

**Morning Mix**

Mattis, defending troop deployment against caravan, cites Pancho Villa's raid into U.S. that killed 18 Americans

By Timothy Bella

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While en route to McAllen, Tex., to [meet with some of the 5,900 troops recently deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border](#) by President Trump, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis offered a history lesson of sorts on Wednesday in defense of the hastily arranged military response to the caravan of migrants called an “[invasion](#)” by Trump.

Before citing the active-duty troops sent by the Clinton administration to the border in the '90s and the National Guardsmen deployed by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama as reasons for why the deployment was needed, Mattis reminded the press gaggle aboard his plane of the lengths to which President Woodrow Wilson went to counteract the forces led by Mexican revolutionary Gen. Francisco “Pancho” Villa more than a century ago.

“I think many of you are aware that President Wilson 100 years ago — a little over 100 years ago deployed the U.S. Army to the Southwest border,” Mattis [said](#). “The threat then was Pancho Villa's troops, a revolutionary raiding across the border into the United States, New Mexico in 1916.”

As a lifelong student of military history with a personal library that reportedly once had [more than 7,000 volumes](#), Mattis citing Wilson's action against Villa in the context of a caravan of men, women and children immediately raised eyebrows.

We're comparing this caravan of predominantly women and children to Pancho Villa?

<https://t.co/mDeXcPs26E>

— Bradley P. Moss (@BradMossEsq) [November 14, 2018](#)

The threat that Trump said would come in the form of a caravan of thousands of Central American migrants, many of them women and children, moving north through Mexico has not materialized. Critics saw the dispatch of active-duty troops to the border as a pre-election stunt.

Villa, on the other hand, did actually lead a cross-border raid that killed 18 Americans in the small town of Columbus, N.M. His actions caused thousands of U.S. troops, led by Gen. John J. Pershing, to pursue him for close to a year, nearly starting a war. Villa's attack is considered by historians one of the first, if not the first, acts of terrorism on U.S. soil.

“The comparison makes absolutely no sense,” [tweeted](#) Univision anchor León Krauze.

After initially earning the support of Wilson around 1913, who once called Villa “a sort of Robin Hood,” the rebel leader felt betrayed by the U.S. government when Mexican leader Venustiano Carranza came back into the president's favor during the early part of the Mexican Revolution. The rebel leader then targeted the United States in January 1916. A group of Villistas, the common word for Villa's army, killed 18 U.S. passengers on a train in Mexico.

Villa's next move came in the early-morning hours of March 9, 1916. Villa was joined by hundreds of Villistas in a raid on Columbus, a bustling New Mexico town of 250 residents located three miles north of the border. The Villistas — reportedly shouting “Viva Villa!” and “Viva Mexico!” — burned the town, looted the homes, hotel and stores, and killed 18 civilians and U.S. soldiers.

“I was awake, they were asleep,” Villa later bragged, according to historian Mitchell Yockelson in [the Daily Beast](#), “and it took them too long to wake up.”

Wilson moved swiftly to pursue Villa, wrote Yockelson, author of “[Forty-Seven Days: How Pershing's Warriors Came of Age to Defeat the German Army in World War I.](#)” Almost a week after the attack in Columbus, Pershing led a punitive expedition (later referred to as the Mexican Expedition) of more than 14,000 troops to Mexico in hope of capturing the terrorist.

Perhaps one of the only common elements between now and then was that it was an election year. Wilson's 1916 presidential reelection campaign trumpeted the slogan “He kept us out of war” in hope that his antiwar image would appeal to those against conflict with Mexico or Europe, according to “[Woodrow Wilson: A Biography.](#)” (He narrowly won a second term over Charles Evans Hughes.)

With the United States close to entering World War I, the expedition would officially end nearly a year later in February 1917 without capturing Villa. (He was assassinated in 1923.)

Gen Mattis says trump sending troops is nothing new. Just like Pres Wilson sending them 100 yrs ago....to combat Pancho Villa's army. Seriously? The caravan is the same thing?

— Christopher C. Cuomo (@ChrisCuomo) [November 14, 2018](#)

Did...did Mattis compare the migrant caravan to Pancho Villa's troops? <https://t.co/ILDditzHE>

— Salvador Hernandez (@SalHernandez) [November 14, 2018](#)

Last month, Krauze wrote for [The Washington Post](#) that the threat of the caravan that was being portrayed by the Trump administration “would be farcical if it weren't tragic.”

“By responding to the migrant caravan with the same vast display of military muscle that Wilson used to counter ‘Pancho’ Villa's very real raid on Columbus more than a century ago, Trump is perpetuating both

a myth and a dangerous narrative,” Krauze wrote. “The idea that the United States is under siege from a barbarian horde from the south is inaccurate and profoundly irresponsible.”

Though Mattis did not repeat the Villa line upon arriving in Texas, he stuck to the spirit of the administration’s message on the deployment when he spoke to troops at Base Camp Donna on Wednesday.

“The eyes of the world right now — certainly all of the Americans — are on you,” Mattis told the soldiers in South Texas, according to [the Associated Press](#). “We’re here because of the number of illegals who say they are going to try to cross into our country.”

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