conspiracy. The consul issued a statement that “It is my personal opinion that General Nafarrate never heard of the San Diego, Texas, junta until he saw it in the newspaper, and further, do not believe that he could be induced to do or say anything on



behalf of said diabolical plot. In all my dealings with him I have seen no evidence of his hostility toward Americans.”<sup>54</sup> As we’ll see, Nafarrete was a consummate liar, and Johnson was pathetically naive.

The manhunt continued. On February 10 federal officers arrested in San Diego a Manuel Flores, who published a Spanish-language newspaper there. Flores was charged with seditious conspiracy, as was Antonio González, also of San Diego.<sup>55</sup> They were charged jointly with Ramos for the alleged violation of section 6 of the Federal Penal Code on February 4, 1915, at Brownsville. González was placed under a five-hundred-dollar bond, while Flores’s case was still before the U.S. commissioner.<sup>56</sup> But this apparent triumph proved disappointing. After investigation it was determined that there was absolutely nothing to indicate that either man had any connection with the conspiracy, and they were released.<sup>57</sup>

Some people have accepted that the Plan de San Diego was a Huerta operation just because Ramos said it was. However, captured secret agents have been known to lie. Ramos’s account was an elaborate cover story.