

Mountain Bell's Adventures in Juarez

by E. A. J. Seddon, adapted by Herb Hackenburg

Most of this story was written in 1913 by a Mountain Bell employee living in El Paso, Texas. At the time, Mexico was suffering through a series of revolutions, many of which occurred in Juarez. This article appeared in the October, 1913 issue of the Mountain Bell Monitor Magazine. Herb's comments are in italic.

El Paso – “The Pass” -- is so named because here the Rio Grande makes its escape for the Gulf of Mexico through the beach that exists between the Franklin Mountains in the United States and the Juarez Mountains in Mexico.

As early as the days of the [United States] Civil War, El Paso was a point of importance. It was the meeting point of several overland stage routes, notably those from Kansas City, Santa Fe and San Antonio; also one from Chihuahua, Mexico. In those days it took a month to travel from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast and El Paso was a meeting point for the southern routes. For six hundred miles in every direction an arid, inhospitable region, with springs and water holes few and far between, stretched out in rugged mystery, and travelers after many days of weary travel found rest and grateful shade between the fine old cottonwood trees that lined the streets of the future metropolis of the great southwest.

Sixty years ago (*162 years ago today*), when Mexico was endeavoring to rid herself of the Emperor Maximilian forced on her by the French, Benito Juarez . . . [*half Spanish, half native Indian*] and “insurrecto,” had established his headquarters in a little village across the river, then known as El Paso del Norte, from which point he conducted his campaigns. After the French were driven out, Juarez was made president of the new republic and it is in honor of this Mexican “George Washington” that the Mexican town across the river is named.

In 1909 the El Paso Exchange had about 3,000 stations; now we have nearly 7,500 and expect to reach 8,100 by the first of the year. The Western Electric installing crew left us last April and we shall welcome them with open arms with the coming of the new year.

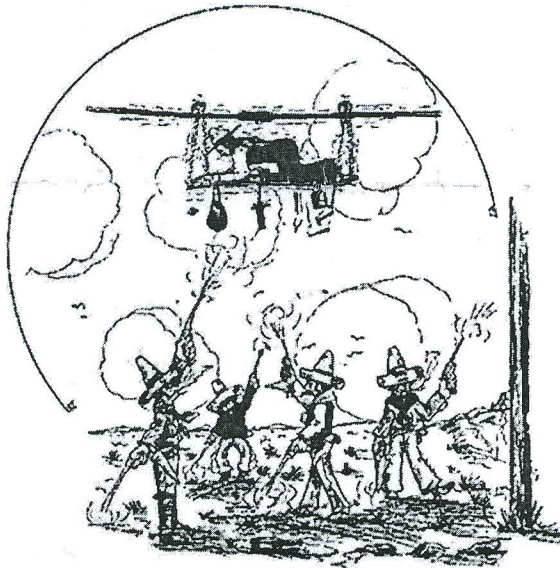
It may be a matter of surprise to many of our readers to learn that the town of Juarez has over 200 stations connected with the El Paso Exchange. The connection between the two towns is established by means of two 200-pair cables strung across what is the Rio Grande del Norte (the Great River of the North). A large portion of subscribers in Juarez are . . . [*Chinese*] who, when they have occasion to change places of residence on the first of the month, invariably take their telephones and house numbers along with them. Most of these Celestials (*from China, the “Celestial Empire”*) are there awaiting an opportunity to cross the line (*into the US*) and use the telephone to keep in touch with and be advised by their more favored brethren on this side.

The telephone lines connecting Juarez have played an important part in the annual battles of Juarez; however, this year's battle hasn't been pulled off yet, but we are expecting it 'most any time. During the Madero revolution, the decisive battle of Juarez was directed over the telephone. Madero had established his headquarters in the pass opposite the smelter and a line was hastily constructed (*by Mountain Bell linemen*) in record-breaking time to a small adobe house and the familiar “Blue Bell” local and long distance sign hung up outside. (*Madero ordered the Bell logo to be installed because in*

his eyes, that highly recognized blue bell made him the official insurrecto to deal with the federal commander on an equal level.)

Mr. Madero then called up the federal commander occupying Juarez and politely requested him to surrender. The federal commander with equal politeness told him to — well, whatever the Spanish equivalent is for “Nothing doing.” A year later the “Maderistas,” not quite sure what they were, started something else, burned half the town and shot up things pretty promiscuously. This year everybody is scared of everybody else—nobody knows where the other fellow stands and everybody is waiting for somebody else to start something. So there you are.

All this manifestation of patriotism has severely tested the strength of our plant in Juarez—in fact, most of the sheathing of the aerial cables is now in lead sleeves. Bill Calloway can tell you something about one of these patches in particular. After several battles, Bill was out in the middle of a span hunting for insurrecto bullets. A bunch of “Soldados” (*Mexican federal soldiers*) were coming down the street filled with the spirit of patriotism and other spirits, probably tequila, or possibly mescal. Just as they came under Bill suspended in mid-air their exuberance of patriotism manifested itself and with many “vivas” they shot off their guns, pointed straight up in the air. One of the bullets came through the platform upon which Bill was sitting . . . Bill did not attempt to get to a pole, but came down the hand line and was later found in El Paso in a dazed condition.



Adios Amigo.

During the first Juarez engagement (*November 20, 1910*) our cables were shot in 175 different places and at one point the fire was so heavy that two spans of an open lead consisting of five [*cross*] arms of wire were completely cut down. After the battle there was only one telephone working in Juarez. That happened three years ago and is likely to happen again any time, for there are still some places left for a few more split sleeves.

We consider Juarez one of our principal assets in spite of its explosive tendencies. When our Mexican neighbors finally decide what they want and give everybody a chance to make a living and develop their marvelous

country, we will be begging for one big blanket estimate and try to keep pace with the increased business. . .

Until then, “Adios, amigo mio.”
I couldn't agree more, Mr. Seddon. Herb

Although Texas was not one of Mountain States Telephone & Telegraph Company's states, El Paso was closer to service areas in New Mexico than to any in Texas. MST&T continued to serve El Paso until 1982 when, in preparation for Divestiture, it was absorbed into Southwestern Bell.