

THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL CAREER
OF SANTOS DEGOLLADO, 1854-1861

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The purpose of this study is to examine the role of Santos Degollado in the history of Mexico during the 1850's and to determine his contributions to the cause of constitutional reform in that period. Approximately 43 percent of the study is based on such primary sources as newspapers, published documents, and contemporary accounts. The most useful of these materials was the 36 volume collection of documents edited by Genaro García. Volume XI was devoted entirely to letters, speeches, and other papers related specifically to Degollado, although most of these documents concerned only the last three years of his career. Another very useful source was the Mexico City newspaper El Siglo XIX, but there were gaps in the available issues. This newspaper was especially valuable for Chapter II's analysis of the Revolution of Ayutla, as was Degollado's own documented account of the Barrón-Forbes incident, Reseña Documentada. The discussion of the drafting of the Constitution of 1857 in Chapter III relied heavily on Francisco Zarco's Crónica del Congreso.

In the use of secondary sources, the author avoided as much as possible the general histories of Mexico, but Vicente Riva Palacio's Mexico A Través de los Siglos was an exception.

Degollado's biographer, Vicente Fuentes Díaz, was used only to fill gaps where no other source was available, especially in Chapter I's examination of the early life of Don Santos. This source constituted only 4 percent of the citations in the last five chapters. Biographers of Benito Juárez (Ralph Roeder and Charles A. Smart) as well as critics of Juárez (Melchor Alvarez and Francisco Bulnes) were used extensively in an effort to shed some light on the relationship between the Mexican president and Degollado.

This study was organized as a chronological, biographical narrative. Chapter I sets the historical background of the period and traces the first 40 years of Degollado's life. Chapter II examines Don Santos' role as a liberal guerrilla commander in the Revolution of Ayutla (1854-55) and his later service as state governor of Jalisco. In this latter position he gained national prominence by banishing a corrupt British consul and involving Mexico in a major diplomatic crisis. Chapter III discusses Degollado's part in the drafting of the reform Constitution of 1857, and the subsequent ousting of his party by the conservative-clerical faction. Chapter IV examines the early phase of the Three Years' War between liberals and Church-supported conservatives, as well as Degollado's role as liberal commander-in-chief and his important part in the promulgation of the Reform Laws of 1859. Chapter V continues to follow the course of the war and Degollado's efforts to bring it to an end. Chapter VI

deals with the removal of Don Santos from command for attempting to negotiate peace. The war ended in liberal victory, but Degollado faced charges of treason. Chapter VII depicts Don Santos' death in battle and his posthumous vindication.

This study concludes that Degollado made positive contributions to the reform movement in Mexico through his leadership of the liberal army, his part in the Reform Laws, and his defense of Mexico's national sovereignty. Although he was never a successful battlefield commander, his contribution was nevertheless irreplaceable. Unfortunately Don Santos was too humanitarian to carry on a war which he mistakenly believed could be ended through compromise without sacrificing any of the liberal goals for reform.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND EARLY LIFE

Santos Degollado lived during the period of the greatest social schism, accompanied by violence and civil war, in the history of the Mexican Republic. He was one of the most important military, political, and ideological leaders of the liberal movement of the 1850's, and significantly influenced the history of the period known as the Reform. In opposing the conservative centralist faction in Mexico, supported by the inordinately powerful and wealthy Mexican Catholic Church, and in combatting the perennial dictatorship of Antonio López de Santa Anna, Degollado contributed substantially to the first major social and political reform in the country's history.

Mexico had won its independence from Spain in 1821. Agustín de Iturbide placed himself at the head of the new Mexican Empire, but was overthrown two years later by Santa Anna. In the ensuing struggle over formation of a new government, two major political factions developed. The centralists (conservatives, clericals, militarists, large landowners) favored a concentration of power in the central government, with the states serving only as administrative units. The federalists (liberals, creoles, middle class) called for a

system similar to that of the United States, where individual states held considerable political power. The Constitution of 1824 formally adopted a federal system, but other issues dividing centralists and federalists continued to cause great disruption and violence in succeeding years.¹

By the 1840's and 1850's the two factions, now called liberals or constitutionalists and conservatives or clericals, were still competing for control of the national government, but the form of government was no longer the primary issue. Indeed, John Lloyd Meham argues that federalism has never existed in Mexico, even at the times when liberals claimed they had implemented a federal system.² What liberals actually were opposing was autocracy, like that of Santa Anna, and not centralism. But other issues were at stake by the 1850's. Liberals sought to limit the tremendous power of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico by abolishing special privileges of the clergy (fueros), by expropriating and confiscating vast Church property, and by establishing religious freedom. Conservatives fought against these reforms, supported conservative-oriented dictatorships, and eventually brought foreign monarchy to power in Mexico. Such extreme polarization of fundamental principles among the Mexican people first kindled the Revolution of Ayutla, then

¹John Lloyd Meham, "The Origins of Federalism in Mexico", Hispanic American Historical Review, XVIII (May, 1938), 166-181.

²Ibid., p. 164.

immediately afterward, the War of the Reform. In the midst of this struggle and an integral part of it was Santos Degollado.

Don Santos was the son of Francisco Degollado, a Spaniard who had emigrated through Veracruz, Mexico, in the late eighteenth century. Francisco acquired the Robles estate in the Marfil Valley, near Guanajuato, and took up mining. Due to his hard work and earlier experience in the same occupation and due to the abundance of silver in the area, Don Francisco quickly accumulated a respectable fortune.³ In 1808 he married Mariana Sánchez, a native of Guanajuato. Their first child, José Nemesio Francisco Degollado, was born on October 30, 1811. Because he was baptized on November 1, All Saints Day, José would be known as "Santos" throughout his life.⁴

³Vicente Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, from Cuadernos de Lectura Popular, La Victoria de la República Series (Mexico, 1966), pp. 7-8 (hereinafter cited as Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado).

⁴Ibid.; Two other sources, Genaro García, ed., Don Santos Degollado, sus Manifestos, Campañas, Destitución Militar, Enjuiciamiento, Rehabilitación, Muerte, Funerales y Honores Postumos, Vol. XI of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México, 36 Vols. (Mexico, 1907), pp. 242-243 (hereinafter cited as García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado), and Angel Pola, ed., El Libro Rojo, 1520-1867, 2 Vols. (Mexico, 1906), II, 360-361, include short, undocumented biographies of Don Santos. Both say the father was Jesús Degollado; García names Ana Sánchez as the mother, while Pola says it was Ana María Garrido. García also has the wrong date of birth. Both editors apparently referred to the same incorrect source. A subsequent correction in the García volume points out that official baptismal records reveal that the names of parents and child, and the date of baptism given in the above text are correct.

Since Don Francisco was sympathetic to the Mexican revolution for independence from Spain, the Spanish viceroy, F. M. Calleja del Rey, seized his property.⁵ The elder Degollado died in 1816 or 1817, leaving his wife, Santos, and a younger son, Rafael, in abject poverty.⁶ Shortly afterward, Mariano Garrido, an uncle who was a priest, brought the family to live with him in Mexico City. When the priest was reassigned to Cocupao (present-day Quiroga), in Michoacán, the Degollado family went with him.⁷

Santos and Rafael received primary education from their uncle, a member of the Augustinian order. Garrido was very strict with the two boys and compelled Santos to work long hours in the vicarage writing marriage and baptismal records. The priest selected a girl for his nephew and all but forced the boy to marry her. On October 14, 1828 Santos took Ignacia Castañeda Espinosa as his wife in a ceremony which was also performed by the uncle. The couple lived with the priest for a short while, during which time Garrido continued his stern treatment of Degollado.⁸

Under such conditions Santos felt the need to gain independence from his uncle, and in early 1829, a few months after

⁵Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 8-9.

⁶Vicente Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, el Santo de la Reforma (Mexico, 1959), p. 13 (hereafter cited as Fuentes Díaz, El Santo).

⁷Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 8-9.

⁸Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 361-362; see also Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, p. 13.

the marriage, he went to Morelia to find work. There he favorably impressed a local notary, Manuel Baldovinos, with his attractive writing style, gained through long hours in the vicarage in Cocupao. Baldovinos hired Degollado as a scribe at fifty centavos a day. While working for the notary, Santos met the juez hacedor de diezmos and visitador de diezmatario (tithe assessor and collector) for the Haceduría (treasury) of the cathedral of Morelia, Dr. José Maria Medina, who also admired the boy's writing. The notary allowed Degollado to go to work for Medina, teaching the collector's young son Nicolás to write.⁹

After two years Medina gave Santos a position as scribe in the accounting section of the Haceduría. Degollado advanced to the post of contador (accountant), at a salary of four hundred pesos a year. At least three years had elapsed since his arrival in Morelia, and Santos was finally able to have his wife join him.¹⁰ By 1834 they had two children, Joaquín and Mariano, and conditions for the family had improved greatly.¹¹

While continuing in his work for the church in Morelia, Degollado read avidly. Largely self-educated, he studied several languages, philosophy, and law. In addition he

⁹Pola, El Libro Rojo. II, 363.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 363, 365.

¹¹Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, pp. 14, 18. Degollado eventually had four children.

learned various crafts, including carpentry, drawing, stenography, and telegraphy. Because he was plagued throughout his life by poor vision and eye disease, Santos constantly feared the loss of his sight. Anticipating that he might become blind and still have to support his family, he studied music, and became a skilled guitarist, once giving a concert with Pedro Vergara at the College of San Nicolás de Hidalgo.¹² Because his interests varied widely, Degollado also studied fencing, the sabre, and infantry tactics. Since he never had any formal military training, this study was the sole foundation of his later military career. In his work for the cathedral the young contador learned much about Spanish legislation regarding tithes. The cabildo, or city council, of Morelia often called for him to answer questions on the distribution of diezmos (tithes) and other church matters.¹³

During this early period in his life, Santos Degollado joined the ranks of Mexican liberals in their struggle against the Church-supported conservatives. Considering the all-pervasiveness of conservatism in his background, this move might at first seem out of character. Degollado had been completely under the strict supervision of a priest until he was seventeen. Even after leaving the influence of his uncle, Santos continued close association with the Church through his secretarial and accounting positions in Morelia.

¹²Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 9-10; El Santo, p. 14.

¹³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 247, 249.

Most of the books he studied were borrowed from friends and associates within the Church,¹⁴ and such literature, of course, was of a conservative flavor.

Conservative upbringing, however, was a characteristic shared by many of the leading nineteenth-century Mexican liberals. Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz had backgrounds similar to Degollado's. What Charles Hale has said of José María Luis Mora, the most important exponent of liberal thought in Mexico before the Reform, can be repeated for Santos Degollado: "The origins of Mora's liberalism are obscure, and one can only hazard explanations from scraps of evidence. Like many creole liberals of his generation, he emerged from a priestly education."¹⁵ For Degollado, conversion to liberalism may have been a reaction to the unpleasant aspects of his youth. But it was a gradual process, for not until the Constituent Congress of 1856 was he won over to the liberal principles of his closest friends and colleagues, and even then he still had reservations.

What was probably Degollado's first contact with liberalism ironically came through the church in Morelia. The head accountant of the Haceduría, Luis Gutiérrez Correa, was a fanatical liberal and head of the local party.¹⁶ While

¹⁴Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 10.

¹⁵Charles A. Hale, Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853 (New Haven, 1968), p. 73.

¹⁶Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 365-366.

attending a concliábulo (secret meeting) of liberals with Correa in 1835, Degollado met Melchor Ocampo.¹⁷ This chance acquaintance became a lifelong friendship and Ocampo was unquestionably the strongest liberalizing influence on Degollado. Ocampo later served as governor of Michoacán, was on Benito Juárez' cabinet, and was that president's most important tutor in the art of liberalism. He was also the ideological voice of Mexican reformers in the 1850's. These two Michoacán liberals, Degollado and Ocampo, became inseparable in friendship and political ideas, and even ultimately in how they met death.

Within a short time after becoming associated with the liberal party in Michoacán, Degollado was taking part in their revolutionary activities. In 1836 he joined a revolt aimed at establishing a federal regime over the state. Conservative President Anastasio Bustamante sent forces under the command of General Isidro Reyes to recapture Morelia. Degollado, as a lieutenant, commanded forces defending one section of the city. The inexperienced rebels were no match for the trained conservative army, and liberal defenses collapsed. Don Santos was captured and sentenced to die, but General Reyes called off the execution and offered the young rebel a position in Bustamante's army. When Degollado declined, he was set free by the conservative general, and the two parted with mutual self-respect.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid.; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 11.

¹⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 252-253.

By 1839 Santos and his brother Rafael still belonged to the group of militant liberals in Morelia, now headed by General Gordiano Guzmán.¹⁹ Guzmán had led an unsuccessful revolution the year before,²⁰ and local conservatives were eager to get rid of him and his followers. Two sergeants from the conservative garrison in the city, who were working undercover for their commander, General Pánfilo Galindo, attended a casual meeting of some of the area liberals. They tried to persuade Degollado and his friends to start another insurrection. When the liberals were hesitant about the scheme, the sergeants attempted to find out the names of other leaders who were not present. These efforts failed also; then without warning, soldiers broke in on the meeting and arrested everyone there. Despite the lack of evidence against them, most of the liberals, including Degollado, were imprisoned for eight months before being released.²¹

For the next three years Degollado avoided involvement in controversial affairs and regained the trust of local conservative leaders. He did not join the revolt which broke out against Santa Anna in the fall of 1844, probably because

¹⁹Juan López de Escalera, Diccionario Biográfico y de Historia de México (Mexico, 1964), p. 266.

²⁰Vicente Riva Palacio, ed., México A Través de los Siglos, 5 Vols. (Mexico, 1958), IV, 411. (Hereinafter volumes of this work will be cited Riva Palacio, México, although credit must be given to Enrique Olavarria y Ferrari as the author of Vol. IV and to José M. Vigil as the author of Vol. V.)

²¹García, Documentos Ineditos para Degollado, pp. 254-257.

it was centered in Jalisco and was quickly crushed.²² That same year Don Santos was appointed secretary of the Subdirecting Board of Studies in Michoacán and president of the Directing Board for Development of Artisans.²³ In 1845 he was elected to the state assembly.²⁴

The following year liberals regained control of the central government of Mexico, and in Michoacán, Melchor Ocampo was elected governor of the state.²⁵ Ocampo appointed Degollado as his director of State Studies²⁶, and the two men worked together to achieve a major goal of reformers throughout the state--the reopening of the College of San Nicolás de Hidalgo. The school had been founded by the first bishop of the diocese, Vasco de Quiroga, during the colonial period, and was the alma mater of both Hidalgo and Morelos. It had been closed and used as a jail by the Mexicans during their war for independence from Spain. Despite numerous efforts to reopen the college, at times blocked by the clergy who insisted on control of the school, it remained closed until 1847.²⁷

²²Francisco de Paula de Arrangoiz y Berzábal, México desde 1808 hasta 1867 (Mexico, 1968), p. 384 (originally published in Madrid, 1872).

²³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 257.

²⁴Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 368.

²⁵Jesús Romero Flores, Historia de la Ciudad de Morelia (Morelia, 1928), p. 129.

²⁶García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 258.

²⁷Julian Bonavit, Historia del Colegio Primitivo y Nacional de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 4th ed. (Morelia, 1958), pp. 153, 182-185.

Due to the inspiration given by Ocampo and the hard work of Degollado, sufficient financial backing was raised and on January 17 the oldest college in America was formally re-opened. Degollado signed the Act of Restoration with the board's president, Juan Manuel González Urueña, and Ocampo appointed Don Santos secretary of the college.²⁸ Degollado continued his relationship with the school for the next few years, and in 1853 he became regent.²⁹

During the War with the United States, Michoacán was not actively involved in the fighting. The state became virtually sovereign and liberals controlled the government.³⁰ When American forces left Mexico City in June 1848, liberals took advantage of the disunity of the conservatives and occupied the capital, attempting to reestablish their government. The liberal administrations of José Joaquín Herrera and Mariano Arista failed to implement their programs, and only in Michoacán, under the governorship of Ocampo, did reform make any headway. The governor's efforts to restrict the Church, however, antagonized conservatives, and rebellion broke out in mid-1852. It spread quickly to the Federal District,

²⁸Bonavit, Colegio de San Nicolás, pp. 206-207, 209, 211.

²⁹F. Vásquez, ed., Escritos Políticos, Vol. II of Obras Completas de Melchor Ocampo, 3 Vols. (Mexico, 1901), p. liii.

³⁰Riva Palacio, México, IV, 700. When Ocampo resigned as governor of Michoacán in March 1848, Degollado was appointed to serve out the remaining three months of his term; see Jesús Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, 2 Vols. (Mexico, 1946), II, 101, 113.

where Arista was overthrown.³¹ The conservatives brought Santa Anna back in 1853 to serve as dictator. His rule gave rise to one of the most widely-supported popular movements in Mexican history, the Revolution of Ayutla, an uprising whose single unifying purpose was to overthrow Santa Anna and the ecclesiastical-military faction which supported him.³²

³¹Justo Sierra, The Political Evolution of the Mexican People, translated by Charles Ramsdell (Austin, 1969), pp. 249, 251, 255.

³²Mecham, "The Origins of Federalism in Mexico," p. 181.

CHAPTER II

THE REVOLUTION OF AYUTLA

Widespread discontent over the return of Santa Anna to the presidency in 1853 finally erupted into a full-scale revolution in the early months of 1854. Although the revolt was initially an outcry against the rule of Santa Anna, once its leaders gained control of the reins of government, it quickly developed into an attack on the power of the Catholic Church. Because this became the all-encompassing goal of the liberals, the period of their crusade is generally known as the Reform and extends from this revolution to 1876, when Porfirio Díaz seized power.¹

The first break with the administration came in February 1854, when Juan Alvarez, a perpetual liberal guerrilla, started an insurrection in the southern state of Guerrero. Although Alvarez was accepted by most liberals as the leader of the revolution, an obscure army officer, Florencio Villareal, was responsible for giving unity to the movement by issuing the Plan of Ayutla on March 1, 1854. The list of objectives in this plan became the goal of

¹John Lloyd Mechem, Church and State in Latin America, a History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations (Chapel Hill, 1934), p. 359; see also Walter V. Scholes, "A Revolution Faltered: Mexico, 1856-1857," Hispanic American Historical Review, XXXII (February, 1952), 1.

liberal revolutionaries for the next year and a half. It called for the overthrow of Santa Anna, the reorganization of local governments, an assembly of representatives from each department and territory to select a president ad interim who in turn would call a convention to approve his acts and draft a constitution, the readjustment of customs duties, the annulment of certain laws promulgated by Santa Anna, and for General Nicolás Bravo to ask Alvarez and Tomás Moreno to lead the revolution.² Alvarez was joined instead by Ignacio Comonfort, a creole bureaucrat who had been removed from office by Santa Anna, and it was these two liberal chieftans who adopted the Plan of Ayutla.³

The revolution was hindered from beginning to end by factionalism and disunity. Because of internal dissension, liberals failed to implement swiftly their programs in 1857 and were forced to fight a longer and bloodier civil war to bring constitutional reform to Mexico. Initially the moderates backed Comonfort while radical groups followed Alvarez.⁴ Extremist reformers had hoped to make Melchor Ocampo president in March 1854, but his views were too drastic for most of the liberals, who gave majority support to Alvarez, the

²Wilfred H. Callcott, Church and State in Mexico, 1822-1857 (Durham, N. C., 1926), pp. 228-229. For the complete Plan of Ayutla see Daniel Muñoz y Pérez, El General Don Juan Alvarez, Ensayo Biográfico Seguido de una Selección de Documentos (Mexico, 1959), pp. 179-181.

³Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 261.

⁴Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 18.

"Panther of the South."⁵ The single unifying force during the military phase of the revolution was a common desire to rid Mexico of Antonio López de Santa Anna. Until that had been accomplished, reform was of secondary importance.

During most of 1854 the Revolution of Ayutla was confined to Guerrero and Michoacán. Liberals captured the important west coast port of Acapulco and Comonfort held it against a siege by Santa Anna. The President was eventually forced to return to the capital, where he claimed a smashing victory over the liberals. That he had been the defeated party was widely-known, however, and it became increasingly evident in the summer that with the revolution spreading, a change in government was imminent.⁶ While Alvarez conducted an expert guerrilla campaign in the south, Comonfort traveled to the United States and returned with enough munitions and supplies to give new strength to the revolution.⁷ By winter the movement had spread to all parts of the country and was winning the support of regional chieftans.

One important local hero who joined the revolution at this time was Santos Degollado, who was still regent of the

⁵El Siglo Diez y Nueve (Mexico City), March 1, 1854, p. 4. Santa Anna gave Alvarez this name; Genaro García, ed., Antonio López de Santa Anna, Mi Historia Militar y Política, 1810-1874, Memorias Inéditas, Vol. II of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México, 36 Vols. (Mexico, 1905), 99.

⁶Harper's New Monthly Magazine (New York), July, 1854, p. 251.

⁷Sierra, Political Evolution, pp. 262-263.

College of San Nicolás de Hidalgo.⁸ He had been one of the first to be persecuted by the dictatorial administration of Santa Anna, and by joining the revolution he not only brought it a large sectional following, but also enhanced its reputation. In Michoacán the insurgents had gained little public respect, but by winning over Degollado to their cause, they showed it to be a movement of high principles.⁹

In December 1854 Don Santos led a raid near Maravatío which captured \$40,000 in money and supplies.¹⁰ By the next month he had raised an army of three to four thousand men and invaded the neighboring state of Jalisco. On January 28, 1855 he attacked the capital city of Guadalajara. Before the battle Degollado had written to his friend, José de la Parra, who, as a santanista (follower of Santa Anna) officer, was defending part of the city which Don Santos was about to attack. He tried to dissuade Parra from sustaining an effort which was so obviously contrary to the will of the people.¹¹ But Degollado's guerrillas were neither trained nor equipped for siege warfare against mammoth fortifications.

⁸Francisco Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones de Ayutla y de Reforma (Mexico, 1967), p. 93.

⁹Riva Palacio, México, IV, 856; see also Anselmo de la Portilla, Historia de la Revolución de México contra la Dictadura del General Santa Anna, 1853-1855 (Mexico, 1856), pp. 196-197.

¹⁰Richard A. Johnson, The Mexican Revolution of Ayutla (Rock Island, Ill., 1939), p. 55.

¹¹El Siglo, February 22, 1855, p. 2.

They soon gave up the attack, but still managed to incite a small rebellion among citizens within the town before retreating.¹²

On February 7 Degollado attacked Zapotlán (present-day Ciudad Guzmán), also in Jalisco, but was defeated by Plutarco Cabrera's santanista forces. Eight days later his army lost again at Cocula, this time to Ramón Tabera.¹³ Degollado had already begun to acquire a reputation as the "hero of defeats", a name which was to follow him throughout his military career. In this campaign, however, he had at least succeeded in spreading the revolution into Jalisco, and had even threatened one of the largest santanista strongholds in all of Mexico, the state capital at Guadalajara.

Degollado also began to earn a more complimentary reputation for being able to recruit and organize an army from practically nothing. The series of defeats in Jalisco had drastically reduced his forces, but in little over a month he had rebuilt and inspired a new army. On April 20, 1855 Don Santos overwhelmed José María Ortega's conservative troops at Puruándiro after a thirty-six hour siege. It was his first major victory.¹⁴ A few days later his army

¹²Luis Pérez Verdía, Historia Particular del Estado de Jalisco, desde los Primeros Tiempos de que Hay Noticia, hasta Nuestros Días, 3 Vols. (Guadalajara, 1952), II, 493; Johnson, Revolution of Ayutla, p. 56.

¹³Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 15; Johnson, Revolution of Ayutla, p. 57.

¹⁴Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 16-17; López de Escalera, Diccionario Biográfico, p. 266.

captured La Piedad, and with this second victory almost the entire state fell into liberal hands.¹⁵

On April 30, to prevent the whole district from collapsing, Santa Anna himself led an army into Michoacán, but Degollado carefully avoided him. The conservatives captured Morelia on May 9 and restored most of the garrisons in northern Michoacán.¹⁶ Santa Anna then led his army across a small mountain range to attack Comonfort at Ario, but a violent storm forced him to turn back to Morelia. On June 2 he set out for the capital, his campaign having, for the time at least, successfully prevented the liberals from capturing the entire state.¹⁷

To avoid a direct clash with Santa Anna's army and to threaten Mexico City in hopes of diverting some of the conservative forces away from Michoacán, Degollado had led 1400 men into the Federal District on May 9. He was pursued by General Tabera, who attacked him on May 24 at Tlálnepanla to prevent a liberal siege of Toluca.¹⁸ Conservative troops from Toluca then cut off liberal reinforcements under Plutarco González, who had been sent to help Degollado. On the 28th Tabera attacked Don Santos' army at Tizayuca, north of the capital. Tabera commanded some of the best infantry units in Santa Anna's army and their withering fire drove

¹⁵Portilla, Historia de la Revolución, p. 202.

¹⁶Romero Flores, Historia de Morelia, p. 139.

¹⁷Riva Palacio, México, IV, 858.

¹⁸El Siglo, May 27, 1855, p. 3.

Degollado's cavalry from the battlefield. The conservatives completely routed and dispersed the liberal army and later executed fifty prisoners. Degollado and a few of his officers made their way back to Michoacán.¹⁹ As a result of this disaster, the worst liberal defeat of the Revolution of Ayutla, both sides considered the liberal movement dead in Michoacán.²⁰

Through his extraordinary ability to inspire followers and organize them into fighting units, Degollado managed to build another army. He then combined forces with Comonfort, and on July 22 they captured Zapotlán from General Cabrera. The victory was due in a large part to the performance of Degollado's men. One week later Colima surrendered to their army and the rest of that district joined the revolution.²¹ Santa Anna realized that his position was indefensible, and on August 9, 1855 he left Mexico City. Four days later the liberals established a provisional government in the capital.²²

Because of widespread factionalism in the liberal party, there was considerable jockeying for positions after the abdication of Santa Anna. Degollado, who was still regarded

¹⁹Portilla, Historia de la Revolución, pp. 216-218.

²⁰El Siglo, May 30, 1855, p. 4.

²¹Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, p. 42; Riva Palacio, México, IV, 859.

²²Lesley Byrd Simpson, Many Mexicos, 4th ed. rev. (Berkeley, 1967), p. 270.

as a moderate by his contemporaries²³, had been receiving as much attention in Mexican newspapers as Alvarez and Comonfort. While it is true that most of the news about Don Santos related to his defeats, he still had become very popular and was recommended by various newspapers for such positions as governor of Michoacán, minister of public works, and minister of justice.²⁴ It is even possible that the reason Comonfort appointed Degollado governor of Jalisco so quickly (August) was that he feared competition from him for the presidency.

On October 4, 1855 the new Junta Patriótica, consisting of one representative from each state, met at Cuernavaca and chose Alvarez over Comonfort to serve as president ad interim. Alvarez appointed only radicals to his cabinet, except for Comonfort, a moderate, who became secretary of war and commander-in-chief.²⁵ These appointments put the conservatives and the clergy ill-at-ease; they were the first of a series of acts which, after two years, plunged Mexico into civil war again.

Benito Juárez, as minister of justice, launched the liberal attack on Church power on November 23, 1855, shortly after Alvarez had entered Mexico City. He issued the Ley

²³Genaro García, ed., La Revolución de Ayutla, según el Archivo del General Doblado, Vol. XXVI of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México, 36 Vols. (Mexico, 1909), p. 111; Johnson, Revolution of Ayutla, p. 84.

²⁴El Siglo, August 19, 1855, p. 4; August 21, 1855, p. 4; September 3, 1855, p. 4.

²⁵Scholes, "A Revolution Falters: Mexico, 1856-1857," p. 3; Callcott, Church and State, pp. 235-237.

Juárez, which struck down some of the military and ecclesiastical fueros, e.g. it abolished the civil power of Church courts. Although it was a relatively moderate measure, the ley evoked a tremendous clamor from conservatives.²⁶ A few days later liberal authorities uncovered a plot to overthrow Alvarez, and found strong evidence that it had been instigated by the clergy in retaliation to the Ley Juárez. In seeking the liberal goal of ending the Church's political life, Alvarez and Juárez had become personal enemies of "the most powerful political body in Mexico."²⁷

Hoping to avert violence, the two men resigned in December. Ezequiel Montes replaced Juárez, who returned to his home state of Oaxaca to become governor.²⁸ In the case of Alvarez, he had previously considered retirement because of age and poor health.²⁹ The increase in conservative antagonism toward his administration was more than sufficient to make Don Juan step down in favor of the more moderate Comonfort.³⁰ Most liberals favored the move, hoping it would allow enough time for the Constituent Congress to meet in February 1856 and draft a new constitution.³¹ Moderates

²⁶Callcott, Church and State, pp. 238-241.

²⁷Harper's, February, 1855, p. 405.

²⁸El Siglo, December 13, 1855, p. 4; December 15, 1855, p. 4.

²⁹Harper's, December, 1855, p. 112.

³⁰Callcott, Church and State, p. 241.

³¹Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 267.

believed that through diplomacy and negotiation, the conservatives could be brought to accept the principles of the Revolution of Ayutla.

As mentioned, Comonfort had appointed Degollado governor and commanding general of Jalisco in August 1855. While he had taken office on the 31st of that month, this did not remove him from consideration for other offices.³² In October, after Ocampo resigned as minister of foreign relations, Alvarez offered the post to Degollado, who declined it.³³ In November there were untrue rumors that he had agreed to become minister of public works.³⁴

Although he served as governor for only eight months, Degollado achieved an impressive list of reforms. He issued a general plan for the Hacienda Pública and established a penal code for its employees; he created a state accounting office and promulgated a statewide publishing law;³⁵ he abolished the alcabala (sales tax), an institution of infamous reputation in Mexican history; and he had a number of schools built.³⁶ In March 1856 he laid the cornerstone to the Teatro

³²Rosaura Hernández Rodríguez, Ignacio Comonfort, Trayectoria Política. Documentos (Mexico, 1967), p. 69; Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, II, 497.

³³Charles Allen Smart, Viva Juárez! (New York, 1963), p. 125.

³⁴Genaro García, ed., Los Gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, según el Archivo del General Doblado, Vol. XXXI of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México, 36 Vols. (Mexico, 1910), pp. 38-39.

³⁵Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, II, 502.

³⁶Pola, El Libro Rojo, p. 370; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 126.

Degollado, a theater in Guadalajara named for him. This project was one of his greatest dreams, and although it was not completed for several years, the fact that it was under way gave him great personal satisfaction.³⁷

Don Santos stood firmly behind the liberal goal of limiting Church power. While governor, he received a request from the bishop of Guadalajara, Pedro Espinosa, that he use his authority to suppress liberal publications which had been criticizing the clergy. In refusing, Degollado professed to be a religious man, but one who favored separation of Church and State. He accused the clergy of being silent witnesses to murders and other crimes committed by the government and supporters of Santa Anna. He predicted that Mexico would experience a civil war which would permanently alter her religious life.³⁸ Although he opposed the political power of the Church, Degollado always defended its religious authority. He punished several young radicals who abused the cathedral in Guadalajara, and in many years as a general he never denied any of his men spiritual sustenance through the holy sacraments.³⁹

³⁷Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, II, 505-506.

³⁸José Martínez Aguilar and Celestino Alberto Castro Flores, Centenario de las Leyes de Reforma y Biografías de Don Benito Juárez, Leandro Valle, Melchor Ocampo, y Santos Degollado (Mexico, 1961), p. 31; Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York, 1928), p. 202.

³⁹Pola, El Libro Rojo, pp. 370-371; Ernesto de la Torres Villar, El Truinfo de la República Liberal, 1857-1860 (Mexico, 1960), p. xxxii.

Degollado strongly supported the revolutionary government of the liberals, and defended its legality in letters to friends and to newspapers.⁴⁰ But he would not support capricious revolutions for momentary whims. He believed that a revolution should be based on sound moral principles and should seek to improve the lot of the Mexican people. When his friend Manuel Doblado, governor of Guanajuato, pronounced (declared a pronunciamiento or revolution) against Comonfort in December 1855 and asked for Degollado's support, the Jaliscan governor refused. Don Santos reminded Doblado,

. . . you have forgotten that I am a man of order and honor, that I never perjure myself. If you take pleasure in following the profession of a revolutionary, I follow principles opposed to yours, and I regret much finding in you an instrument so disposed to restoring power to the bloody and oppressive party which has caused the country so much pain. . .⁴¹

Degollado's political and social ideas were not original with him. They came from the heart of classic Mexican liberalism and were shared by his fellow reformers. Melchor Ocampo had strong influence on the political thought of Degollado and most other contemporary liberals. But Don Santos made tremendous sacrifices and great efforts to achieve some of his political ideals. He worked to end such abuses as censorship, special privileges, and all types of monopolies. He supported private land ownership, but sought greater distribution of land to the lower classes. He wanted education for rural areas and favored protection for artisans

⁴⁰El Siglo, September 9, 1855, p. 3.

⁴¹Ibid., December 22, 1855, p. 4.

and small farmers. Degollado believed in national sovereignty as the primary base of existence for the Republic. Through his insistence that Mexico must not subordinate herself in any way to foreign powers, he became involved in one of the most serious diplomatic crises of the period.⁴²

On December 13, 1855 a revolt against the Degollado administration broke out at Tepic, near the west coast in Jalisco. The commander of the army garrison in Tepic, Angel Benítez, led the pronunciamiento against the state government. He had been aided and encouraged to revolt by two foreign consular agents in the city, Eustaquio W. Barrón, Jr., of England, and Guillermo Forbes, of the United States and Chile. Barrón and Forbes owned a company which was supported by the conservative, clerical elements in the area and which was attempting to gain a commercial monopoly by forcing out of business its major competitor, the liberal-supported company of the Castaños family. Barrón and Forbes exported silver, imported foreign manufactured goods, and probably engaged in some smuggling. They had used their consular authority to gain advantage over the Castaños company by bribing and pressuring local officials. But when Santos Degollado had become governor in the fall, he had appointed new liberal administrators whom the consuls were unable to control. Consequently, Barrón and Forbes had provoked the rebellion in December in hopes of regaining their predominant position.⁴³

⁴²Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 12-14.

⁴³Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, II, 503; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 19-21. Riva Palacio, México, V, 97, says José María Espino started the revolt.

As news of the revolt spread, most people believed it to be a part of the pronunciamiento of Doblado in Guanajuato.⁴⁴ Degollado led a force from Guadalajara to put down the insurrection and arrived in Tepic on December 30. Barrón, Forbes, and Benítez had fled the night before by bribing Mexican naval officers on the gunboat Antonita to take them to the British frigate President, where they were given refuge. The ayuntamiento (city council) of Tepic explained to Degollado what had taken place and petitioned him to drive the consuls out of Mexico. Among other things, the ayuntamiento accused Barrón and Forbes of instigating an earlier revolution for their own benefit, enlisting the aid of known bandits, seeking a commercial monopoly, and provoking and financing the December 13 revolt.⁴⁵

Rather than pursuing the consuls, Degollado simply decreed on January 8, 1856: "I forbid that Misters Barrón and Forbes may return to the territory of Jalisco, while His Excellency the President of the Republic resolves the exile. . .asked for by the authorities and inhabitants of this city. . ." ⁴⁶ Don Santos reported his actions to the minister

⁴⁴El Siglo, December 27, 1855, p. 1.

⁴⁵Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 21-22; Santos Degollado, Reseña Documentada que el C. Santos Degollado, Gobernador y Comandante General que Fue del Estado de Jalisco, Hace a la Representación Nacional para que en Calidad de Gran Jurado Decida sobre su Responsabilidad Oficial, por Haber Prohibido a los Estrangeros Barrón y Forbes que Volviesen a Tepic, entre tanto el Supremo Gobierno Resolvía lo Conveniente (Mexico, 1857), pp. 3, 4, 11-12.

⁴⁶Degollado, Reseña Documentada, p. 13.

of war, Manuel María Sandoval, so that Comonfort might ask England and the United States to recall their consuls. Sandoval approved Degollado's conduct on January 16.⁴⁷

Barrón, who had been born in Tepic, complained to the British minister in Mexico City, Mr. Lettson, and to his father, Eustaquio W. Barrón, Sr., who was very influential in the Mexican capital. England filed a formal protest demanding that Barrón, Jr. be reinstated and indemnified, and that Degollado be tried for his insult to British national dignity. Forbes requested a similar protest from the United States government, but instead, secretary of state William L. Marcy, who either believed the consul to be guilty or Degollado to be within his authority, refused and forced Forbes to resign.⁴⁸

Actually Degollado had always believed that Barrón was less guilty than Forbes, and on January 11, 1856 he had given permission for Barrón to continue his duties at San Blas, although he still was not permitted to return to Tepic. On January 5 a group of citizens in Tepic had written to President Comonfort accusing Barrón and Forbes of interfering in elections, bribing officials, hiring bandits, and starting revolts, all to gain a commercial monopoly. They asked Comonfort to banish Forbes, as the principal author of these

⁴⁷ Degollado, Reseña Documentada, pp. 4, 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 23-24.

crimes, and to withdraw exequatur (official recognition) for Barrón, warning him strongly to keep out of Mexican political affairs.⁴⁹

Don Santos stood firmly behind his action. Barrón had returned to San Blas aboard the President, and, with the support of the British naval commander on the west coast, threatened to intervene with force, but Governor Degollado refused to revoke his decree.⁵⁰ In letters on January 12 and 16, Comonfort approved Degollado's actions in the affair, but by the first week of February, after the British had filed their protest, the president began to hesitate and decided the matter should be investigated. Consequently he sent José María Muñoz de Cote, chief justice of the Supreme Court, to Tepic in late March. Degollado welcomed the investigation, certain that it would uphold his position.⁵¹

When this inquiry by Muñoz de Cote uncovered nothing new, the British launched a series of newspaper attacks and threats. Degollado answered some of these, contending that he had only acted in the interests of Mexico:

I find inexplicable the effort that Eustaquio Barrón has made to present me to the nation as a deep enemy of his house. I know neither him nor his children, against whom I take action out of necessity and with much pain; I have never been a merchant, nor even

⁴⁹Degollado, Reseña Documentada, pp. 16-19, 38.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 15; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 22-24.

⁵¹Degollado, Reseña Documentada, pp. 31-34, 36.

a resident of Jalisco . . .I have never even been able to consider Barrón and Forbes enemies of my political principles, since they profess none: there is no reason or rational motive to believe me a partisan of the enemies of this house. . .I have treated Barrón and Forbes as pernicious foreigners, but without hatred."⁵²

The major issue involved was whether Degollado had the authority, as a governor, to banish the two consuls from his state. Barrón's first lawyer, Manuel Piña y Cuevas, argued that Degollado had this power only in a serious situation where guilt was proven. The British conceded that he did have the prerogative to withdraw exequatur, giving his reasons to the respective governments.⁵³ Don Santos contended that he had acted within his authority and in the interest of Mexico. He believed, furthermore, that had he so chosen, he could have legally banished Barrón from all of Mexico.⁵⁴

In May Degollado decided to resign the governorship of Jalisco and take a seat in the Constituent Congress, which had met in February to draft the new Mexican constitution. He obviously believed that for the moment this was the most important task facing Mexico. In addition he had become disillusioned by the Barrón-Forbes incident, because Comonfort was beginning to weaken in the face of continued British pressure. Also Don Santos may not have been happy in Jalisco, since Michoacán was his adopted home and since there had been growing conservative opposition to his administration. Moreover, many liberals were dissatisfied with Degollado's

⁵²El Siglo, April 4, 1856, p. 3.

⁵³El Siglo, April 19, 1856, p. 2.

⁵⁴Degollado, Reseña Documentada, p. 8.

moderate course.⁵⁵ Still he had a large number of supporters who attempted to block his resignation by writing to the president and by soliciting support from newspapers, all to no avail.⁵⁶

On September 2, 1856 England broke diplomatic relations with Mexico over the still unsettled Barrón-Forbes incident. The following month the British sent an ultimatum and demanded a satisfactory reply within nine days. Comonfort yielded and on November 16 he agreed to let Barrón return to his post in Tepic. In addition the president indemnified the consuls' company and gave England permission to prosecute Degollado before the Constituent Congress.⁵⁷ In December 1856 Barrón, Jr., returned to Tepic, where local officials and conservative leaders staged a celebration in his honor. During the festivities, speeches were made denouncing and insulting Degollado and others who had defended Mexican national dignity. On December 28 the people of Tepic rose up spontaneously against those local authorities who sided with the foreigners. Although they did not bother Barron or other foreigners, they attacked the houses of Barron's conservative Mexican friends and made prisoners of

⁵⁵García, Gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, pp. 187-189.

⁵⁶El Siglo, May 12, 1856, p. 3.

⁵⁷Francisco Zarco, Crónica del Congreso Extraordinario Constituyente, 1856-1857 (Mexico, 1957), p. 990; Constitución Federal de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos, Sancionada y Jurada por el Congreso General Constituyente el Día 5 de Febrero de 1857 (Mexico, 1857), pp. 103-104; Riva Palacio, México, V, 196.

Camilo Gómez, the local conservative political boss, and Mariano Pico, the commander of the military garrison. Comonfort sent a commission to restore peace and settle the controversy.⁵⁸ After Pico was released, he sent his official report to the state governor, knowing it would eventually reach Comonfort. He declared that the people who had revolted and taken him prisoner had been shouting, "Muera Comonfort! Viva D. Santos Degollado!" (Death to Comonfort! Long live Don Santos Degollado!). The conservative officer also praised Barrón, who had fortified his house to provide a place of security in the center of the city.⁵⁹

In February 1857 the Mexican Constituent Congress, sitting in the form of a grand jury, heard the case against Degollado. Speaking in his own defense, Don Santos asked first for the preservation of his country's dignity before his own, and if this could not be done, he preferred "to continue playing the role of a criminal, in order to lend a greater service to my country." On February 16, after the new constitution had been promulgated, the Congress voted unanimously that there was no reason to bring suit against Degollado.⁶⁰ Don Santos was pleased with the decision and

⁵⁸El Siglo, January 9, 1857, p. 4; January 13, 1857, p. 4.

⁵⁹Ibid., February 4, 1857, p. 3.

⁶⁰Degollado, Reseña Documentada, p. 10; Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, pp. xxii, 980; Constitución Federal, p. 104. It must be remembered that the Congress was an entirely liberal body, and accordingly did not favor coddling foreigners. Benito Gómez Farías, who had been convicted of libelous action against Barrón, Forbes, and Co. for his article in La Pata de Cabra and had been fined and given six months in jail, was given a hearty and unanimous welcome by the Congress; see Callcott, Church and State, p. 269.

considered it "very honorable for myself and sufficient in importance to rehabilitate me in public opinion."⁶¹ But the British refused to accept the verdict. In December 1856 they had received permission to seek recompense through the Mexican courts, so Barrón's lawyers began mapping out plans to prosecute Degollado before the supreme court.⁶²

There was an additional reason for the British to be incensed by the congressional decision. In January 1857, only a month after reassuming his post in Tepic, Barrón had resigned as consul. England had appointed a Mr. Allsopp, who worked for Barrón, Forbes, and Co., to the position, but Mexico had refused to accept him.⁶³ Relations between the two countries again became intensely strained. Rumors spread that a British squadron was enroute to Mexico to effect a military intervention. In this tense atmosphere congress handed down its verdict in favor of Don Santos. England immediately demanded that the Degollado case be submitted to the Mexican supreme court. In April Don Santos accepted this demand, though it was unorthodox. He was confident of his own acquittal but feared that the precedent would make congressional grand juries powerless.⁶⁴

In May of 1857 Mexico's department of foreign relations and the British ministry jointly decided to lay the issue

⁶¹Degollado, Reseña Documentada, p. 10.

⁶²El Siglo, December 19, 1856, p. 4.

⁶³El Siglo, January 31, 1857, p. 1.

⁶⁴Hernández Rodríguez, Ignacio Comonfort, p. 59; El Siglo, May 16, 1857, p. 2.

before the supreme court, which readily agreed to hear arguments on whether the decision of congress had been fair. Hilario Elguero represented Barrón, while Degollado announced that he would conduct the defense, not of himself, but of Mexico.⁶⁵ The case was reviewed on May 6 and 7, and newspapers carried letters and poems of encouragement for Degollado.⁶⁶ In his defense Don Santos cited Article 11 of the Treaty of Amisty, Navigation, and Commerce, signed by England and Mexico in 1826, which guaranteed each signator the right to refuse to accept consuls sent by the other party. Degollado also referred to British-American treaties of 1794, 1806, and 1815, which contained provisions sanctioning the type of action he had taken in Tepic, and to several Mexican laws establishing his right as governor to expel foreigners.⁶⁷

Although the justices promised to render a decision within six days,⁶⁸ weeks passed with no hint of a verdict. Degollado believed that the delay meant an adverse decision, so he planned a trip to England to denounce the consul before his own government. He was also aware that there was some support for him in England. Don Santos left Mexico City in late May, amidst rumors that the British legation would have

⁶⁵El Siglo, May 4, 1857, p. 3; The Daily Picayune (New Orleans), May 16, 1857, morning edition, p. 4.

⁶⁶El Siglo, May 6, 1857, p. 2; Emma Cosío Villegas, ed., Diario Personal de Matías Romero, 1855-1865 (Mexico, 1960), p. 87.

⁶⁷Degollado, Reseña Documentada, pp. 22-24.

⁶⁸El Siglo, May 8, 1857, p. 3.

him arrested to block his mission. He was apprehended in Veracruz, as he was about to take passage to Europe on the steamship Texas. Eustaquio W. Barrón, Sr. had pressured Comonfort and the supreme court into ordering the state governor to seize Don Santos and return him to the capital.⁶⁹

With Degollado back in Mexico City, the supreme court published the following unanimous decision, which it had made on June 2, 1857:

That in conformity to the laws in force in Mexico and to the compact of November 13 last, Don Santos Degollado cannot be judged for having issued the orders of January 8 and 11, 1856, as implied by the declaration of the Congress, seated in grand jury, dated last February 16, that there was no reason for bringing suit.⁷⁰

Degollado had been involved in the Barrón-Forbes controversy for eighteen months, and it had weighed heavily on him through his governorship, through the drafting of the Constitution of 1857, and into the summer of national elections. Finally in June the burden was lifted and his name was cleared. There can be little doubt but that Don Santos had acted only in the interest of his country, although this action brought him into conflict with one of the greatest world powers of the time. In addition his political enemies had used the issue to blacken his reputation. He remained popular, however, with the Mexican people throughout the struggle,

⁶⁹Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, p. 65; El Siglo, May 31, 1857, pp. 2-3; June 11, 1857, p. 3; June 17, 1857, p. 3.

⁷⁰El Siglo, June 22, 1857, p. 3; Daily Picayune, June 4, 1857, afternoon edition, p. 1.

and when he was justly cleared of all charges, Don Santos came to represent the steadfast preservation of Mexico's national honor.

CHAPTER III

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1857 AND THE LIBERAL FALL FROM POWER

Provisions of the Plan of Ayutla required the liberal president ad interim to call a congress to draft a new constitution for Mexico. Comonfort had taken this step in late summer, 1855, and the Constituent Congress formally convened on February 18, 1856 to undertake the project.¹ Although it was a completely liberal assembly, its early sessions were plagued by the same disunity which had hindered the military phase of the revolution. The delegates split into two major factions: moderados, more moderate liberals who believed that such reforms as abolition of fueros, reducing the wealth of the clergy, and limiting clerical and executive power could be accomplished gradually and individually; and puros, radicals who contended that all such measures should be implemented at once.²

Santos Degollado had resigned as governor of Jalisco in May 1856 to accept the position he had won in the fall elections as proprietary delegate to the congress from Michoacán.³

¹Callcott, Church and State, p. 267.

²Walter V. Scholes, "Church and State at the Mexican Constitutional Convention, 1856-1857," The Americas, IV (October, 1947), 152.

³Muñoz y Pérez, Juan Alvarez, p. 215.

He had immense prestige at the time and many political leaders hoped he would become the bond to unite the two factions.⁴ Although he unofficially took part in sessions throughout the spring, Degollado was listed as a delegate who had not yet reported, since he still occupied the post of state governor. On July 1 congress officially approved his credentials and the delegates welcomed him with a standing ovation.⁵

Don Santos was relatively moderate in his political viewpoints at the time he joined the congress.⁶ This is evidenced by his first formal proposal, a resolution that the Constitution of 1824 be amended with reform laws to become the new constitution. Delegates voted down the suggestion in late July, but some of the moderates continued to support the measure throughout August.⁷

In the last session of July Don Santos was elected president of the Constituent Congress for the month of August.⁸ Under his direction the representatives debated the most heated issue to come before them during the entire year that they would meet--religious freedom. The puros asked that Article 15 of the new constitution include a provision which would establish freedom of conscience in religion

⁴García, Gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, pp. 7, 223.

⁵El Siglo, April 10, 1856, p. 4; July 2, 1856, p. 1; Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, p. 203.

⁶See again note 23, Chapter II, p. 6.

⁷García, Gobiernos de Alvarez y Comonfort, pp. 241, 247; Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, p. 528.

⁸Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, p. 377.

throughout Mexico. On August 5, 1856, with the galleries packed, congress voted on whether to bring the bill out of committee. By a vote of sixty-five against to forty-four for, delegates virtually killed the article by returning it. On January 24 it was formally retired by a vote of fifty-seven to twenty-two; so the final draft of the constitution simply ignored the issue. In the August 5 vote Don Santos aligned himself unquestionably with the puro faction by voting for the article when some of his close friends and even his son voted against it.⁹

On September 26 Degollado began to introduce his proposals for the electoral provisions of Article 60, dealing with the qualifications to be a delegate to the legislative congress. His son, Joaquín, read the remainder of his suggestions at the next session on October 1, since Don Santos had become too ill to attend. Until this time Degollado had taken little active part in debates on the floor, but he explained that he was abandoning his habitual silence because he felt very strongly about this issue. He wanted a requirement that all congressional deputies reside in the area they represented. He suggested that legal residence should be constituted as follows: two years for a candidate who brought his business interests and his family to settle in the area,

⁹Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, pp. 436-437; Scholes, "Church and State," p. 172; Muñoz y Pérez, Juan Alvarez, p. 221. Don Santos' son, Joaquín, served in Congress as an alternate delegate from the Federal District; see Francisco Zarco, Historia del Congreso Constituyente de 1857 (Mexico, 1916), p. 9.

three years for a man who brought only one of the two, and five years if he brought only himself. Degollado contended that this requirement would conform to the wishes of people he had met throughout Mexico during his military campaigns, and it would conform to the democratic principles of a republican system. He insisted that a delegate could not capably represent all the states, and that election to congress was an obligation to represent one's own constituents, not a reward from them.¹⁰

These were rather strict residence requirements and reflected a more conservative facet of Degollado's political personality. On October 3 congress voted down a more lenient set of regulations, practically assuring the acceptance of Don Santos' proposals. Francisco Zarco, a leading puro, argued that this move was a triumph for provincialism and would endanger the success of the new government. He contended that stringent residence requirements would fill the new congress with backwoods rustics, most of whom would either not attend the sessions or would stay only for a short while.¹¹

On October 29, 1856 Degollado and two other delegates were appointed to draft the organic electoral laws. He missed numerous sessions in November and December to work on this section of the constitution. While the various provisions were being introduced, debated, and passed, on

¹⁰Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, pp. 630-637; Zarco, Historia del Congreso, pp. 535-536.

¹¹Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, p. 648.

December 29, January 7 and 12, Degollado was cooperative and willing to compromise and change those sections which other delegates found objectionable.¹²

In late January 1857 Ezequiel Montes introduced several measures dealing with church taxes and outlining the rights and economic power of the clergy. Being particularly knowledgeable in this subject, due to his earlier occupation in Morelia, Degollado participated in the debate and eloquently defended the Montes proposals.¹³ He pointed out that the clergy subsisted through its power to collect tithes and without this income the churchmen would become wards of the State. Revealing his strong religious background, Degollado contended that church taxing power was based on the text of St. Paul, "He who serves the altar should live by the altar." Payment of these church tithes was the choice of the individual. In a sense, it was an aspect of the freedom of conscience which liberals advocated, for by abolishing the tithe, they would be denying the free choice of the individual to pay it if he wished. Citizens who did not feel a need for the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and burial would not feel a need to pay tithes. Since the Mexican people were Catholic, however, and wanted the church services, they should pay for them by financially supporting the clergy.

¹²Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, pp. 731, 858, 866, 880; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 27.

¹³I. y N. Colegio de Abogados de México, El Constituyente de 1856 y el Pensamiento Liberal Mexicano (Mexico, 1960), p. 35.

Don Santos agreed that there were abuses of this power and advocated the abolition of priestly rights of estola (fees to pay for vestments) and parochial bonuses. He suggested that tithes should be made uniform throughout all dioceses.¹⁴

Degollado's opinions on several other issues lend additional insight into his changing political thought at this time. In October 1856 he recommended abolishing the alcabala, as he had done in Jalisco while serving as governor there. He advocated fixing the size of the army each year, an unusual proposal coming from a general. Limiting the power of the executive had been one of the chief liberal goals in the Revolution of Ayutla, and Don Santos favored giving the power of amnesty, among others, to congress instead of to the president. He believed that the Constituent Congress should not become involved in affairs of public finance, but should leave such matters for the regular congress.¹⁵

By the end of January the delegates had finished their work, and on February 5, 1857 the new constitution was formally adopted. Similar to the Constitution of the United States in many respects, it established a federal republic with a central government of three branches, and it included guarantees of individual civil rights.¹⁶

¹⁴Zarco, Crónica del Congreso, pp. 946, 949-950.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 661, 670, 707, 889.

¹⁶Martínez Aguilar, Centenario de las Leyes, pp. 8-10. For the complete Constitution of 1857 see Constitución Federal de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos, Sancionada y Jurada por el Congreso General Constituyente el Día 5 de Febrero de 1857 (Mexico, 1857).

By the time congress closed in February, Santos Degollado had moved farther to the left in his political philosophy. Nevertheless, it is difficult to politically categorize him, since he took a conservative stand on some issues, while on others he appeared almost radical. He was not yet, as many have suggested, a "complete liberal."¹⁷ He had entered Congress as a moderate and had advocated the revision of an older constitution in lieu of drafting a completely new one, and his firm residence requirements for delegates showed a conservative attitude which perpetuated provincialism. He still had reservations about the political war on the Church, and he protected the clergy from extremist efforts to destroy every facet of their economic power. In some ways the Constitution of 1857 exceeded his convictions, but once it was law, Degollado supported it with undoubted loyalty. Later he moved even farther to the left, as shown by his role in the promulgation of the Reform Laws in 1859. At this time, however, in 1857, although he was undeniably one of the leading liberals in Mexico, Don Santos was certainly not radical in his political thought.

During 1856, while the constitution was being drafted, minor rebellions against the liberal government broke out in

¹⁷Simpson, Many Mexicos, p. 272, calls Degollado the "stoutest of liberals" in 1857; Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 373, says that in Congress Don Santos usually voted with a group of forty of the most radical liberals; Callcott, Church and State, p. 239, calls him an extreme liberal for forcing the Ley Juárez at an inopportune time; Ralph Roeder, Juárez and His Mexico, 2 Vols. (New York, 1947), I, 139, says that in February 1857, Degollado was a complete liberal.

all parts of Mexico. Each step taken toward reform brought forth another pronunciamento from conservative factions. The two-year period of liberal control was far from peaceful; indeed, the Comonfort regime fought from day to day for its very existence, without ever establishing firm rule over the country.¹⁸ The most serious threat in 1856 was a revolt in January, started by a priest, Ortega y García. Antonio Haro y Tamariz took over leadership of the movement, and his forces succeeded in capturing the city of Puebla.¹⁹ Although the clericals managed to hold out for some time and even threatened the safety of the congressional representatives in Mexico City, Comonfort finally crushed the insurrection in March. He ordered the confiscation of certain Church property to indemnify the government for its expenses in suppressing the revolt.²⁰

After the constitution was promulgated in February 1857, the liberal government issued a decree requiring all citizens to take an oath of loyalty to the new law of the land. The clergy in most states retaliated by prohibiting faithful Catholics from taking the oath. Those who did were denied the holy sacraments until they retracted the oath before two witnesses. Although clerics in some areas, such as Tabasco

¹⁸Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 273; Harper's, April, 1856, p. 691.

¹⁹Emilio Portes Gil, "The Conflict in Mexico Between Civil Power and the Clergy, 1854-1876: Defense of the Civil Power," The Conflict Between Church and State in Latin America, edited by Frederick B. Pike (New York, 1964), p. 119.

²⁰Harper's, June, 1856, p. 118.

and Monterrey, accepted the constitution without protest, there was widespread opposition in most central and southern states, including Jalisco, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and the Federal District.²¹ In April the governor and city council from the capital were refused admittance to the cathedral of Mexico City on Thursday and Friday of Holy Week. Riots broke out in the capital, as well as in Tacubaya and Puebla. The government ordered the arrest and banishment of the bishop and archbishop of the diocese for keeping liberal officials out of the church and for inciting the riots.²²

Despite all the violence and disorder of the period, the liberals in power continued attempts to implement their reforms, and they achieved at least some temporary success. In addition to the new constitution, progress was made in easing immigration restrictions, in improving public education and communications, and in continuing the attack on Church power.²³ Concerning the latter, liberals took a strong step toward reducing the Church's role as a landowner. At that time the Catholic Church held as much as one third of all the land in Mexico. On May 25, 1856 the Ley Lerdo, named for Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, secretary of the treasury, formally abolished the right of civil and ecclesiastical corporations to own real property, except that which was used

²¹Robert J. Knowlton, "La Iglesia Mexicana y la Reforma: respuesta y resultados," Historia Mexicana, XVIII (April-June, 1969), pp. 521-523.

²²Picayune, May 3, 1857, morning edition, p. 1.

²³Callcott, Church and State, pp. 260-262.

directly for worship. It was not a confiscatory measure, but one designed to force some of the large land holders, especially the Church, to disgorge and sell their land to the lower classes.²⁴ Again the reaction from conservatives was quick and violent. More revolts broke out and priests refused to give the sacraments to those who acquired Church land through the ley.²⁵

The national elections of that summer revealed that the new government would not have overwhelming support when it took power in September 1857. Only twenty-one of the one hundred fifty-five delegates to the Constituent Congress were reelected to the regular congress.²⁶ There was strong opposition to many of the reforms of the liberal regime, and it became evident that the Church would never peacefully accept them and their accompanying reduction of her influence.

In the spring, after finishing his work on the constitution, Don Santos returned to his adopted state, Michoacán, to campaign for liberals who were seeking election to the new congress and to state offices. In July 1857, shortly after he was cleared of all guilt in the Barrón-Forbes incident, Degollado was elected governor of Michoacán and was to take office on December 27.²⁷ Also, Matías Romero nominated him in November for the position as first magistrate on the

²⁴Callcott, Church and State, pp. 248-249; Mecham, Church and State, p. 362.

²⁵Knowlton, "La Iglesia Mexicana," pp. 525-526.

²⁶Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, pp. 194-195.

²⁷Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 156-157; Romero Flores, Historia de Morelia, p. 141.

supreme court.²⁸ Although Don Santos assumed the governorship in December, had the liberals remained in power, it is likely that he would have taken the court post. But as the time approached for the Constitution of 1857 to go into effect, increasing Church resistance caused more bloodshed and destruction. The liberals had no real hope of enforcing the constitution at that time. Feelings ran so high and the Mexican people had become so extremely polarized over the issues, that a civil war to decide which faction would prevail was, in fact, irrepressible.²⁹

President Comonfort decided that the only way to deal with the discord was to suspend civil liberties, revise the constitution, and employ greater executive enforcement power. Congress rejected these suggestions for fear that such moves would bring about another dictatorship. On December 17, 1857, ten days before the new government was to take effect, Comonfort abrogated the constitution. He assumed full control of the country and announced that a new congress would convene in three months to draft another constitution.³⁰ In the final analysis, the liberal reforms embodied in the Constitution of 1857 had simply been too extreme for the moderate president.

²⁸Cosío Villegas, Diario Personal, p. 129.

²⁹Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 278; Knowlton, "La Iglesia Mexicana," p. 534.

³⁰Henry B. Parkes, A History of Mexico, 3rd ed. rev. (Boston, 1960), p. 240.

That same day Félix Zuloaga, a conservative general at Tacubaya, pronounced and issued his Plan of Tacubaya calling for another constitution.³¹ Liberal governors and generals, such as Doblado in Guanajuato and Anastasio Parrodi in Jalisco, made preparations to resist the new conservative uprising. Comonfort was caught between the two opposing sides and chose inaction as the safest course to follow. But when Veracruz pronounced against him and Zuloaga, the president yielded to pressure from the conservative general, who by this time had entered the capital, and accepted the Plan of Tacubaya on January 11. While conservatives hoped this would return their party to power, Comonfort had taken the step only as an attempt to preserve constitutional order and to avert violence. Zuloaga finally forced the president to resign and assumed the office himself. Comonfort fled to the United States in February, leaving the conservatives in control of the capital.³²

Under the provisions of the Constitution of 1857, Benito Juárez, as head of the supreme court, was to assume the presidency if the office were vacated. Zuloaga had Juárez imprisoned to forestall this possibility. Barrón, Forbes, and Co., Don Santos' old adversary, loaned the Zuloaga government 320,000 pesos on the security of Church property,³³ and

³¹For the complete Plan of Tacubaya see Riva Palacio, México, V, 267.

³²Ibid., pp. 272-275; Harper's, February, 1858, p. 401; March, 1858, p. 545; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 167.

³³Edgar Turlington, Mexico and Her Foreign Creditors (New York, 1930), p. 113.

the conservative-clerical faction threw their full support to the new regime. Juárez escaped and claimed the presidency; liberals in the Federal District took up arms and rallied behind him in defense of the constitution.³⁴ Thus the sides were drawn for the Three Years' War.

In the liberal exodus from Mexico City, Degollado narrowly escaped capture by fleeing on horseback.³⁵ The conservatives held unchallenged control of the capital and received de facto recognition from the diplomatic corps, including the United States.³⁶ They held sway in Mexico City for the next three years, after which time the capital was the last conservative bastion in the country to fall to the liberals.

After fleeing from the Federal District, many of the liberals, now also known as constitutionalists, gathered in Guanajuato to proclaim Juárez president. Most of the important political leaders were present, including Juárez, Degollado, Ocampo, Guillermo Prieto, Matías Romero, Leandro Valle, and Benito Gómez Farías.³⁷ On January 19 Juárez appointed his cabinet and issued a manifesto accusing the conservatives of invoking the sacred name of Mexico's religion to serve their own personal, illegitimate ambitions. He vowed to enforce the Constitution of 1857, and this became

³⁴Cosío Villegas, Diario Personal, pp. 135, 142; Martínez Aguilar, Centenario de las Leyes, p. 12.

³⁵Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 168.

³⁶Turlington, Foreign Creditors, p. 113.

³⁷Cosío Villegas, Diario Personal, p. 145.

the primary goal of the liberals in the early phase of the war. In addition Juárez warned that he would spare no effort in repressing those who refused to follow the law and to respect its authority.³⁸

Anastasio Parrodí was the acknowledged commander-in-chief of the liberal forces, and with troops from Michoacán mustered by Degollado, he soon had an army of 7,000 men.³⁹ Juárez and Parrodí planned to fall back to Celaya and Salamanca to draw the conservatives after them and to force them to overextend their supply lines. Unfortunately this strategy gave the clericals enough time to amass superior forces and to expand their area of domination.⁴⁰ While Parrodí maneuvered in southern Guanajuato, Juárez' few remaining forces faced continual harassment around San Agustín. In these minor engagements, Degollado offered to scout for Juárez, but the president considered Don Santos too valuable to risk.⁴¹ By the time the conservative army caught Parrodí at Salamanca, they had raised considerably superior numbers and dealt him a crippling defeat on March 11, 1858. He was trapped and forced to surrender the entire constitutional army the following week at Guadalajara.⁴²

³⁸Riva Palacio, México, V, 285.

³⁹Roeder, Juárez, I, 163.

⁴⁰Riva Palacio, México, V, 286.

⁴¹Cosío Villegas, Diario Personal, p. 158.

⁴²Roeder, Juárez, I, 163; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 177.

Juárez and his tiny remnant of an army retreated to Colima. On March 27, 1858 the president made Santos Degollado the new minister of war and commander-in-chief of the liberal army, which at the time consisted of 350 men and two cannon.⁴³ Don Santos accepted the appointment and said, "I dispense with trite phrases which excuse my temerity, and I simply take my soul in hand to present it in sacrifice to the Government, depository of the law, for which, and for my children, I desire a glorious death defending the cause of independence, of liberty, and of humanity."⁴⁴

On April 7 Juárez decreed that he would go to Veracruz to establish the seat of the constitutional government. He ordered Don Santos to remain behind in charge of the army and to conduct military operations in the interior.⁴⁵ Several scholars have suggested that the president's appointment was a shrewd political move, designed to use Degollado's popularity to gain support from the central states for the Juárez regime. Indeed, the president was virtually unknown at the time in Michoacán, while Don Santos had an impressive following of nearly fanatical supporters there.⁴⁶ This argument can be supported further by the facts that Degollado's

⁴³Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 28-29; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 177.

⁴⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 9-11.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁴⁶Walter V. Scholes, Mexican Politics During the Juárez Regime, 1855-1872 (Columbia, 1957), p. 28; Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, pp. 222-223.

military training was nil and his record in battles had been far from impressive up to that time. In short, his military career hardly made him an obvious choice for the post as head of the army.

Other historians have gone so far as to imply cowardice on Juárez' part, and jealousy of Degollado's popularity. One of Juárez' biographers infers that he was wearing a sardonic smile when he named Don Santos commander-in-chief.⁴⁷ A critic of the president points out that he retreated from the scene of the revolution, abandoning the responsibility of leading his cause, to seek instead the relative safety of Veracruz. In the liberal capital Juárez enjoyed comfortable living, a warm reception from the citizens, and security from danger and responsibility. During the early phase of the war, Veracruz was cut off from communication with the interior, making Degollado virtually the leader of the liberal effort. He had no army, no finances, no munitions, no food; he was surrounded by hostile forces and unsympathetic civilians; he bore all of the responsibility and risk, but carried none of the advantages.⁴⁸

Matías Romero unwittingly revealed Juárez' disjointed sense of danger when he asked the president whether he should accompany him to Veracruz or should remain with Degollado in the embattled interior. Juárez answered, ". . .that it did

⁴⁷Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 177.

⁴⁸Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 230; Hubert H. Bancroft, History of Mexico, Vol. V, 1824-1861, Vol. XIII of The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft (San Francisco, 1885), p. 743.

not seem convenient to him that I should go to Vera Cruz [sic] because of the danger there was of encountering unhealthy climates like Havana and New Orleans and to whose dangers I need not expose myself; but if I wanted to risk them, he would arrange my going." Romero chose to expose himself to the dangerous climates instead of the conservative armies, and accompanied the president from Manzanillo to Panama, then through Cuba to Veracruz.⁴⁹

Thus the liberals were out of power in early 1858. One may choose to apply any of several interpretations to President Benito Juárez' actions at this time. Was he riding along on Degollado's popularity or did he really believe he had chosen the best man for the position as commander-in-chief? Was he abandoning his responsibility for leadership of the cause or was he instead taking the course of action which would best guarantee his regime's preservation? Did he hope that Degollado would be eliminated by leaving him in the interior or did he sincerely believe that Don Santos could make headway against such tremendous odds? Regardless of what Juárez' motives may have been, they have gained some degree of validity through the simple fact that the liberal movement eventually triumphed under his presidency. One statement can be made without equivocation: Santos Degollado was left, in early 1858, with the responsibility of recruiting an army and actively leading the liberal cause through one of its most hopeless periods.

⁴⁹Cosío Villegas, Diario Personal, pp. 164-165.

CHAPTER IV

THE THREE YEARS' WAR: EARLY PHASE

At the time he assumed command of the constitutional army in March 1858, Santos Degollado seemed an unlikely choice to solve the military problems facing Mexican liberals. He was a self-admitted pacifist with no formal military training. He was a small, slender, quiet-looking man, who was nearly blind without the thick eyeglasses he wore constantly. He had short dark hair, a goatee, and a moustache. His gentle exterior gave not the slightest hint of his new violent occupation. He learned the military profession slowly, painfully, and half-reluctantly, but with unwavering self-discipline and confidence. He was continually conscious of the goals for which the liberals were fighting, and he tried to maintain the morale and enthusiasm of his men by periodically reminding them of these objectives. He hoped such inspiration would stave off the demoralizing monotony of purposeless day-to-day fighting.¹

Early in the war Degollado enjoyed continual success in recruiting soldiers by concentrating his efforts in the area of Michoacan, where he was best-known and most popular. The

¹Roeder, Juárez, I, 173-174.

conservatives accused Don Santos of using force to enlist troops,² but this is unlikely since his army never suffered from inordinately high desertions and since he so easily managed to replenish his forces with volunteers when they were depleted by losses in battle. It was simply not in his character to conscript by force.

Although manpower needs were adequately met during the first year of the war, the liberal movement faced serious problems in financial resources. Conservatives drew upon the vast wealth of their primary backers, the Church and the landed aristocracy. Liberals held the major Mexican port of foreign trade, Veracruz, and collected duties on all goods passing through it. But this income did not come into play for the constitutionalists during the first months of the struggle.³ Since Juárez had left Degollado in the interior with full authority to take whatever steps necessary to field a military machine, Don Santos imposed a forced loan of 100,000 pesos on the clergy in early 1858. In addition he exacted a contribution of horses from the large landowners.⁴

Later that year, on September 22, Miguel Blanco, a leading liberal general, levied another forced loan on the clergy in Michoacán which they refused to pay. Nevertheless he confiscated 500,000 pesos worth of valuables from the

²El Siglo, April 16, 1858, p. 2.

³Turlington, Foreign Creditors, p. 113.

⁴Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 160.

state's churches, sending part to liberals in the Federal District and part to Degollado in Guadaluajara.⁵ In December Don Santos imposed another loan on the clergy, this one for 2,500,000 pesos, the identical amount the Church had contributed to the conservatives in October. He warned that henceforth the clergy would be expected to donate equally to both sides.⁶

The crippling defeat and surrender of Parrodí's army in March 1858 had left Degollado with the primary responsibility of recruiting and organizing a new army. By June he had a force large enough to attack Guadaluajara, one of the conservatives' three major strongholds. Degollado employed a technique he was to use many times during the war, one which reveals his aversion for violence. On June 3, before laying siege to the city, Don Santos wrote to the opposing commander, Francisco G. Casanova. He attempted to persuade the conservative general to restore peace to Mexico by accepting the overwhelming choice of public opinion, which favored those who supported the Constitution of 1857 as the legitimate government.⁷ Casanova rejected the plea. Degollado would likely have been able to capture the city, but Miguel

⁵Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 167; Romero Flores, Historia de Morelia, pp. 143-144. Conservatives recovered some of these confiscated valuables six months later when they defeated Degollado in the battle of Tacubaya.

⁶Wilfred H. Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929 (Stanford, 1931), p. 18.

⁷Torre Villar, Triunfo Liberal, p. 64; Manuel Cambre, La Guerra de Tres Años (Guadaluajara, 1949), p. 105.

Miramón, the conservatives' best general, arrived with reinforcements and compelled the liberals to withdraw.

Miramón pursued Degollado southward until the liberals made a stand at the Barranca of Atenquique on July 2. Don Santos put one unit on each side of a large gorge and when Miramón attacked the first force, it fell back to join the other. Miramón thought the liberals had retreated and pushed no farther. The day ended with neither side having gained an advantage, but the following day both Miramón and Degollado claimed victory. It is not known which side withdrew first.⁸ Certainly neither army won a decisive victory, but Degollado had given ample notice that the liberals were back in the war. He had threatened Guadalajara and had escaped retribution. In addition he had tied up most of the conservative armies long enough to give liberal forces in other areas an opportunity to take the offensive. In June these liberal units won victories at San Diego and Santo Domingo, and they captured the important city of San Luis Potosí. In July they took Durango, then seized Tampico the following month.⁹

⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 18-23, is Miramón's report of the battle. Martínez Aguilar, Cen-tenario de las Leyes, p. 32, saw the battle as indecisive, but said Miramón withdrew first. Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 233, gave the victory to Degollado. Carlos Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, el Caudillo Conservador (Mexico, 1945), p. 59, contends that the liberals withdrew first.

⁹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 17; Roeder, Juárez, I, 183; Harper's, September, 1858, p. 546.

Don Santos kept up the momentum his armies had gained in the summer. On September 21 he defeated his old enemy Casanova at Cuevas de Techaluta, forcing the conservatives to retreat into Guadalajara. This time Degollado was confident he could capture the capital of Jalisco.¹⁰ He knew that Miramón's army, which had been trying to regain San Luis Potosí from Santiago Vidaurri, commander of the northern liberals, was by then marching southward. Miguel Blanco had attacked Mexico City and captured Chapultepec, forcing Miramón to ignore Guadalajara in order to rush to the defense of the capital.¹¹

After holding off a thirty-day siege, Casanova surrendered Guadalajara to the liberals on October 27, 1858. This was Degollado's first major victory in the Three Years' War.¹² By this time Miramón had secured Mexico City and was marching to relieve Casanova. His army was bolstered by the forces of Leonardo Márquez, one of the most controversial clerical generals.¹³ The approach of this superior enemy force prompted Degollado to abandon the city. He led his army toward Colima, as he had done after leaving his siege of Guadalajara the previous June. Again Miramón pursued the liberals, this time inflicting a minor defeat on December 14

¹⁰García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 25.

¹¹Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, p. 150.

¹²Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 748; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 31.

¹³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 40.

at San Miguel.¹⁴ Don Santos turned to face the conservative army at San Joaquín, in Colima, only five leagues from the Barranca of Atenquique. On December 26 Miramón crushed the constitutionalists, capturing 300 men and all of Degollado's artillery and munitions. The remnants of the liberal force scattered into Michoacán.¹⁵

The first year of the Three Years' War had set the pattern of warfare which was to follow. It was obvious that Mexico was now involved in full-scale civil war. Fighting in the Revolution of Ayutla had been chiefly guerrilla warfare with very few pitched battles between major armies. Many of the early liberal victories in the Reform, especially those in the north, were also won by guerrilla units.¹⁶ But in the southern interior, major battles such as the two sieges of Guadalajara, Barranca de Atenquique, Cuevas de Techaluta, and San Joaquín all were fought by armies of several thousand men. Even though these units were larger than they had been in the Revolution of Ayutla, they were still small and still of a guerrilla nature when compared to European and American armies. According to several estimates of the total forces on each side, no more than 40,000

¹⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 43.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 45; Melchor Alvarez, Historia Documentada de la Vida Pública del Gral. José Justo Alvarez, or, La Verdad sobre Algunos Acontecimientos de Importancia de la Guerra de Reforma (Mexico, 1905), p. 91; Roeder, Juárez, I, 187-188.

¹⁶Roeder, Juárez, I, 183.

men were in both armies after the first year.¹⁷ Not until the final months of the war did either side amass more than 10,000 men for a single operation. The forces of both sides were in transition from informal, semi-independent, guerrilla units to modern, organized armies. The guerrilla background of the liberal soldiers often made it difficult for Don Santos to instill the discipline and organization necessary for large-scale campaigns.¹⁸ That he was able to carry out such operations at all was a credit to his leadership and coordinational abilities.

With larger units and longer campaigns, arms and equipment came to play a more important role in the Three Years' War than in earlier wars. Infantry was used more for sieges, occupation, and battles near large cities. Both sides relied on cavalry in open-field engagements, far from major population centers. This dependence on mounted units where foot-soldiers were unavailable made horses an important factor in the war. Mules were necessary for hauling equipment and became an indispensable asset, since an army in the field had to be largely self-sustaining. For example, it was necessary to carry one's own forge to make horseshoes and equipment repairs. Good wagons were essential, as the French would find out five years later. Muzzle-loading muskets and fowling pieces, lances, and sabres were the most

¹⁷Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 247; Harper's, September, 1858, p. 546.

¹⁸Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 122-123.

common small arms. Artillery played a decisive role throughout the war, and the enemy's heavy guns were the most valuable prizes a general could capture in battle. Howitzers and cannon used in the field ranged as large as twenty-four pounders.¹⁹

During 1858 Degollado had organized a major army and inspired liberal forces throughout Mexico. He had captured the capital of Jalisco and won enough victories to give Benito Juárez sufficient time to consolidate the constitutional government in Veracruz. Don Santos carried tremendous authority and responsibility for the revolution at this time. He appointed men to military command and to civil posts as high as state governor, and he had the power to remove them as well. He issued decrees and manifestos which bore the weight of national law. It was Degollado, more than any other leader including Juárez, who kept the liberal cause alive.²⁰ But he had suffered a tremendous loss at San Joaquín and the end of the year found his army in shambles. The conservatives, due to the efforts of their leading general, Miguel Miramón, had regained the initiative. Miramón had twice chased Degollado from Guadalajara, crushed him at San Joaquín, saved Mexico City from Blanco, destroyed Vidaurri's army of the North, and recaptured San Luis Potosí.²¹

¹⁹Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 149-179, passim.

²⁰Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 17; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 29.

²¹Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 284.

With the liberals of the interior in full rout, Miramón decided to attack the liberal capital and stronghold at Veracruz.

When he returned to Mexico City in January 1859, after restoring Guadalajara and defeating Degollado's army, Miramón, barely twenty-seven years old, became the conservative president of Mexico. Zuloaga remained the titular head as far as a few groups were concerned, but he held no real power among conservatives for the next two years.²² Miramón set in motion his plans to capture Veracruz while the liberals were still reeling from their losses in the winter. He attacked the constitutional capital on March 18, initiating a series of events which led to the most controversial battle of the entire period of the Reform.²³

After the defeat at San Joaquín in December, Don Santos had returned to Michoacán and spent the next two months recruiting and reorganizing his army.²⁴ In March he defeated conservative units under Gregorio de Callejo, Tomás Mejía, and Manuel Calvo at Calamanda near Querétaro. He was about to follow up with the decisive blow when he received orders from President Juárez to attack Mexico City.²⁵ Although some authorities have argued that it was Degollado's idea

²²Luis Islas García, Miramón, Caballero del Infortunio (Mexico, 1957), p. 67; Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 285; Harper's, March, 1859, p. 544.

²³Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 159.

²⁴Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, p. 186.

²⁵Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 455.

to attack the capital, the liberal general was fully aware that his army had not sufficiently recovered from its losses in December to attempt such a massive campaign. He delayed for some time after receiving the order from Juárez, hoping to raise a minimum of 10,000 men for the siege. Don Santos also wanted to allow enough time for the conservative operation against Veracruz to unfold completely. He finally began his campaign into the Federal District in late March with three to six thousand men.²⁶

Critics have soundly condemned Juárez for ordering the attack on Mexico City. The president was informed of the weakened condition of Degollado's army. In addition, Veracruz was exceptionally well-defended and faced no real danger from Miramón's attack. Indeed, some liberal leaders had hopes that the conservative siege would backfire and result in a crippling defeat for Miramón.²⁷ Because of his unfounded fears, however, Juárez ordered Degollado to attack the capital, not with any real hope of capturing it, but to draw the conservatives away from Veracruz.²⁸ This strategy was useless, since Miramón had anticipated and accordingly planned for such action by the liberals. He had left 4,000 men at the capital and alerted Leonardo Márquez in

²⁶ José M. Vigil in Riva Palacio, México, V, pp. 358-359, contends that attacking Mexico City was entirely Degollado's idea. Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 123-124; Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 247; James Creelman, Díaz, Master of Mexico (New York, 1912), p. 108.

²⁷ Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 106.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 103, 118.

Guadalajara to be prepared to relieve Mexico City in case of attack. Finally Miramón knew that in an emergency he could force march to the capital from Veracruz in one day, if necessary.²⁹

General Degollado heard rumors that liberal sympathizers in Mexico City were prepared to revolt against the conservative occupation forces if a constitutional army would attack.³⁰ Having waited as long as possible to recruit men and raise supplies, Don Santos issued orders for his various units to invade the Valley of Mexico and join with liberal forces already there in preparation for the attack on the capital.³¹ Once in the Federal District, Degollado issued a decree on March 21 which he hoped would bring a spontaneous uprising of the citizens in and around Mexico City:

Mexican people!: a short and generous effort, and the chains which oppress us will fall without bloodshed; so that in March, 1859 our liberty may be guaranteed forever, as in September, 1821, our independence was assured! The latter without the former does not complete public happiness; but with the two, you will be the admiration of the world!³²

On April 2 the liberals sent a probing attack against the capital through San Cosme, which failed. The next day Don Santos told his men that the clergy was willing to sacrifice Mexico's nationality because it owed loyalty not to Mexico, but to Rome. He expressed confidence in his men,

²⁹Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 251.

³⁰Creelman, Díaz, p. 108.

³¹Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 329-330.

³²García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 62.

pointing out that by capturing Mexico City they could greatly hasten the end of the war.³³ But Don Santos was still hesitant about the whole operation. The unsuccessful attack through San Cosme and the arrival of more conservative forces under Márquez caused him to consider retreat. There had been no uprising in the city to accompany his attack, for the conservatives held too firm a grip on the capital. Degollado had 6,000 men and 20 cannon, while the clericals numbered 9,000 and had 90 cannon. In addition Miramón had raised the siege of Veracruz and was returning to the capital. But Don Santos received further orders from Juárez to continue the attack, despite the increasingly dangerous position.³⁴

The conservatives defending Mexico City were well-entrenched and the arrival of Márquez from Guadalajara placed Degollado's army on the defensive. Don Santos expressed the belief, one day before the decisive battle, that if his men could hold their positions at Tacubaya, north of the capital, they would still have some hope of victory. But if they broke and fell back, the enemy would overtake and destroy them.³⁵

The battle began on April 10 at Molino Prieto and lasted until noon the following day.³⁶ Although Márquez' attacking

³³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 62.

³⁴Polá, El Libro Rojo, II, 72; Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 102, 131-132.

³⁵Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 127, 331.

³⁶Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, pp. 79-80.

attacking force was smaller than the liberal army, he brilliantly deployed twenty-two artillery pieces to support his infantry and cavalry assaults. The conservatives cut off liberal escape routes, and by a lucky stroke they blew up the liberals' ammunition depot.³⁷ Without ammunition the liberals were routed, giving a hard-fought, but complete, victory to the clericals. General Márquez did not exaggerate in his following statement about the battle:

The arms of the Supreme Government have triumphed completely over the bandits who besieged the capital of the Republic. The valiant troops, which I am proud to command, have obtained this victory, fighting for ground hand to hand; and in the battle, not only did they defeat the enemy, but also they took by force all his artillery, ammunition, wagons, armament and the rest of his military stores, counting among his losses the dress coat and sash of Division General which the infamous Degollado has the impudence to wear without having served his country or ever belonged to the noble military.

Colonel Amado Antonio Guadarrama had captured a mule carrying Degollado's uniform, papers, and personal belongings; Márquez sent these into Mexico City where they were displayed in the National Palace.³⁸ In addition the conservatives recaptured some of the Church valuables which had been confiscated by Blanco in Morelia the previous September and sent to Don Santos.

Ocampo insisted that although the constitutional army was overwhelmingly defeated, it had made an orderly retreat from Tacubaya. General Degollado and José Justo Alvarez

³⁷Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 760-761.

³⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 65-66.

were the last liberals to leave the battlefield. Don Santos had hoped to witness the arrival of Miramón, whom he had learned was enroute from Veracruz, because having drawn the conservatives away from the liberal port would represent a triumph for Degollado, despite the defeat in battle.³⁹

Don Santos had been unable to take along his wounded when the liberals retreated, so he left them behind in improvised hospitals under the care of the chief liberal medical officer and three assistants. Several medical students and doctors came out to the battlefield from Mexico City to treat the wounded soldiers of both armies, and some of the neighboring citizens joined in the humanitarian effort.⁴⁰

Miramón did arrive at the scene of the battle shortly after Degollado had retired. He instructed General Márquez to execute the liberal prisoners. Apparently Miramón did not intend for the command to be carried to the extremes that Márquez employed.⁴¹ First Don Leonardo executed the liberal general, Marcial Lazcano, and four other officers. Then he had all the liberal prisoners shot, including the wounded men in hospital beds. Finally he murdered the doctors, medical students, and civilians who were attending the

³⁹Vásquez, Obras de Ocampo, II, 212-213; Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 135.

⁴⁰Francisco Zarco, Las Matanzas de Tacubaya (Mexico, 1958), pp. 16-17. This account by a liberal was originally written immediately after the battle and the executions.

⁴¹Roeder, Juárez, I, 198-199.

casualties of both sides.⁴² Included in this last group were several young boys, a Franciscan monk who had said mass for the liberals, three Americans and a few other foreigners, and a local doctor who was from one of the most distinguished families in Mexico.⁴³

Estimates of the total number of men executed by the conservatives after the battle range from a dozen to over a hundred, but the most reliable sources indicate that at least fifty were killed.⁴⁴ Indignation spread to the United States, where the executions were labeled "an indiscriminate slaughter." President James Buchanan asked the United States Congress for authorization to enter Mexico with military forces to exact indemnification from the conservatives.⁴⁵ Although Márquez was highly praised by clericals throughout Mexico for his victory, he earned the sobriquet "Tiger of Tacubaya" for his butchery.⁴⁶

It is noteworthy that Márquez, and not Miramón, was the favorite general of the clergy. After Tacubaya he took every

⁴²Zarco, Matanzas de Tacubaya, p. 18; Vásquez, Obras de Ocampo, II, 212-213.

⁴³Zarco, Matanzas de Tacubaya, pp. 19-24; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 82; James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902, 10 Vols. (Washington, 1904), V, 565, 645.

⁴⁴Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, p. 80; Vásquez, Obras de Ocampo, II, 212-213; Zarco, Matanzas de Tacubaya, pp. 23-24; Creelman, Díaz, p. 108.

⁴⁵Harper's, June, 1859, p. 119; Richardson, Messages of the Presidents, V, 567-568.

⁴⁶Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, p. 80; Creelman, Díaz, p. 108.

opportunity to enhance his reputation for shooting prisoners and murdering political opponents. When conservatives lost control of the capital in 1860, he continued to lead guerrilla bands in the central provinces. He was directly responsible for the deaths of Ocampo, Degollado, and Leandro Valle, a rising young liberal officer. When the French invaded Mexico in 1862, he joined forces with them and fought for Emperor Maximilian. When the emperor was captured by Juarez in 1867, Márquez fled to Havana where he spent the last forty years of his life.⁴⁷

The "Assassin of Tacubaya," as Degollado called Márquez at times, was responsible for the mass executions following April 11. He later tried to place the blame on Miramón for having ordered the executions, but it is evident that the conservative president never expected such a broad interpretation of his order. When Miramón learned of what his subordinate was doing he personally released several liberals whom Márquez had scheduled to die the following day.⁴⁸ Miramón was the youngest and most capable general in the clerical army. He was a man of chivalry and unsurpassed military skill. After the liberal victory in 1860, he fled to Europe on a French warship. He returned with the French invasion two years later and became Maximilian's leading

⁴⁷Parkes, History of Mexico, pp. 244-274, passim.

⁴⁸Carlos E. Castañeda, ed., La Guerra de Reforma Según el Archivo del General D. Manuel Doblado, Vol. III of Nuevos Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México, 3 Vols. (San Antonio, 1930), p. 114; Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 73.

Mexican general. In June 1867 he was captured with the emperor and executed by order of President Juárez.⁴⁹

After the battle of Tacubaya and the outcry against the executions by Márquez, conservatives were quick to point out that liberals were guilty of having taken similar measures. When Degollado had captured Guadalajara in late 1858, he had promised the conservative commander that his life would be spared if he surrendered. Against Don Santos' orders, however, a liberal officer executed the conservative. A few days later Degollado had stood helplessly while a liberal mob hanged two conservative criminals.⁵⁰ Two days after his defeat at Tacubaya, Don Santos executed three men whom the clericals argued were innocent.⁵¹ Among his comrades, at least, General Degollado was known for fair treatment of prisoners. In July 1859 the poet laureate of the liberals, Guillermo Prieto, composed a poem in Tampico praising Don Santos' clemency toward his enemy.⁵² And as far as international opinion was concerned, the liberals had a much more humanitarian image than their opponents. The constitutional cause, although it suffered a great military defeat at

⁴⁹Simpson, Many Mexicos, pp. 280, 285; Parkes, History of Mexico, pp. 243-273, passim.

⁵⁰Roeder, Juárez, I, 199. Degollado broke the officer who was responsible for executing the conservative commander, but the man later regained his rank through contributions to the cause.

⁵¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 84.

⁵²Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 147.

Tacubaya, gained a significant propaganda victory because of Márquez' brutality.⁵³

In the immediate reality of conditions, however, the military victory carried more weight than the propaganda victory. Blame for the defeat of his army fell on General Degollado. But critics of Benito Juárez have since tried to shift guilt to the president. He has been accused of ordering Degollado to attack Mexico City without adequate preparations and forces, of exposing Degollado's liberal army unnecessarily when in reality Veracruz "was in a brilliant state of defense," of missing an ideal opportunity to deal Miramón a major defeat at the liberal port, and of being so concerned for his own person and position that he caused the disaster of April 11 through his final orders. Don Santos, on the other hand, had sacrificed his reputation in following those orders and received blame for the defeat.⁵⁴

It is obvious that some of the responsibility for the loss at Tacubaya must fall to Degollado. But the outcome of the battle cannot be simply written off, as one historian contends, to Don Santos' "incompetency."⁵⁵ He had certainly proven himself as an organizer and logistical tactician. And he had won battles, albeit fewer and less significant than those he had lost. At Tacubaya his army was entrenched and superior in numbers to the attacking conservatives. Yet

⁵³Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 30.

⁵⁴Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 138, 141.

⁵⁵Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 760.

the clerical forces won a resounding victory. One could point to any of a number of reasons. Perhaps the conservatives were better trained and disciplined (Don Santos was still in the process of rebuilding his army after the disaster at San Joaquín). Perhaps the liberals had overextended their supply lines. Possibly the chance explosion of the liberal ammunition depot was the deciding factor. It may have been that the battle was a "terrible demonstration of the folly of attempting large-scale operations with the inadequate resources and inflated tactics of guerilla [sic] warfare."⁵⁶ Whether Degollado deserved blame for the rout at Tacubaya or not, the battle did cast serious doubt, for the first time, on his ability as a battlefield commander.

In April 1859 Don Santos retreated from the Federal District to Morelia, then on to Colima.⁵⁷ He blamed his recent losses, including Tacubaya, on a lack of revenue.⁵⁸ This same obstacle hindered his attempts to rebuild the constitutional forces. The army, which had so often been a "phoenix"⁵⁹ after crushing defeats, did not rematerialize after the catastrophe of April 11. Don Santos had lost considerable prestige at Tacubaya and he had completely exhausted the liberals' financial resources. Despite all his

⁵⁶Roeder, Juárez, I, 197.

⁵⁷Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, p. 210.

⁵⁸Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 143.

⁵⁹Sierra, Political Evolution, p. 286.

efforts throughout April and May, he was unable to rebuild the liberal army.

Consequently, General Degollado went to Veracruz in early June to regain face with his government and to solicit funds for recruiting and equipping more forces. He convinced Juárez that the constitutional army had been sacrificed to save the regime in Veracruz.⁶⁰ And he argued that it could not be rebuilt without more revenue and new incentive. Together with Miguel Lerdo de Tejada and Melchor Ocampo, from the cabinet, Degollado saw this as an ideal time to further the reform aspect of the liberal movement in hopes that it would revitalize the bogged-down military effort. A series of reform laws had been written and readied for promulgation in late 1858, but Juárez had held them back for legalistic reasons. Finally in July, after the continued pressure from the authors of the laws, Ocampo and Lerdo de Tejada, was magnified by Degollado's support, Juárez agreed to issue the reform measures. They were promulgated over a period of seventeen months, with the first law appearing on July 12, 1859.⁶¹

The Reform Laws were the culmination of the emancipation of civil power from the Church, a process which had been initiated by the Constitution of 1857. They completed, in a final decisive sweep, what had been a gradual method of

⁶⁰Roeder, Juárez, I, 202.

⁶¹Martínez Aguilar, Centenario de las Leyes, pp. 17-18; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 31-33.

separating the Church and State. Some of the basic principles of the laws were nationalization of Church property; exclaustration of monks; establishment of civil registry for birth, death, and marriage; secularization of cemeteries and public holidays; and finally, freedom of religion.⁶²

Several liberal leaders deserve credit for encouraging Juárez to publish the Reform Laws, including José Justo Alvarez, Juan José de la Garza, Ocampo, and Lerdo de Tejada. It cannot be disputed that "liberals in general shared similar views [on the Reform Laws], but . . . it took the impetus given by Degollado to embody these opinions into law."⁶³ Don Santos reportedly asked Juárez, "Let me publish the new laws and if they produce no result, have me shot."⁶⁴

Manuel Ruiz, the minister of justice at the time, credited Degollado with primary responsibility for the promulgation of the laws, despite claims by Juárez and others to the contrary. Several days before the president publicly announced the new measures, Don Santos had written to Manuel Doblado in Guanajuato, "I now have the satisfaction of letting you know that my journey [to Veracruz] had good results and that we can all hope for a quick end to the civil war and the triumph of good principles." He also explained that

⁶²Roeder, Juárez, I, 205; Martínez Aguilar, Centenario de las Leyes, p. 18.

⁶³Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 145. Quote from Scholes, Mexican Politics, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁴Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 32-33.

he had an agent in the United States negotiating a loan which would provide enough resources to assure a liberal victory.⁶⁵

Degollado was proud to have given new purpose to his cause. If there is any time in his career when Don Santos can be considered a radical, it is here. His decisive role in the promulgation of the Reform Laws clearly reveals that he had abandoned his earlier reservations about complete extermination of the Church's civil power. Yet in spite of this stand, Degollado was still a religious man. Unlike some liberals, he did not see any inconsistency between his spiritual life and his part in the war on the Church.⁶⁶

President Juárez received credit for the Reform Laws, although he had not written them and had only issued them with reluctance. His generals in the field, not he, would have to face the consequences of a conservative backlash. His only role, that of the figurehead who announced the laws, could have been performed by anyone. The true moral commitment and the decisive steps had been taken by Ocampo, Lerdo de Tejada, and especially Santos Degollado.⁶⁷

The Reform Laws gave the liberals new incentive. But the constitutional army was not so awesomely inspired that it rose up like an invincible juggernaut and devastated its

⁶⁵Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 31-33. Quote from Castañeda, Guerra de Reforma, pp. 71-72.

⁶⁶Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 158.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

enemies in an irresistible march to victory. It is true that some alienated liberals returned to the fold. Degollado himself believed that the end of the war would come quickly. But contemporaries misjudged the effect the laws would have on conservatives. For if the laws gave the liberals more of an incentive to fight, they also gave the Church more reason to resist. The liberals still faced a long uphill battle. What the Reform Laws did, then, was to bring the Three Years' War into its decisive phase. They erased almost all avenues of compromise and intensified the already extreme polarization of factions in Mexico. The publication of the laws was tantamount to a demand by the liberals for unconditional surrender.

CHAPTER V

DEADLOCK IN THE THREE YEARS' WAR

In July 1859 Santos Degollado left Veracruz to rejoin his army of the interior. He had helped to bring new meaning to the liberal cause by expediting the publication of the Reform Laws. Now he traveled to Tampico, then on to Ciudad Victoria by the end of the month. In early August he established his general headquarters in San Luis Potosí.¹ He remained there for the next three months directing liberal operations in central Mexico.²

During this time the constitutionalists received some encouraging news. Jesús González Ortega, a young northern general, gave Miramón his first defeat. On August 10, 1859 this new liberal hero, who was ultimately to replace Degollado, joined forces with Manuel Doblado, amassed an army three times the size of Miramón's, and routed the conservatives at Silao.³

For the most part, however, the outlook was bleak for the constitutional army. In September Degollado pointed out his number one problem, the same obstacle which had plagued

¹Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 147, 149.

²Castañeda, Guerra de Reforma, pp. 100-150, passim.

³Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 169.

him throughout the war: "This lack of money paralyzes all my projects and has me in perpetual bitterness." Having failed in his efforts to secure a loan in the United States, he sought creditors in Zacatecas, but these hopes also fell through.⁴

Another problem developed in September. Santiago Vidaurri, a leading northern liberal general whose personal ambitions had endangered the constitutionalists' unity on other occasions, began causing new difficulties. He had joined the liberals in the Revolution of Ayutla and captured Monterrey, but later in 1855 he led opposition to Comonfort's regime. He regained the confidence of liberals in early 1858 by opposing Miramón, although he suffered a disastrous defeat and lost control of San Luis Potosí.⁵

By September 1859 Vidaurri had rebuilt his army of the north and had regained control of most of northern Mexico. But because he believed his country should have a progressive dictatorship instead of a democracy and because he had hopes of becoming that dictator himself, he withdrew his forces from support of the Juárez government and declared himself head of a new republic of Nueva León and Coahuila. Degollado officially removed Vidaurri from command in September and eventually drove him from Mexico, but the loss of the northern army greatly weakened the liberal war effort.⁶

⁴Castañeda, Guerra de Reforma, p. 106.

⁵Sierra, Political Evolution, pp. 263, 267, 284.

⁶Ibid., p. 291; Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 320; Roeder, Juárez, I, 211; Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 157.

In the first week of November 1859 Degollado again took the field. He left his general headquarters in San Luis Potosí and set out for Guanajuato.⁷ Knowing full well that Miramón's army was in the area, hopefully still weakened from the defeat by González Ortega three months earlier, Don Santos went in search of revenue and supplies. Despite the recent loss of Vidaurri's forces, he doubtless felt confident that he had good chances of victory in an encounter with the conservative president, because he had been rebuilding his army for seven months.

On November 12 at Estancia de las Vacas, between Querétaro and Celaya, the two adversaries met once again. Don Santos asked Miramón to negotiate with him in hopes of convincing the conservative general to accept the Constitution of 1857 and to put an end to the war and its bloodshed. Although Miramón rejected this plea, Degollado came away from the meeting convinced that, "Miramón is gallant, and that in his way and with his shortcomings, he desires an end to the war which he confesses cannot end but with the triumph of the liberal ideas."⁸

As the two generals parted, Miramón told Don Santos, "Tomorrow I will defeat you as surely as three and two are five." Degollado's reply gave a vivid self-appraisal of his role in the struggle, "My duty is not to conquer, but to

⁷Castañeda, Guerra de Reforma, p. 163.

⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 91-96; Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 30.

fight for principles which, in the end, have to triumph because they are of a magnificent revolution which, in the moral order, is taking place throughout the country."⁹

Many of Degollado's contemporaries and colleagues, including one of his strongest supporters, José Justo Alvarez, believed that Don Santos' meeting with Miramón had been a mistake. It was poor strategy resulting from his lack of knowledge in military affairs and from his desire to avoid bloodshed. Alvarez contended that it gave the enemy encouragement by hinting at an unwillingness to fight.¹⁰

The following morning, November 13, at 7:00 o'clock the two opposing armies clashed in a three-hour battle. Miramón's force was only one third as large as the 6,000-man liberal army. Degollado hit Miramón's left flank and temporarily split the conservatives, but the commander of the attacking liberal unit was killed and Manuel Doblado who was supposed to follow up into the breach fell back instead. This gave Miramón enough time to redeploy his artillery and launch a counterattack which caused the advance liberal troops to retreat, spreading panic through the ranks. Constitutional soldiers ignored the orders of their officers, and conservatives broke through Degollado's center, routing the entire liberal army. General Degollado, with a few men, attempted

⁹Quoted in Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, p. 174.

¹⁰Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 199.

to hold the line from several houses, but was forced to withdraw.¹¹

The results of the battle were disastrous for the liberals. They lost 30 artillery pieces, 43 munitions wagons, and 500 arms. Conservatives captured as many as 420 prisoners, including General José Justo Alvarez, who lost a leg in the battle. Degollado later praised Miramón for the good treatment these prisoners received. Estancia de las Vacas was heralded as Miramón's greatest victory. In a matter of hours he tactically destroyed an army which Santos Degollado had spent seven months building. In addition the victory gave new life to the dying conservative cause.¹²

As one of the last to leave the battlefield, Degollado was closely pursued and narrowly escaped capture. When he retreated through Celaya with a few liberal officers, several "hired assassins" fired at him, missing their target only by inches.¹³ Don Santos returned to San Luis Potosí, where he reported the defeat at Estancia to his government in Veracruz. He answered accusations which had been leveled at him regarding the battle by announcing that he would travel

¹¹Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, pp. 282, 286; Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, III, 93; Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 201-202.

¹²Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 202-203; Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, p. 286; Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 771; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 103.

¹³Pérez Verdía, Historia de Jalisco, III, 93; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 94.

wherever necessary to stand trial for his conduct.¹⁴ He told his few remaining troops that, concerning the stigma attached to all their names by the defeat, "We have only one path to reparation: battle. Women weep, men take revenge."¹⁵

Degollado's papers, which were captured at Estancia, revealed what some of his plans for the war had been before the crushing defeat. Still seeking a loan from the United States, he also expected England to recognize the Juárez regime soon, and would seek financial support there as well. In addition he indicated that Juárez had approved his plan for enlisting four to five thousand soldiers and officers from the United States, and he would soon work out the details of this scheme.¹⁶ None of these plans ever materialized, possibly due to the dark outlook of the liberal cause after Estancia.

Degollado's military reputation was finished by this debacle, and never again in the Three Years' War did he actively command troops in battle.¹⁷ Miramón had effected the first part of his master plan for victory, which was to destroy Degollado's army, then to sweep the other liberal forces in the west back to the Pacific, and finally to

¹⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 96.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁶Genaro García, ed., Causa Instruída contra el General Leonardo Márquez por Graves Delitos del Orden Militar, Vol. VIII of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México (Mexico, 1906), pp. 287-288.

¹⁷Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 235.

capture Veracruz. He initiated the second phase by retaking Guadalajara, but then jeopardized his hopes of securing control of the west by removing from command Leonardo Márquez, the most effective general in that area. Márquez was court-martialed for having tried to negotiate a peace settlement and for having seized foreign-owned silver.¹⁸ Miramón then began preparing for the third phase of his plan, another siege of Veracruz.

By the end of the year conditions in Mexico were even more confusing. The conservative war effort, which had been on the verge of collapse, had been revitalized by some significant victories, especially Estancia de las Vacas. There was a feeling of harmony among most conservative leaders, with the exception of Miramón and Márquez. Also the conservatives still had strong backing from the Church and from most foreign powers. The liberals, on the other hand, were out of money and split by disunity. Their army had been demoralized by the defection of Vidaurri's northern forces and had been destroyed at Estancia. Although they controlled twenty-three of the twenty-eight states and all ports except San Blas, they were beginning to lose ground. The conservatives still held a sure grip on Mexico City and were planning a new attempt to capture Veracruz.¹⁹

In light of these circumstances, liberals agreed that the constitutional army needed strong professional

¹⁸Sierra, Political Evolution, pp. 290-291. See also note 16.

¹⁹Harper's, December 1859, p. 116.

reorganization. Each defeat made it increasingly difficult for Degollado to rebuild his forces. On December 15, 1859 the liberal minister of war called Degollado to Veracruz to plan new strategy.²⁰ Don Santos left for the capital five days later after pledging to the state governors and military leaders that he would propose a method of ending the war while assuring the perpetuation of liberal goals. Although he did not explain what his plan was, he vowed that if it was not accepted, he would turn over his generalship to another and serve as a common soldier until their cause was won.²¹

When he arrived in Veracruz, Degollado was appointed minister of foreign relations, a position which his friend Melchor Ocampo had just resigned.²² Ocampo had become the target of bitter criticism for his role in negotiating and signing the proposed McLane-Ocampo Treaty with the United States. Although it is unquestionable that the liberals were in serious need of new organization and strategy, it is also probable that the government leaders anticipated Miramón's coming attack on their capital and preferred having their leading general on hand to command the city's defense.

Miramón's army began its second siege of Veracruz in February 1860. From the beginning it had little hope of

²⁰Roeder, Juárez, I, 244; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 99.

²¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 100-105.

²²Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 221.

success, and Santos Degollado thought that the effort might finish the conservatives. Miramón's force numbered 7,000 men with 40 cannon. While the liberals had only 4,500 men, they had gathered 154 artillery pieces; they had stored sufficient food, water, and ammunition; and they had built well-fortified defensive positions. If Miramón were not destroyed by the overwhelmingly superior liberal firepower, he would certainly be driven off by lack of provisions, bad climate, and disease.²³

General Miramón realized some of the problems he faced. A long siege would be to his disadvantage, so he planned to capture the liberal capital quickly with the aid of an assault from the sea. He had acquired two ships in Cuba, named them the Miramón and the Marqués de la Habana, and provisioned them with ammunition and supplies which he knew his army would need. Under the command of Tomás Marín, the two vessels arrived at Veracruz in late February.²⁴

On February 24 Juárez issued a proclamation declaring the two conservative ships to be pirates. Several American vessels were in the port at the time, including the frigate Savannah and the corvettes Saratoga and Preble. The United States had formally recognized Juárez as the legitimate president of Mexico almost a year earlier. Degollado met with Captain Joseph R. Jarvis, the senior naval officer, and

²³Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 407.

²⁴Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 778; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 207.

gave him a copy of Juárez' proclamation. Don Santos asked the captain to cut off the conservative attack from the sea, but Jarvis answered that he could not interfere unless Marín attempted to blockade the port and prevent American trade.²⁵

On March 6 the Saratoga, under Commander Thomas Turner, and two American merchant steamers, Indianola and Wave, approached the conservative ships to determine their intent. When Marín opened fire on the Americans, Turner returned fire and captured the two vessels. Jarvis sent the Miramón and the Marqués to the United States as prizes and their crews were tried as pirates. A United States District Court eventually released the conservatives, but the United States Senate formally approved the actions of Jarvis and Turner.²⁶

The loss of the two ships and their cargoes of ammunition forced Miramón to raise his siege and return to Mexico City. In retaliation to United States' interference he ordered the confiscation of all American property and the deportation of Americans from Mexico.²⁷ While he had been engaged in the futile campaign against Veracruz, liberals had been regaining ground throughout the country. González Ortega held Durango and Manuel Doblado controlled Guanajuato. In January 1860 Zacatecas fell to the liberals and in March

²⁵Smart, Viva Juárez, pp. 207-208; Edward J. Berbusse, "The Origins of the McLane-Ocampo Treaty of 1859," The Americas, XIV, (January, 1958), 240.

²⁶Harper's, May 1860, p. 834; Smart, Viva Juárez, pp. 208-212.

²⁷Harper's, May 1860, p. 834.

they invaded Jalisco.²⁸ Although these victories were not enough to crush the conservatives, they did manage to ruin Miramón's campaign plan.

While Degollado's primary mission in Veracruz was the formulation of more effective military strategy, he was, nevertheless, minister of foreign affairs and as such had inherited from Ocampo the touchy issue of the McLane-Ocampo Treaty. The United States had officially recognized the Juárez government on April 6, 1859.²⁹ President Buchanan had sent Robert McLane as minister to Veracruz. On December 14, 1859 McLane signed a treaty with Ocampo which gave the United States the right to cross freely the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and to cross from the Gulf of California to Arizona. In addition the United States acquired the right to enter Mexico to protect her own citizens and property. In return Mexico was to receive \$2,000,000, and the United States was to assume the debt of another \$2,000,000 in American claims.³⁰

For his part in the treaty, Ocampo was bitterly attacked by many fellow liberals and finally was forced to resign. Mexicans on both sides in the war denounced the treaty for sacrificing their country's national sovereignty. More

²⁸Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, pp. 421-423.

²⁹Alfonso Teja Zabre, Historia de México, 10 Vols. (Mexico, 1933), II, 56.

³⁰Agustín Cue Cánovas, El Tratado McLane-Ocampo; Juárez, los Estados Unidos, y Europa (Mexico, 1956), p. 247; (for the complete text of the treaty see pp. 196-206); Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 36.

recently, however, the treaty has been defended on the grounds that it would have preserved Mexico's national sovereignty. It was common knowledge that the conservatives were encouraging European powers to intervene in Mexico in hopes that they would establish a foreign monarchy and crush the liberal movement. The McLane-Ocampo Treaty sought to forestall such European interference by giving the liberals enough funds to bring the war to a quick end, to reestablish stability, and to begin payment on foreign debts. Thus the treaty sought to preserve Mexico's national dignity by preventing European intervention, even if by so doing it brought on a less humiliating and less threatening intervention by the United States.³¹

Because the liberals were in desperate need of funds, Degollado wrote in February to José María Mata, a Mexican agent in Washington, and instructed him to negotiate for a \$500,000 loan on the basis of the \$2,000,000 to be received from the yet-to-be-ratified McLane-Ocampo Treaty.³² Mata failed and on May 31, 1869 the United States Senate rejected the treaty. America's northern states refused to accept the treaty for fear that it would benefit the southern slave states by increasing their area of influence.³³

At one of Juárez' cabinet meetings, on March 13, 1860, Degollado proposed a new stand on the course of the war. He

³¹Cue Cánovas, McLane-Ocampo, pp. 246-247.

³²Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 37.

³³Cue Cánovas, McLane-Ocampo, pp. 239-241; Turlington, Foreign Creditors, p. 123.

suggested an armistice of six months to a year, during which time both sides would hold elections, a congress would be called, and the constitution would be changed. Juárez and the rest of the cabinet, with the single exception of Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, voted down the proposal.³⁴

The following day, however, Juárez appointed Degollado and José Emparán to meet with two of Miramón's commissioners to discuss a negotiated peace. The conservatives were unwilling to accept the liberal principles embodied in the Constitution of 1857, so the meeting closed without having reached any agreement.³⁵ It is noteworthy, especially in light of subsequent events in the fall, that Juárez was at all willing to consider compromise.

By the middle of March the conservatives had abandoned their siege of Veracruz and were returning to Mexico City. Degollado had finished his work in the liberal capital also, and he traveled to Tampico to reassume command of the constitutional army. In April he reestablished his general headquarters at San Luis Potosí.³⁶

Throughout the summer neither side was able to gain any advantage. Miramón's army had exhausted itself in the offensive against Veracruz. The liberal army had been destroyed at Estancia de las Vacas. The loan from the United States,

³⁴Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 38.

³⁵Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 38; Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 219.

³⁶Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, pp. 339, 364.

which liberals hoped would enable them to rebuild their forces, fell through when the McLane-Ocampo Treaty was rejected. In this stalemate the conservatives held the upper hand. They needed only to keep on the defensive and hold their few positions, for eventually the prolongation of disorder would provoke a foreign intervention. And in Europe the conservatives already had the powerful support of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition European rulers, especially Louis Napoleon of France, had hopes of using Mexico for transplanting monarchy into the Western Hemisphere, a scheme which the Mexican conservatives also favored. Liberals, on the other hand, had to take the offensive and return stability to the country if they were to survive. Their party and their reforms would be the first targets of a European invasion.³⁷

In August 1860 Degollado outlined the new liberal campaign plan, which he hoped would bring quick victory. Having failed himself to overthrow the conservatives, Don Santos now voluntarily selected Jesús González Ortega to lead a major operation against the remaining clerical strongholds in Guadalajara and Mexico City.³⁸ Degollado's army of the interior was to defeat Miramón's reserve force under General Alfaro. He would then join with González Ortega's northern army, composed of forces from Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, and Durango, and together they would destroy

³⁷Roeder, Juárez, I, 243-244.

³⁸Ibid., I, 245. The conservatives still held Puebla also.

Miramón's troops. Then while the army of the west, composed of units from Jalisco, Colima, Zamora, and Sinaloa, held itself in reserve, González Ortega would lead the other two armies in a siege against Mexico City.³⁹

But Don Santos and his subordinates despaired. They had a viable strategy, but no means of implementing it. The liberal army was in beggarly condition, completely unable to undertake a major campaign.⁴⁰ It was little consolation that the conservatives had also exhausted their resources. Degollado knew that while his opponents could afford to wait, he must attack, for delay threatened the liberal movement almost as surely as military defeat. Without money his cause would die, while with it there was some hope.

On August 29, 1860 General Degollado wrote to González Ortega from Guanajuato asking his opinion on a scheme for raising the necessary revenue. Don Santos believed that since no other source of funds was available to the liberals, it would be proper to seize 200,000 pesos from one of the conductas (silver shipments) from the mines in Zacatecas or Aguascalientes while it was enroute to Tampico on the east coast. This was risky because foreign powers owned the silver, and confiscating it could lead to international problems. By this time most of the diplomatic corps had rejected Miramón for Juárez, but seizing a conducta might destroy the

³⁹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 112.

⁴⁰Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 35-36.

possibility of recognition by England and others.⁴¹ Indeed, such a seizure by Leonardo Márquez had led to his court-martial and had caused some European nations to become disenchanted with the conservatives.⁴² Don Santos suffered much mental anguish over the plan, but before he could reach a decision, events forced his hand.

On September 4 Manuel Doblado, who was also in Guanajuato, ordered his subordinate, General Ignacio Echagaray, to seize a conducta from Zacatecas somewhere between San Luis Potosí and Tampico. Doblado confided that the matter could decide the life or death of the Mexican Republic.⁴³ Five days later Echagaray captured the conducta at Laguna Seca, near San Luis Potosí, and confiscated its shipment of approximately 1,125,000 pesos in silver.⁴⁴

On September 10 Doblado informed General Degollado of his orders to Echagaray. He explained that he was fully aware of the possible consequences of his act, but he believed that capturing the conducta was the only means liberals had of ending the misery and anarchy of the war. Doblado saw only two choices for the constitutional cause. It could disband its forces and throw away their three years of bloody

⁴¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 114-115.

⁴²Roeder, Juárez, I, 245-246.

⁴³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 123.

⁴⁴Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 223; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 36-37; Carl H. Bock, Prelude to Tragedy, the Negotiation and Breakdown of the Tripartite Convention of London, October 31, 1861 (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 60-61.

sacrifice when the movement was finally close to victory. Or it could permit its army to take advantage of whatever resources it might encounter and to take whatever steps necessary, within the limits of morality and discipline, to perpetuate their struggle. Doblado argued that since the conservatives only controlled three major cities, the liberals had to act quickly to end the war. He believed that the funds from the conducta would provide ample resources for a final decisive campaign, and he was willing to stand trial for his action if it were disapproved by Degollado.⁴⁵

Doblado's move wiped away Don Santos' indecision. The commander-in-chief may even have looked upon Doblado's offer to face a trial as a challenge to his own devotion to the cause.⁴⁶ He answered the report on September 12 by informing Doblado, "I approve your conduct, I take upon myself the full weight of responsibility, and I declare you free from that responsibility which you could have borne for having taken so grave and serious an action," and furthermore that, "you are free from this moment from any charge, and that the Supreme Government has to blame only me and submit me to the crucible of a trial."⁴⁷

Don Santos reasoned that Doblado was innocent of any misconduct because the commander-in-chief had given him

⁴⁵García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 124-126.

⁴⁶Roeder, Juárez, I, 246.

⁴⁷García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 128.

unlimited authority to take whatever actions he thought necessary. In addition, Degollado had been informed of the affair early enough so that he could have ordered the silver returned, but did not do so. He agreed with Doblado that in light of a threatened foreign invasion, continual bloodshed and destruction from the war, and the absolute need to quickly establish a solid peace, he dared not vacillate any longer.⁴⁸

In his letter to Doblado, Don Santos pledged to use all his powers to satisfy the foreign owners of the conducta in order to avert an international crisis. If a "victim" were needed to appease them, he promised to step down from command to face trial and suffer a criminal's fate, for, "Posterity will do me justice and will approve the fruit of my great sacrifice."⁴⁹

When President Juárez received word of the seizure of the conducta, he immediately ordered Degollado to return the funds.⁵⁰ The British minister, George B. Mathew, sent a consul to receive the English portion, 400,000 pesos, and Don Santos promptly returned that amount.⁵¹ He realized that British recognition could come at any time, but such an incident could ruin that possibility. In addition if Britain were seriously provoked, she could easily blockade Mexican

⁴⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 128.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 129.

⁵⁰Creelman, Díaz, p. 112.

⁵¹Bock, Prelude to Tragedy, p. 61.

ports, cutting off the liberals' only source of income. But the remaining portion, over 700,000 pesos, Degollado used to equip the constitutional army in order to launch a full-scale offensive.⁵²

Fellow officers, as well as his enemies, criticized Degollado for the capture of foreign-owned money. In self-defense Don Santos issued a manifesto which emotionally and articulately presented his case,

With my eyes fixed on my cause, with my heart filled with hope and faith, after each defeat I have risen like a promise of triumph, and my cry has been an invocation to battle and a call to patriotism . . . The dispersion of twenty thousand men over these exhausted villages, the transformation of the war into a bloody and anarchical insurrection, the extinction of discipline, unity, and law into this chaos of blood, of desperation, and of extermination, was not a fictitious fear, but a reality which we all felt in the face of a huge temptation for the presence of the wealth of the conducta.

. . . I had given everything to my country: I had preserved, with miserly severity, for me and mine, a pure name to leave to my children, some of whom I have left without education and deprived others of my presence in their last moments; yet necessity came knocking at my door and demanding, in the name of my cause, my reputation to deliver over to contempt and malediction, and after a horrible agony I slew my name and closed my future and plead guilty. In the profound conflict that tortured me in the solitude of my soul, I asked myself: and what of the national name and honor? Cold reason replied then, and repeats now, that the national name suffers far more from the prolongation of the struggle, that the foreigner like the native must suffer its consequences, and that with the loss of independence all will be lost.

. . . For this reason I presented my name and assumed the responsibility which I could have avoided through the generous resolution of Senor Doblado to report it, because thus, though my person suffered even the ingratitude of the same Government which has

⁵²Roeder, Juárez, I, 248-249; Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 38.

covered me with honors, the interests of those same ones who accuse me of an offense against their property, remained clearly secure.

I have not sought to vindicate myself or to elude my destiny by subterfuges of any kind, or even to gain the sympathy of those who are fighting. I am accustomed to having my own devotion to the cause described as a fatal obstinacy, and my misfortune as a crime to the point of not being allowed to die for my cause on the battlefield.

But if, condemned by opinion, if repelled by my own, if forgotten by all, my cause for this reason triumphs, rises up with respect, and my country is happy, its independence assured, then my aspirations will be liberally satisfied.⁵³

Although at the time he became involved in the conducta affair Degollado received much censure, his role has since been recognized as a decisive factor in bringing liberal victory at that time. Some have labeled this incident his greatest contribution to the constitutional effort, credited the seizure with solving the urgent financial needs of the Juárez government for military activities, and even called it "the most spectacular financial step of the war."⁵⁴ Degollado used the more than 700,000 pesos remaining from the conducta to equip his army, which González Ortega subsequently led in a final victorious campaign against the conservatives.⁵⁵

Through his actions in this incident Degollado committed himself without reservation to a course seeking complete

⁵³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 118-121. Italics are mine. Some of this translation is taken from Roeder, Juárez, I, 247-248.

⁵⁴Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. xix; Turlington, Foreign Creditors, p. 123; Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 27.

⁵⁵Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, p. 38.

military victory. He was wholeheartedly willing to take the responsibility for an action which of itself could have ended his army career and wrecked his future, in the single hope that that action might bring success to his cause. He unconditionally dedicated himself to the new campaign plan, believing that it alone could gain the assurance that liberal ideals would prevail in Mexico.

Yet while still facing the consequences of his role in the conducta affair, and just a few days after defending it as the only means to victory, he seemingly rejected his commitment to complete military triumph and launched his efforts in a completely new direction. Degollado became involved in an attempt to gain a negotiated peace. To everyone, even Don Santos' closest supporters, this appeared to be not only a reversal of his stand throughout the war, but even a repudiation of the principles of the liberal cause to the point of treason.

CHAPTER VI

DEGOLLADO'S PEACE PLAN AND THE END OF THE THREE YEARS' WAR

Throughout the Three Years' War Santos Degollado had sought to reconcile his basically pacifistic nature with his determination to implement liberal ideals. His desire for peace invariably took second place to his principles of social and political reform for Mexico. He had made attempts prior to September 1860 to persuade conservative leaders to arrange a peace settlement, but always with the reservation that they must accept the liberal code from the Constitution of 1857 and the Reform Laws. Without exception, the conservatives that he approached with this offer rejected it.

On September 21, 1860 Don Santos initiated another unsuccessful bid for a negotiated peace, but this time the consequences of his act were tragic. He wrote to George Mathew, the British chargé d'affaires to Mexico, explaining, "that pacification will not come by force of arms alone and I am ready to dispense with the form and persons provided that the principles which sustain the liberal party remain secure and perfectly without injury."¹ Degollado pointed out that he had made offers of peace to various conservative

¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 131.

leaders on several occasions, only to be ignored. For this reason he decided to suggest a peace plan to Mathew and also informed his own government of the proposal. Don Santos vowed that if both sides in the war rejected his scheme he would retire from the political scene in Mexico.²

The Degollado plan, as proposed to Mathew on September 21, contained the following provisions: 1. A junta composed of the foreign diplomatic corps in Mexico City, including the minister from the United States, and one representative from each of the two Mexican factions would establish five bases for a new constitution. These were free election of representatives to a national congress, religious freedom, supremacy of civil power, nationalization of church-owned property (bienes llamados del clero), and the principles contained in the Reform Laws. 2. The junta would name a provisional president to serve until the congress convened. 3. Congress would convene three months from the date on which it was formally summoned. 4. The first acts of congress would be to name an interim president and to declare the five provisions listed above in item 1 to be the basis of the new constitution. 5. Congress would present the new constitution within three months of the date on which it convened.³

Before communicating his plan to Mathew, Degollado had discussed it with González Ortega. Provisions of the plan

²García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 131.

³Ibid.

implied that both Juárez and Miramón would willingly step down for the good of their country. Don Santos told Ortega that he believed Juárez had the self-denial and virtue which the situation demanded. The general realized that it would be difficult to persuade the conservatives to accept the essential principles of the Constitution of 1857 and the Reform Laws, but he argued that it was,

. . . necessary to open an extensive pathway to the hopes of all the honorable [conservatives] and a door through which those who proclaimed the ill-fated Plan of Tacubaya can leave with honor; it is necessary to make them see that we belong to a civilized people, who fight for principles and not for persons or for greedy interests.⁴

Don Santos argued that in addition, Mexicans needed to demonstrate to friendly foreign powers that their country sought only to bring its citizens equality with the rest of the world in moral and material progress and happiness. He concluded by informing Ortega,

If you and the rest of the Generals . . . are in accord with this program, I will continue at your head and I will fight until I conquer or die; but if you are not in agreement with it, you should prepare to elect a leader to replace me, because my duty and my conscience prohibit me from continuing in any other way.⁵

Degollado sent a copy of his peace plan to Juárez, and in a short time news of it had reached most important liberal leaders. When Juárez rejected the proposal nearly every liberal in Mexico joined him in condemning it. Some generals, such as Doblado and Ortega, had originally supported

⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 134.

⁵Ibid., pp. 134, 136.

the peace plan, but when Juárez' opinion killed any hopes for the scheme, all of them publicly backed the president.⁶

Efforts to explain this seemingly abnormal move by Degollado have clouded the issue considerably. Not only were contemporary observers startled by Don Santos' action, but historians since that time have offered varying explanations. One expert in the politics of the period argues that Degollado had given up hope of a liberal victory, and apparently saw an arranged peace as the only way open to achieve liberal goals.⁷ A historian of Mexican liberalism suggests that Don Santos was so overwhelmed with regret over the seizure of the conducta, that he began peace negotiations to avoid driving foreign powers into the arms of the conservatives.⁸ One Juárez biographer goes so far as to suggest that Degollado was mentally unstable and paranoid.⁹ A biographer of Porfirio Díaz, a liberal general and subsequent dictator of Mexico, contends that Don Santos was seduced into a cunning plot by the conservatives to suppress the Juárez regime by placing the destiny of the country, through the formulation of the new government, in the hands of pro-conservative diplomatic representatives from monarchical, Catholic Europe.¹⁰

⁶Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 226.

⁷Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 41.

⁸Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 28.

⁹Smart, Viva Juárez, pp. 125, 225.

¹⁰Creelman, Díaz, p. 112.

The last of the above arguments merits further consideration. Another Juárez biographer maintains that the British had not been entirely satisfied with the return of their portion of the conducta. Accordingly, Mathew was able to diplomatically blackmail Degollado into promoting a peace plan which was almost identical to that which the British chargé himself had proposed to both sides on several occasions. This argument implied that England had other more selfish motives in the affair than a simple desire for peace in Mexico. Naturally the British wanted security for their investments, but the suggestion is made that they favored a conservative regime as the best means to guarantee this security. Thus the British were pictured as maneuvering to bring down the liberals through subterfuge.¹¹

This argument, however, has some basic weaknesses. The British machinations for peace had been going on for some time. While Degollado had been serving as minister of foreign relations in Veracruz in March 1860, he had given British representatives there the wrong impression about Juárez' willingness to negotiate a peace settlement. Lord John Russell in London had suggested an armistice and a new constitutional assembly.¹² Mathew forwarded his superior's proposal to Juárez, but it was rejected. That same month Degollado had made a similar recommendation, and while it also was turned down, Juárez at least left Don Santos some

¹¹Roeder, Juárez, I, 249-251.

¹²Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 220.

hope that the issue was not closed by sending him to negotiate with Miramón's commissioners.¹³ This evidence suggests that by September 1860 England had joined most other foreign powers in siding with the liberals, because she chose to work for peace through the Juárez faction instead of with the conservatives. Additionally, by the fall of 1860 most observers agreed that a liberal military victory was only a matter of time. And finally, throughout the year the British had been growing increasingly impatient with the conservative abuses of English citizens and property. This attitude reached a peak in November, two months after Degollado proposed his peace plan. Juárez officials had collected 660,000 pesos to be paid on debts to London bondholders, and the money had been placed under the British seal in their legation. In a last-ditch effort to hold off liberal victory, conservatives seized the funds to equip their defenses in Mexico City.¹⁴ Realizing their movement was near death, they may even have hoped for British intervention, which would throw the country into a worse turmoil and possibly salvage their cause. Nevertheless, this seizure doomed conservative relations with England. Russell instructed Mathew to recognize Juárez when he captured Mexico City, provided the liberals would accept the debts incurred by the conservatives through loans and damages.¹⁵

¹³Scholes, Mexican Politics, p. 38.

¹⁴Turlington, Foreign Creditors, p. 117.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 118-119.

The evidence suggests that, although Degollado may have gotten the basic provisions of his peace plan from the English, his reason for proposing it was not to court British favor. Their grievances in the conducta affair had been promptly satisfied, and from most indications their sympathies lay with the liberals. Other aforementioned explanations for Degollado's conduct can be more easily dismissed. He had not lost hope for a liberal military victory, as will be demonstrated later. To the contrary he was rather certain in September that victory was imminent. He did not have strong regrets over the conducta affair; its ultimate contribution to victory vindicated his defense of the action at the time it took place. That he suffered from paranoia cannot be disproven, but it seems unlikely. The reason for Degollado's efforts to negotiate peace, as expressed in his own words, seems blindingly simple when compared to the motives assigned him by various observers.

In a letter to González Ortega on September 30, 1860 Degollado explained his reasons:

. . . even when we triumph in Guadalajara and later in Mexico City, we will not pacify the country, if it is not by means of the negotiations begun; since once these are begun and accepted by our opponents, the support of the Diplomatic Corps will be the guarantee of their completion. By any other mode the civil war will continue, and at the end of a year intervention will infallibly come, or rather, foreign domination.¹⁶

Thus it is obvious that Don Santos advanced his peace arrangement for the same reason that he sanctioned capturing

¹⁶García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 140-141. Italics are mine.

the conducta. He hoped to insure the perpetuation of liberal reform principles by a permanent peace and to protect Mexico's national sovereignty from foreign intervention.

The attempt to come to terms with the conservatives was not, therefore, a new, surprising approach for Degollado to take, as some historians would have us believe. Earlier he had endeavored to discuss peace settlements with conservative generals Casanova and Miramón before major battles, and had informed his government of these efforts. In a Veracruz cabinet meeting he had proposed a negotiated settlement to the war. He had even been specifically empowered by Juárez to discuss an armistice with the conservative president's representatives. Don Santos was never secretive about any of his negotiations. And in none of these instances did Degollado's own government caution him against such dealings; indeed, they sanctioned his efforts in March.

Why then was the reaction against his peace plan in September so strong and widespread? Possibly Juárez opposed a compromised settlement short of total victory because it would have required him to relinquish voluntarily his leadership. Evidence continues to mount that Don Benito did not possess the "self-denial" with which Degollado credited him. The reason most liberals gave for rejecting the plan was that it would turn the country over to foreign powers by giving their ministers a major role in redesigning the Mexican government. Degollado on the other hand argued that his proposal would prevent a far more serious and inevitable foreign military intervention. Indeed, within one month of

the time he predicted, England, France, and Spain signed the Tripartite Convention of London, whereby they jointly invaded Mexico. It then took the liberals five years to drive the last of the foreigners out of their country.

In another criticism of the plan, Don Santos was accused of deserting his country. This was simply not true, for although Degollado abhorred the constant warfare, he would never have sacrificed the goals of the Reform movement even to bring an end to the bloody strife. He sincerely believed that his plan was in the best interest of Mexico. Most liberals thought it was a foregone conclusion that the conservatives would reject the proposal as they had done several times before. Don Santos willingly acknowledged that it would be exceptionally difficult to persuade the enemy to accept the reform principles, but he felt that there was no other course of action with better chances of success. Additionally he could hope that conservatives would see that their position had become untenable and that their remaining strongholds would fall in a few months. This realization would encourage them to come to terms.

In reality it was the fact that liberals were on the verge of a complete military victory that prompted most of them to reject peace negotiations. In this context their opposition is understandable. Yet Degollado realized that such an end would not bring lasting peace. Conservative resistance would never be completely erased by force, and foreign intervention would necessarily occur. In the end, persuading his fellow liberals to accept a negotiated peace

proved to be a more impossible task than persuading the conservatives to do so. Don Santos was thus an unfortunate victim of circumstances, and his biggest mistake was an unrealistic belief that the liberal war machine he had helped to build could be halted anywhere short of total victory. One historian of the period labeled as delusion Degollado's "hope that the war could be ended by compromise . . . as if compromise were possible between parties separated by such a bloody chasm!"¹⁷

On September 30 the military leaders who had assembled to map out final plans for the siege of Guadalajara decreed that

having convened a junta composed of the principal commanders of the Army of Operations, for the purpose of asking their opinion with respect to the propositions suggested to the Chargé d'Affaires of Britain, Mr. Mathew, it has been unanimously resolved not to approve the referred propositions.¹⁸

In addition to this repudiation, Don Santos received personal letters from many friends and military associates reproaching his conduct in the affair. Guillermo Prieto expressed an inability to understand how Don Santos could have taken such action, and he recommended to Degollado that he should remove himself from command.¹⁹ Leandro Valle praised the general's motives, but condemned the peace plan. Ignacio Zaragoza, a leading liberal general, wrote a heated censure of Don Santos

¹⁷Bancroft, History of Mexico, XIII, 746.

¹⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 141-142.

¹⁹Ibid.

and vowed never to obey him again.²⁰ Manuel Doblado told Degollado that he had committed "political suicide," and asked, "What ill disposition has been able to inspire in you such a mistaken determination?" Doblado pointed out that to suffer intervention by necessity and to submit to it willfully were two very different matters.²¹ Ignacio de la Llave, the liberal minister of war, in a letter to a liberal general, Epitacio Huerta, accused Degollado of provoking anarchy, of compromising Mexico's national sovereignty, and of the crime of treason.²² Juárez himself expressed the general reaction with his observation that "not a single liberal chief seconded [Don Santos'] wretched plan."²³

On October 10, 1860 González Ortega was named to succeed Degollado as commander-in-chief. One week later Ignacio de la Llave notified Degollado that he would be prosecuted for the incident. The following month Llave cleared up any doubts about Don Santos' military status by declaring that he had no military command whatsoever and no power to give orders.²⁴ In what must have been a final crushing blow to

²⁰Alfonso Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, un Liberal Romántico (Mexico, 1956), pp. 92-93.

²¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 142-143.

²²Ibid., p. 158.

²³Angel Pola, ed., Miscelánea Comunicados, Respuestas, Iniciativas, Dictámenes, Informes, Brindis, etc. de Benito Juárez (Mexico, 1906), p. 337.

²⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 150, 151, 165.

Degollado, several liberal generals in late October sent him a recommendation that he absent himself from the theater of war. The fact that his views on the war differed so greatly from their own, they explained, would weaken the unity of the army and possibly bring conflicts in orders and command.²⁵ Don Santos answered that he would make any sacrifice for his cause, and that since he did not wish to be an obstacle to liberal success, he would not argue the matter.²⁶

In bidding farewell to the army he had led and fought with for almost three years, Don Santos gave his first and only public defense of his actions at this time. After speaking to his men of the hardships they had shared and the victories they had won, he declared,

Comrades, I affirm, on my honor, that I am not unworthy of your confidence and your esteem. The Supreme Government has been surprised by sinister reports. Soon you will know the truth and you will be able to judge your general . . . my hand has always sustained our flag when so many others, in the unfortunate days, abandoned it because they believed it forsaken and lost.

In closing he encouraged his soldiers to remain loyal and obedient to their officers and government.²⁷

In view of the complete lack of support for his plan, and considering Don Santos' earlier promise to step down if the reaction were negative, Juárez' stand in removing him from command of the liberal army can certainly be understood,

²⁵García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 160-163.

²⁶Ibid., p. 164.

²⁷Cambre, Guerra de Tres Años, pp. 471-472.

if not justified. But to prosecute Degollado for treason as if he had secretly conspired to bring about the defeat of the liberal movement was a wholly indefensible move. Juárez offered an oversimplified explanation,

. . . in spite of the services lent by Mister Degollado, and although he was one of the persons whom the central government trusted and on whom it conferred a large part of its ample powers, now that that person has departed from the path traced by the spirit of the present revolution and has sought to nullify a law, he has been called to trial as he deserves.²⁸

During the month of November 1860 liberals had laid siege to Guadalajara. As commander of the attacking force, González Ortega tried to arrange a peace settlement with the conservative general by offering to reject the leadership of Benito Juárez. The conservatives declined, but when Juárez learned of Ortega's dealings, he did nothing, despite the fact that the young general was guilty of the same "crime" as Santos Degollado. A Juárez biographer points out that Ortega was a winning general while Don Santos had not been, hence his action could be overlooked. "The justice of Juárez was tempered by a sense of expediency . . . The discretion of the President gave his detractors an opportunity . . . to accuse him of catering to the strong and scourging the weak."²⁹ Furthermore, when Degollado had been appointed commander-in-chief, Juárez had not placed any restrictions on his authority. So, technically, Don Santos had not

²⁸Pola, Miscelánea de Juárez, pp. 334-336.

²⁹Smart, Viva Juárez, p. 226; Roeder, Juárez, I, 258-259.

overstepped his power. But the minister of war, fearful of another incident like the Degollado-Mathew affair, had been careful to qualify Ortega's appointment as head of the liberal army by conferring on him, "the same authority with which his predecessor was invested, and only the prohibition from entering in agreement with the reactionaries."³⁰ Thus Ortega did what he was specifically prohibited from doing. And by making sure to insert this limitation on Ortega's powers, the Juárez government admitted that it had not put such a restriction on Degollado. Don Santos had not negotiated with the enemy in any event, but with the British chargé. A leading critic of the Mexican president points out that Degollado's crime was not sacrificing Mexico, but his willingness to give up Juárez' presidency.³¹ One interesting impression of the affair was offered by a conservative who heard rumors of the action taken against Degollado. He expressed disbelief saying: "This would be a miracle of the first order." To this same conservative it was a comedy with Juárez parodying what had been done to Leonardo Márquez by Miramón.³²

Whatever the injustice of the affair, Ortega was in command of the army and Degollado was an outcast. In early

³⁰García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 165-166. Italics are mine.

³¹Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 447.

³²Genaro García and Carlos Pereyra, ed., Correspondencia Secreta de los Principales Intervencionistas Mexicanas, 1860-1862, Vol. I of Documentos Inéditos o Muy Raros para la Historia de México (Mexico, 1905), pp. 16-17.

November the new commander-in-chief led 20,000 men against Guadalajara. This army, the largest that the liberals had ever mustered, forced Márquez to abandon the city, leaving the conservatives in control of only Mexico City.³³ The battle of Guadalajara was thought to be a great victory for the constitutionalists because the neighboring citizens were ardently pro-conservative and without their aid a successful liberal siege was considered impossible.³⁴ Juárez pointed to the victory as evidence that the change in commanders-in-chief had not adversely affected the liberal army.³⁵ What he failed to point out was that the final plan for the siege of Guadalajara had been mapped out by Degollado; the funds used to provide equipment for the army had been acquired by Degollado; and with 20,000 men the liberals were virtually assured success.³⁶

By the time Guadalajara fell, Degollado had left for Toluca. He reached the town, just to the southwest of Mexico City, on December 2, 1860.³⁷ Miramón's forces in the capital were readying their defenses for the coming liberal onslaught. The conservative president realized that soon Mexico City would be surrounded and the decisive battle of the war would

³³Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, pp. 236-238. By this time Miramón had restored Leonardo Márquez to command in hopes of turning the tide of the war.

³⁴García, Correspondencia Secreta, pp. 15-17.

³⁵Pola, Miscelánea de Juárez, p. 337.

³⁶Ibid., p. 335.

³⁷Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 383.

ensue. But he refused to wait patiently for the liberal attack. On December 9 he dressed a division of his troops in the red uniforms of the constitutionalists and led a sortie against Toluca. Catching the garrison by surprise, he captured Degollado, General Felipe P. Berriozábal, a third general, 30 officers, and 1300 men. Miramón brought his prisoners and captured arms back to Mexico City on the 12th.³⁸

On December 20 Miramón again marched out of the capital, this time with 8,000 men. Two days later he met Ortega's army at San Miguel Calpulalpan in the final major battle of the Three Years' War. After a crushing defeat at the hands of a liberal army more than twice the size of his own, Miramón retreated back to the capital.³⁹ Here he decided that to try to hold the city would be hopeless. Despite urging from some of his officers to shoot the liberal prisoners, Miramón chose to turn the city over to Degollado and his officers. But Don Santos refused to take command because he no longer held any military authority, and Miramón

³⁸Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, pp. 103-104; Riva Palacio, México, V, 442; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 232. García's collection includes a portion of Santos Degollado's diary; hereinafter citations referring to this source will be followed by the designation "(diary)".

³⁹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 232 (diary); Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, pp. 103-104.

surrendered control to Berriozabal.⁴⁰ The conservative president then disbanded his forces and left the city, eventually making his way to Veracruz, where he escaped to Europe on a French ship.⁴¹

On Christmas day the liberals took control of Mexico City, after almost exactly three years of absence. The entire army formally entered the city in a grand victory parade on New Year's Day.⁴² While leading the march Ortega saw Santos Degollado watching from the balcony of the Hotel de Iturbide. The young general had Don Santos brought down to join the parade. He embraced his old commander and gave him the flag from the head of the procession, declaring that no one deserved more than him to join the victory parade. The two men then watched as the liberal army passed in review.⁴³ In the excitement and jubilation over the recent victory, Don Santos' "crimes" were temporarily forgotten. But on January 11 Juárez arrived from Veracruz and, "Mexico was for the first time, under the rule of a civilian." He entered the city quietly and without the usual pomp and

⁴⁰García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 232-233 (diary); Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 387. José M. Vigil, author of Riva Palacio, México, V, 442, tells that Leonardo Márquez claimed in 1868 that he had prevented Miramón from executing the liberal prisoners, but this is doubtful; it would have been completely out of character for both conservatives.

⁴¹Sánchez Navarro y Peón, Miramón, p. 104.

⁴²Harper's, March 1861, p. 549.

⁴³Riva Palacio, México, V, 444; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 234 (diary).

celebration.⁴⁴ His attitude toward Degollado would not be as forgiving as that of Ortega.

A week after the victory parade Don Santos fell ill with scarlet fever and was bedridden when President Juárez arrived in the capital. Don Benito visited his former general on the thirteenth.⁴⁵ Degollado immediately began efforts to bring his case to trial, so he might have an opportunity to clear his name.⁴⁶ He announced that at least one newspaper had suggested that the supreme court rush his trial, thereby permitting him to run for president against Juárez. This proposal, however, evoked attacks on Don Santos from other newspapers. He explained that he would not accept candidacy for the presidential office because he did not feel competent. He wanted only to vindicate his reputation and return to private life, something he hoped to do as quickly as possible.⁴⁷

In addition to charges of treason Degollado still faced prosecution for the conducta affair. He had been accused of pilfering some of the captured funds and of delaying the trial to cover up his crime. In answer to these charges he offered a letter from President Juárez revealing that Don Santos was doing everything possible to hasten the

⁴⁴ Parkes, History of Mexico, p. 250.

⁴⁵ García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 234 (diary).

⁴⁶ El Siglo, January 28, 1861, p. 3; January 31, 1861, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., February 1, 1861, p. 4.

proceedings. Degollado also published an itemized statement indicating what had happened to every peso of the conducta silver.⁴⁸

On February 14, 1861 Juárez appointed Leandro Valle, quartermaster of the army, to investigate Degollado's conduct in the peace plan and conducta affairs. On February 27 the government formally presented Don Santos with the charges against him.⁴⁹ It had taken the liberal president five months to make this first official move. Perhaps Juárez had considered this an opportune time, the eve of national elections, to bring the case back to the public's attention. Miguel Lerdo de Tejada had announced as a candidate for the presidency,⁵⁰ and González Ortega had resigned as minister of war to run for the office. As was mentioned above, a small movement had begun which proposed Santos Degollado as a candidate also. Juárez offered the war ministry to Don Santos, who refused until the matter of clearing his name could be put to rest. Unable to regain Degollado's support, the president pushed again for prosecution.⁵¹

The Degollado case became a national issue, and Don Santos himself hinted that Juárez did not want to risk

⁴⁸ El Siglo, February 16, 1861, p. 3.

⁴⁹ García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 166-167, 234 (diary).

⁵⁰ Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., "The Status of Biography in Mexican Historiography," paper presented at the Third Meeting of United States and Mexican Historians (Oaxtepec, Morelos, November 6, 1969), p. 16.

⁵¹ Roeder, Juárez, I, 295-296.

exonerating his former general because of the immediacy of elections. He denounced the president for being ungrateful and for permitting libelous newspaper attacks against his character. Although the public was not well-informed on the charges, opinion generally favored Degollado. Had Don Santos been politically ambitious he could have created problems for Juárez in the March election. While he could not have won the presidency, Degollado could have significantly narrowed Don Benito's margin of victory. Not only did Degollado win the governorship of Michoacán, an office which he neither campaigned for nor accepted, but he also tied Juan Francisco López as congressional delegate from the state, and received votes for the presidency as well. But Degollado had not wanted public office, and he wrote in April that he could not accept any position until he had been acquitted of all charges by a congressional grand jury.⁵²

To answer newspaper attacks, Don Santos began writing articles in his own defense, which friendly newspapers published. Although deeply involved in these and other efforts to recover his good name, Degollado still managed to find time to intervene in behalf of an old enemy, Francisco Casanova, and save him at the eleventh hour from a firing squad.⁵³ After delays in Degollado's own trial and conflicts

⁵²Roeder, Juárez, I, 296, 298-299; Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 32; Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, pp. 149-152.

⁵³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 237 (diary).

over jurisdiction, Don Santos wrote to Leandro Valle, at the end of May, explaining that in order to hasten the proceedings he would not contest the issue of his immunity as a high official, but would willingly relinquish that right. He believed that the sooner the case came to trial the sooner his innocence would become known.⁵⁴

But eight months had now passed since the incidents in September and Don Santos was no closer to an opportunity to publicly defend himself than he had been when removed from command. Public opinion had polarized, mostly in his favor, but in the minds of most liberal leaders he was guilty until proven innocent. Despite all his efforts to expedite the trial, the government delayed. By the first week in June of 1861, no formal hearing had been scheduled. But in that month Don Santos was to clear himself without the benefit of trial.

⁵⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 169. Two sources, Roeder, Juárez, I, 259, and Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 31, state that in the spring Degollado's case was quietly forgotten and he was restored to a subordinate command. This is extremely doubtful considering Don Santos' stand on public office and Juárez' steadfastness. The case was ignored, but charges were not dropped, and Don Santos' rejoining the army was done under highly limited and public circumstances, as will be explained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VII

DEGOLLADO'S DEATH

CONCLUSIONS

Benito Juárez was reelected president of Mexico in the spring of 1861 and his government set about the tasks of restoring order and satisfying foreign creditors. Although the liberals still encountered resistance from scattered conservative bands, such as the one led by Leonardo Márquez, they nevertheless controlled the country. Santos Degollado hoped in June that the Juárez regime would finally turn its attention to the charges against him and designate a time for his trial.¹

Melchor Ocampo had resigned in the spring as minister of foreign relations over differences with other cabinet members and had returned to his home in Pomoca, Michoacán. He planned to travel to Mexico City in the early summer when Don Santos' case was heard, and he intended to help Degollado prepare his own defense.² But on May 31 Lindoro Cajiga, under orders from Márquez, captured Don Melchor at his home. Three days later Márquez, the "Tiger of Tacubaya", had Ocampo executed by a firing squad. The common opinion in Morelia

¹Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 174.

²Ibid., II, 173; Smart, Viva Juárez, 240.

was that Marquez had gotten his instructions from high Church officials in the cathedral chapter of that city.³

In Mexico City news of the assassination of Ocampo created an atmosphere of fury and grief. In the session of June 4 congress was engaged in a disorderly debate over what action to take. When Don Santos learned that Ocampo, perhaps his closest friend, had been killed by his greatest enemy, he sent a note to congress requesting permission to address the assembly. This was granted. Degollado entered the chamber and was greeted by a thunderous applause from the gallery and a standing ovation from the delegates.⁴

Don Santos asked the congress for two kinds of justice. First he called for justice against the assassins of Ocampo. Then he pleaded for justice for himself, asking that his case be decided and his innocence or guilt be declared, so he could rejoin the fight, not as a leader but as a common soldier. Degollado vowed that he would never again seek to rise to power, and sought only to wage war against his enemies. Finally, he expressed surprise that the city had not risen up in anger against the assassins.⁵

A contemporary account in El Monitor Republicano quotes the following passage from Don Santos' speech:

³Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 174-177.

⁴García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 180; Roeder, Juárez, I, 306-307.

⁵García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 180-181; Torre Villar, Triunfo Liberal, p. 288.

I come in the name of justice. I want to be judged. I swear before the spirit of Ocampo that vengeance is not my desire. I want neither command nor ovations; I want to fight against the assassins. I will not call for the persecution of women, old men, or children, but must we weep in inaction like ladies? [applause] No, we will fight! I will go as the least soldier; we will make an example of these evil-doers. Permit me to shed my blood in battle . . . allow me to fight against our enemies and I will return so that judgment can be declared in my case.⁶

As Don Santos left the floor, the applause was deafening. When order was restored the first motion made was that all charges against him be dropped. In the ensuing debate, a delegate named Lama pointed out that by granting pardon, congress would presuppose a judgment which had not yet taken place. The gallery burst out jeering the speaker, calling him "reactionary" and "hypocrite." Another congressman answered Lama's remark by pointing out that they were not dealing with a criminal, but a man who was suffering for his own patriotism and was a victim of the typical ingratitude of great leaders. He particularly chastised the Michoacán delegation for opposing the motion to drop charges.⁷

The arguments continued back and forth for several minutes. Then Don Santos returned to the chamber to clarify his request. He declared that he did not want absolution, but only permission to lead a punitive force against the conservatives. He promised that he would then return to

⁶García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 181.

⁷García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 182-183.

face trial for the charges against him. Manuel M. de Zamacona rose and gave an inspirational speech declaring that Degollado did not need to use the death of Ocampo to redeem himself, but could do so on his own merit. The motion to grant the general's request was then quickly passed.⁸ One historian points out that although charges were not formally dismissed, it was obvious to everyone that Don Santos had been cleared and his trial would not be held.⁹ This contention is impossible to prove or disprove. The formal resolution, signed later that day by President Juárez, declared "that the citizen Santos Degollado may continue lending his services to the constitutional cause, with the reservation of the results of his pending trial."¹⁰

On June 6 Degollado notified the minister of war that congress had authorized him to lead forces against the conservative guerrilla band which had captured and killed Ocampo. Don Santos declared that he would be proud to lead even a small unit under the command of any general the president might choose to appoint. But he explained further that he considered himself free of any restrictions that might be imposed by anyone except congress and free to recruit his own guerrilla soldiers should the minister of war not provide him with ample forces. In closing Degollado cautioned

⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 184-185.

⁹Roeder, Juárez, I, 307.

¹⁰García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 188.

that as far as he was concerned only congress had the authority to limit his actions or recall him from the mission.¹¹

The following day Degollado left Mexico City for Toluca.¹² There on June 9 he accepted Tomás O'Horán's plan to search the mountains between the two cities. On the same day he asked González Ortega for 32,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, so he would not have to waste time making his own. After he received 14 dragoons from General Berriozábal and 130 cavalrymen from O'Horán, Don Santos asked Ortega for the use of a select few of his former officers.¹³

Early on the morning of June 15 Degollado, who had grown impatient waiting for O'Horán to bring more forces from Tacubaya, set out with General Berriozábal and 150 men.¹⁴ He left behind instructions for O'Horán to meet him with the convoy at a certain spot on the road in the early afternoon. Don Santos then marched to Lerma, where he picked up a small unit commanded by Félix Vega.¹⁵ The force descended to the plains of Salazar, then to the foot of Monte de las Cruces, the scene of an important battle in the war for independence from Spain. Here Degollado split his

¹¹García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 189-190.

¹²Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, p. 119.

¹³García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 191-197.

¹⁴Romero Flores, Historia de Michoacán, II, 180.

¹⁵García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 200-205.

tiny army into two units, one of which he left on the road with Berriozábal to meet Tomás O'Horán and the convoy from Tacubaya. The other unit Degollado led up the mountain, following an incompetent guide who took the worst possible trail.¹⁶

The poor ascent route was the first of a number of unfortunate developments which contributed to the disaster of that afternoon. Part of the way up the mountain a large band of conservative guerrillas ambushed Degollado's unit. In what must have been a tactical maneuver, the conservatives allowed themselves to be driven off rather easily. General Berriozábal, who was moving down the road to link up with O'Horán's long overdue reinforcements, heard the noise of battle and was preparing to move up the mountain to give assistance. But when the attackers fell back, Don Santos' men gave shouts of victory and the bugler played the diana, a previously arranged signal between Degollado and Berriozábal that there was no trouble and to continue as agreed with their plan.¹⁷

As Berriozábal's unit turned and disappeared down the road, the conservatives saw their chance and reattacked furiously. Don Santos sent an officer to bring back the reserve unit, but the man was never seen again. The liberals managed to reach a piece of high ground where they could

¹⁶Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, pp. 120-121; Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, pp. 157-158.

¹⁷Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, p. 123.

defend themselves, but were surrounded and cut off from retreat. By 3:00 o'clock Degollado's men were running out of ammunition, but still they saw no sign of O'Horán or Berriozábal. Twice the conservatives trumpeted parlamento admitido, an invitation to parley with Don Santos, but he refused to trust the enemy or to consider surrender.¹⁸

Shortly after 5:00 o'clock, with the liberal ammunition supply exhausted, the attackers managed to maneuver above Degollado's men. As the conservatives closed in, Don Santos had no choice but to order retreat, though the command was virtually a declaration of "every man for himself." Leading his horse with one hand and firing his pistol with the other, Degollado fought his way down the mountain. His adjutant, José María Gómez, died at his side, while other officers and men scattered. Less than a hundred liberals survived. Miraculously, Don Santos reached the plains at the foot of the mountain with one of his officers. Once in the open, Degollado's excellent horsemanship enabled him to break through the encircling conservatives. He was closely pursued, however, and finally was lanced in the neck by "Chato" Alejandro, shot in the back of the head by an Indian named Neri, and finished by a third man who shot him point blank in the chest.¹⁹

¹⁸García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 206-216.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 216-217; Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, pp. 125-126; Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 366, 393.

Degollado's body was recovered and buried in nearby Huixquilucán.²⁰ The news of his death was a tremendous shock to the Mexican people. Congress ordered that his funeral be conducted with the full military honors traditionally given a general, and on August 31 it formally cleared him of all charges and declared him Benemérito de la Patria. The following year, in July, his remains were brought to Mexico City to be interred with other heroes of Mexico's past. Instead, at his family's request, he was buried in a British cemetery at the corner of Rivera de San Cosme and the highway of La Verónica (present day Melchor Ocampo). His grave is there to this day.²¹

On August 9, 1861 President Juárez led a procession from the National Palace to the Alameda in Mexico City, in which Mexico's most prominent leaders gathered to pay homage to Santos Degollado. The city officials, the president and his cabinet ministers, congressmen, the supreme court magistrates, and many foreigners marched in mourning. Flags flew at half mast for three days, and public officials wore symbols of mourning for nine days. Grief over his loss was soon amplified by the news that forces sent out under

²⁰Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 393.

²¹Pola, El Libro Rojo, II, 393; Fuentes Diaz, El Santo, pp. 173-174; Torre Villar, Triunfo Liberal, p. 293; García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 223, 226.

Leandro Valle to punish the conservatives had also been defeated and that Valle had been executed by Leonardo Márquez.²²

For the Mexican people, Degollado's "fate was felt to be the consummation of a career vowed to disaster."²³ A few years later, while the Emperor Maximilian was visiting Degollado's grave, he was heard to say of the old liberal, "Poor man. . .his century did not understand him, his country did not know him."²⁴ One incident best symbolizes his image to Mexico. When Degollado's personal belongings were being gathered, his diary was found to contain a small gold ring bearing the coat of arms of the Mexican Republic and the inscription, "Todo por Ti," "Everything for you."²⁵ He was, once again, in the ultimate sense, the "Hero of Defeat."

Santos Degollado's contributions to the cause of liberal reform in Mexico were considerable. They merit a degree of recapitulation and conclusion. In the Revolution of Ayutla, Degollado was an important, though not the decisive factor in the overthrow of Santa Anna and the drafting of the Constitution of 1857. By 1857 he had become a major figure in the liberal party, but he was not one of its strongest advocates of reform. He still had serious

²²García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, pp. 224-225; Roeder, Juárez, I, 315.

²³Roeder, Juárez, I, 314.

²⁴Fuentes Díaz, El Santo, pp. 177-178.

²⁵García, Documentos Inéditos para Degollado, p. 241.

reservations about completely overhauling the Church-State relationship in Mexico, feelings with which most Mexicans of the period were inculcated from childhood, and Degollado more than most. But by the summer of 1859 he had overcome this hesitance. In July of that year he was the decisive element in the promulgation of the Reform Laws, through which the liberals abandoned the last of their limitations of the war against Church power. Degollado's biographer considers his victory in this step greater than any of the defeats given him by conservatives.²⁶ If Don Santos ever espoused radical philosophy, it was here. His role in publishing these laws and in the subsequent struggle to enforce them should commit him to posterity as a reformer, not simply as a general.

In the Barrón-Forbes incident Don Santos came to represent steadfast defense of Mexico's national sovereignty at a time when even President Comonfort was retreating in the face of British pressure. It was in this affair that the tremendous popularity which Don Santos enjoyed in Michoacán began to spread to other parts of Mexico. But during the year and a half he spent defending himself from the British, Degollado learned the dangers of antagonizing a powerful nation. That he eventually emerged from the issue a hero among his countrymen did not wash away the scars of battle. It is probable that the lessons he learned

²⁶Fuentes Díaz, Santos Degollado, pp. 33-34.

in this incident strongly influenced his actions in the conducta affair and the peace plan controversy in September 1860.

In these later incidents, the case may well have been that Don Santos sought reconciliation with the British by offering them a hand in the reconstruction of Mexican government. He certainly knew firsthand the pressure England could exert. But this paper disputes that contention and accepts instead Santos Degollado's argument that his seizure of the silver shipment and attempts to negotiate peace were an effort to forestall foreign military intervention. As per his own prediction, when the peace plan was rejected, intervention came. The temptation to speculate about possible developments if Juárez had accepted the plan and submitted to negotiation is herein rejected. Given the conditions in Mexico at the time, compromise was impossible. Don Santos was unrealistic in believing his plan had any hopes of success, and by proposing it he brought troubles on himself. But in light of his character and attitude toward the war, could he have honestly done anything else?

Looking from the other side, Don Santos may have gotten off lightly. Perhaps the liberal leadership was sacrificing him as a scapegoat for all their problems in order to unify themselves more strongly. As it turned out, Degollado cleared his name for posterity through his martyrdom. Had the liberals not triumphed in December 1860, what harsher fate might he have suffered as a scapegoat?

When Benito Juárez and his cabinet went to Veracruz in May 1858 to establish the seat of constitutional government, "The liberal cause seemed lost and the constitutional army almost destroyed, and only the inexhaustible perseverance of Degollado was able to avoid a conclusive disaster."²⁷ From the time Don Santos took responsibility for carrying on the liberal revolution until his death, observers point to various conflicts with President Juárez. Critics challenged Don Benito's reasons for appointing Degollado commander-in-chief, accused him of abandoning his cause, claimed that he sacrificed his army and Don Santos' reputation for his own personal safety, asserted that he resisted promulgation of the Reform Laws, and labeled as unjust his prosecution of Degollado in the peace plan affair. Indeed, Juárez actually owed his political existence to Don Santos. Throughout the preceding chapters critical viewpoints of the president have been given generous expression, leading to the assumption that an ultimate conclusion about the relationship between the two men would be reached. Unfortunately one is hard pressed to find any conclusive evidence that a clash existed. Although few experts will go as far as Francisco Bulnes, who believed that Degollado's misfortune was the deliberate goal of Juárez, most will agree that the conflict between the two liberals had a part in the tragic incidents that surrounded the last three years of Don Santos' life.²⁸

²⁷Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, p. 77.

²⁸Teja Zabre, Leandro Valle, p. 118.

Degollado provided the early liberal war effort with a contribution which Juárez did not make. He gave the movement unity and central direction, and this was one of his most important military contributions. Without his supervision of the numerous sectional chieftans in a united campaign, "the reactionaries with 3,000 men would have been able to overrun the whole Republic impunitively erasing bands of one to three thousand men."²⁹ And without Degollado to sustain the effort, other more fortunate leaders, e.g., Jesús González Ortega, would not have appeared.³⁰ Along this line, not just anyone could have given such central leadership. Degollado had an emotional appeal and a popularity with the liberal rank and file that would have been hard to equal.

There were other positive benefits from Don Santos' generalship. He organized forces in the major battles of Atenquique, San Joaquín, Calamanda, Tacubaya, Estancia, and two attacks on Guadalajara. In addition he organized Ortega's army for the victories at Silao and Guadalajara. He participated in and directed more battles than any other liberal general in the Three Years' War.³¹ His persistence and tenacity in the face of defeat and his reorganizational and recruiting abilities saved the constitutional cause from

²⁹Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, p. 439.

³⁰El Siglo, June 18, 1861, p. 1. See also Alvarez, José Justo Alvarez, p. 167.

³¹Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, pp. 455, 457.

complete collapse on several occasions. Thus his leadership was a plus for the liberals, and it should be noted that none of his many losses was ever fatal to the cause. This "hero of defeats" might be compared to George Washington, in that although he lost most of the battles, he won the war.

Degollado thus unquestionably shaped his country's history in the 1850's. In a more peaceful time, one not involving great issues of national destiny and social upheaval, he might never have left his position in the cathedral at Morelia. But such a time has never existed in Mexico until recent years. Hence it is not really valid to picture him as a man created by circumstances. Instead he stepped forward to join an idealistic minority movement, he suffered persecution, yet remained constant and zealous. Don Santos would have argued that even without him, the liberal cause would have eventually triumphed, and no doubt it would have. But Degollado picked the time and the place. He was an "event making man,"³² a man of eminent character and will, a man who was great not just for what he did, but for what he was.

By anyone's standards Don Santos was never a good battlefield commander. Like George B. McClellan of the Union army in the American Civil War, he was an excellent organizational and logistical general who became impotent in battle. Francisco Bulnes states that, after all, it was the soldiers

³²Sidney Hook, The Hero in History, a Study in Limitation and Possibility (New York, 1943), p. 154.

who won the Three Years' War, and of all of them, "he who stands out most for his constancy, his activity, his faith, his valor, his epic heroism, his impartiality, and his exquisite virtue, is without doubt, Don Santos Degollado."³³ All this may be true, but noticeably absent from this list of attributes is that of fighting ability. What, above all, is the purpose of a general if not to win battles? This Degollado did little of, as will be attested to by even his strongest supporters.³⁴

Don Santos was first and always a man of peace. He made every attempt to avoid bloodshed. Before most battles, even those in which he was certain of victory, Degollado tried to persuade his opponent to negotiate. He sought to end the war through compromise on at least three separate occasions. He would have taken almost any step, short of sacrificing his principles for liberal constitutional reform, to halt the violence.

The first serious doubt of Degollado's ability as a battlefield commander came after the devastating loss at Tacubaya in April 1858. By November 1859, with the defeat at Estancia de las Vacas, his reputation as a combat general was finished, and rightly so. Santos Degollado was too humanitarian and too reflective to be successful in that capacity. Unfortunately there are times when just goals can

³³Bulnes, Juárez y las Revoluciones, pp. 300-301.

³⁴Alvarez, Jose Justo Alvarez, p. xvi-xvii.

only be attained through violence. In such cases, paradoxical as it may seem, men like Degollado are not fit for the task.

Santos Degollado has been best remembered for the role he disliked most and was poorest at--that of battle commander. He deserves to be remembered as one of Mexico's great reformers. As a general he was out of focus with his times and certainly not representative of Mexican military men. The chivalry of warfare which he practiced was outdated and gone. In 1861 Degollado's reputation was stained and his future was uncertain. Considering his personality and his experiences, a court acquittal would probably not have satisfied Don Santos' desire to clear his name. Martyrdom was a more appropriate demonstration of his true dedication to the cause.

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