

## **EL CINCO DE MAYO**

### **WHY DO WE CELEBRATE IT IN THE UNITED STATES?**

By Samuel Saenz



A Mexican army of teenagers defeated a powerful French army at Puebla, Mexico on May 5, 1862, and in doing so, helped preserve the Union (United States) during the American Civil War. How could this be if the battle took place in Mexico and the American Civil War was in the United States? If you want to know, read on.

After being a Spanish colony for over 300 years, Mexico became independent in 1821. For the next forty years, it experienced many internal revolts, was invaded by foreign countries (primarily the United States) resulting in the loss of a third of its territory, all of which went to the United States. Today, that territory has names like: Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. Due to the Texas Revolution of 1836, in which Mexico lost part of Texas, compounded with the events above, Mexico's distrust of the United States made relationship between the countries very difficult.

However, something coincidental happened in 1861. Abraham Lincoln became the president of the United States where he was confronted with a civil war while in Mexico, Benito Juarez also became president, where his civil war had just ended, and his country was bankrupt. Mr. Juarez decided to stop payments on foreign debts, and asked some countries for more time. France, under the leadership of Napoleon III decided to get involved in the American Civil War on the side of the South. Mr. Lincoln's navy, however, blockaded the South in the Gulf of Mexico. To reach the war zone in the United States, Napoleon III had to find another passage so Mexico became the alternate route. Napoleon III refused to honor Mexico's request for more time and used the money issue as an excuse to invade it with military power and to eventually proceed to the United States.

Here is where the Mexican Army helped preserve the Union. On its way to Mexico City, on May 5, 1862, a French Army was met at Puebla by a Mexican Army, which soundly defeated it. The victory united Juarez's forces against France. Although France was stronger and managed to control Mexico until 1867, the Mexican Army kept them busy all the American Civil War-years, and it was never able to get involved in that conflict on the side of the South. During this time, the decisive battles of the American Civil War were fought, and the North won, thus reuniting the United States. The relationship between Mexico and the United States began to improve, especially after the United States sent troops to Mexico after the Civil War, to help defeat the French.

The Battle of Puebla changed the course of our history, and through the years it has signified cooperation, patriotism, and a shared sense of pride between the two countries. A fellow Texan and native of Goliad, Texas, General Ignacio Zaragoza, was the leader and hero of this historical event. Incidentally, The Monroe Doctrine was defended at Puebla for the first time since President James Monroe wrote it in 1823.

Every year, some folks inquire as to why a Mexican holiday such as EL CINCO DE MAYO celebrated and commemorated in our country. You decide.