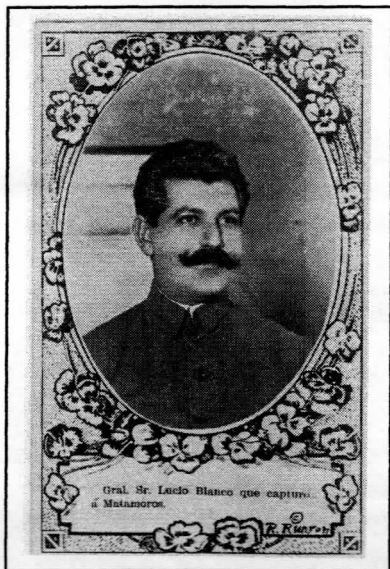


General Lucio Blanco and his South Texas Cattle Agent, Ismael Montalvo

By Carlos M. Larralde PhD, R504



General Lucio Blanco

Minister of War in Benito Juarez's government. His family remained prosperous ranchers and well educated.

The diligent Blanco became involved in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and remained faithful to the Constitutionalist Carranza army. Venustiano Carranza, governor of Coahuila, a white-whiskered politician, was a tough and often pompous man who wore blue-tinted spectacles. Shortly after, Carranza made Blanco commander of the Tamaulipas region. Periodically, Blanco resided in Matamoros since June 4, 1913. While trying to control the region, he struggled with supporters of the brutal and arrogant Felix Diaz. Still, Blanco maintained good relations with numerous Texas mayors, especially with San Antonio.

Again Blanco faced problems with Diaz. "The young General Luico Blanco distributed an estate belonging to Felix Diaz among the peons." An angry Carranza warned Blanco that if the revolution were to be directed against landowners it would delay its triumph for years. Blanco answered brashly that his troops were ready to fight five or ten years, whatever time was required. From that day on, Carranza was determined to play off his strong generals against each other.ⁱ

As a child and as a young man, I was close to my grandparents in San Benito, near Brownsville, Texas. With my grandfather, Ismael Montalvo, I used to go the bullfights in Matamoros. I quickly discovered that he was a penny-pincher. At times he reminisced about his younger years during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 along the Lower Rio Grande.

At times we visited his friend Aniceto Pizaña in Matamoros and we would talk about one of their favorite friends, the elegant and vain General Lucio Blanco, who carried a small mirror to quickly groom himself for special occasions, such as meetings with journalists, politicians or dinner sessions. His clothes were immaculate.

Blanco spoke eloquent Spanish and his manners were impeccable. Born in Musquiz, Coahuila in 1879, the energetic Blanco was of independent character and descended from Miguel Blanco,

Actually Blanco impressed people, especially Montalvo, about his concern for laborers who remained eternally in debt and how the law would hunt them down if they ran away. They could only escape across the border to Texas. Blanco was determined to give workers parcels of land to erase the miserable and hopelessness of life. When he could, Blanco improved Matamoros and used the law to promote working conditions. Blanco was anxious to erase the legacy of President Victoriano Huerta, who quickly revealed his regime with a brutality and cynicism policy and ran the country from a sleazy bar, surrounded by cronies and rowdy characters.

To get revenues to purchase more military supplies and support his army, Blanco confiscated large herds of cattle and brought them to Matamoros. Born in 1876 near Brownsville, Ismael Montalvo lived in San Benito. He would take the cattle to San Antonio or Dallas to be sold again and shipped to the Midwest for meat goods. When Montalvo received payment for the cattle, he gave the cash to Blanco and Montalvo was given his commission. Montalvo refused to keep accurate records to avoid any investigations concerning tariffs, income taxes, state taxes or any other government charges. The only expenses were bribes for border authorities.

The energetic, patriotic and authoritarian Blanco issued Montalvo a Mexican license, as a "laborer" so that there were be no misunderstanding about who was boss. Montalvo did not care, as long as his profits were worthy of the commerce activities. As he said, "I used to see Blanco as a big dollar sign with two legs. Although I must admit that I found him fair, practical and pleasant with a sense of humor. In time I began to respect him and we became friends."ⁱⁱ

While keeping a firm discipline hand on his army, Blanco forbade free inquiry from his officers and quickly punished any soldier who created abuses. He kept a firm grasp of practical politics and knew well the true motivations and needs of Tamaulipas. He paid his troops and modernized his army. If there were problems or delays with the cattle sales, Blanco was forced to print his currency to keep Tamaulipas under control. Unfortunately, like other Mexican officials, Blanco issued crude *cartones*. He issued 5, 10, 20, 50 and 1 peso denominations. All of them had Blanco's name printed. They are now extremely rare.

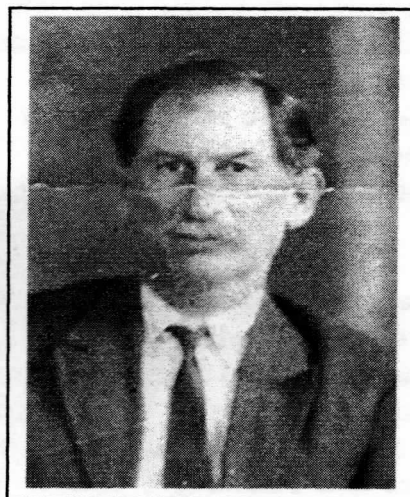
Like other currencies, the new paper issue depreciated almost as soon as it rolled off the press. Not to be outdone, the Zaptistas and other revolutionary groups issued their own currency. The "revolutionary paper" was without adequate hard reserves to back it up and was backed only by the force of arms. To add to the complex problem, several states and mining and industrial companies did the same thing. By 1915, at least twenty-five different kinds of paper currency were in circulation. Blanco did not have the patience or the resources to get his currency done attractive by the American Bank Note Company in Chicago. While some of the beautiful currency circulated, nobody was able to ascertain accurately the fluctuating exchange rates. As historians Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman noted, "Counterfeiters, of course, had a field day, while bankers and tax collectors were driven almost to insanity."ⁱⁱⁱ

Again Blanco saw cattle as gold and merchants, like Montalvo, as a key to survive. Tamaulipas, like most of Mexico, suffered from economic problems. Farmers realized their perishable products were extremely vulnerable to transportation delays. Because of that, food and manufactured goods became scarce. A black market flourished in large cities and the entire Mexican economic structure was weak.

For all his organization talents, Blanco continued to have conflicts with the energetic Carranza over land issues. At times Blanco sought refuge in Brownsville or in San Benito and stayed with Montalvo. While resting in San Benito, Blanco shared his problems with Montalvo. As fascinated as these political revelations were, Montalvo made certain that Blanco never felt humiliated revealing state or military secrets. Montalvo had too much financial stake with Blanco and cultivated Blanco's authority along the Lower Rio Grande.

While a bold Blanco was busy handling urgent issues, the neatly combed General Emiliano Nafarrate remained in charge of the Matamoros region. One of Nafarrate's duties was to keep the confiscated cattle moving into Texas for revenues. Montalvo and other Texan cattlemen assisted Nafarrate. Deals were ironed out to take some of the livestock in cattle cars far beyond Fort Worth.

As long as Nafarrate reported to Blanco that peace prevailed along the border and that the bank accounts were kept safely in Brownsville, all was well. Blanco did not want to transfer his cattle revenues as pesos since the Mexican currency was unstable and the banking structure was shattered. Unfortunately most of Blanco revenues went for ammunition. But the local Mexican Consul J.Z. Garza on March 2, 1915 announced cheerful news that two thousand rounds of ammunition were found by Blanco's forces that have been smuggled across the Rio Grande by anti-Carranza forces.^{iv}



Ismael Montalvo, May 1927

Since the enterprising Blanco was away, Montalvo and Nafarrate remained friends to keep the cattle route open to Texas. They were afraid that two Hispanic civil rights leaders, Aniceto Pizaña and Luis de la Rosa could easily jeopardize everything with their guerrilla warfare against the American army and Texas Rangers. Known as the Plan of San Diego, they were determined to make Texas a Hispanic republic.

Blanco had too many problems with Carranza and other officials to worry about Pizaña and de la Rosa's activities. Like the clever Montalvo, Pizaña respected

Blanco, saying that Blanco was a radiant do-gooder whose honesty and charity were unassailable. Meanwhile, a rigid Blanco gave strict orders "that men of business and finance must be in charge to reconstruct a [Mexican] republic of government with order... [and] justice."^v

With Blanco's blessings, on June 9, 1915, the keen eyed Nafarrate established an aviation school to train young Mexicans for the Carranza cause in Matamoros, located on a stretch of ground by the Rio Grande near the International Bridge. These Mexican officials had learned from Victoriano Huerta's army the value of aircraft. Huerta employed 80-horsepower planes that were used in reconnaissance and bombing raids against his enemies.

Carranza's forces never forgot that lesson. To get the aviation school started, the instructor would be the aviator Colonel F.A. Chapa while two airplanes were bought from New York's Huntington Air Craft Company. Plans were made to get eight more airplanes. Monalvo made jokes that now the cattle could be sent in the airplanes while the cows wore masks.^{vi}



Type of plane used at this time in Mexico

A flabbergasted Blanco halted the project when an assiduous Pizaña demanded that several of these airplanes could be used in his civil rights cause to drop bombs in San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Houston and Dallas. Hearing that Blanco and other Carranza officers turned him down, a disappointed Pizaña went to the German consul to ask for submarines to sabotage several Texas harbors. As always, Montalvo told Pizaña that Blanco, Nafarrate and other army officials "...are the sons of the revolution and without it, life has no substance. Once there is peace, they will perish."^{vii}

Apparently the resourceful Montalvo was not the only cattle agent of a demanding Blanco. Mexican historians Armando de Maria y Campos and Alfonso Tarcena documented that Blanco was active in the cattle business to support his political activities until June 5, 1922, shortly before he died. One of Blanco's outlets was Roma, Texas and especially Laredo, Texas. There in the lavish Hamilton Hotel, Blanco had meetings with cattlemen, Duke Carver and Jim Hozelrigg.^{viii}

The quick-witted Montalvo learned that Blanco loved to conduct his livestock transactions with cattlemen in hotels and later in saloons, far away from the critical eye. He also loved to discuss in these places land redistribution and avoided an increase in taxes, knowing well it could generate bitter public relations. During these moments, Blanco would tell these men that he wanted to be remembered as a champion who initiated land redistribution and free seed to anyone who asked for it

and by expanding the activities of the agricultural schools in Tamaulipas. These meetings ended when the saloon ladies sparkled the dinner.

Maria y Campos stated that Blanco's cattle came from Mexican cattle owners who were executed for their anti-revolutionary beliefs. Their land was distributed to peasants. Every time he issued parcels to poor farmers, Blanco loved to be photographed in these gatherings. While dressed in his spotless uniforms, he made certain that photographers from Matamoros or Brownsville were there for the occasion. When one of his general, Gustavo Elizondo, appeared in civilian clothes during a meeting with the mayor of Matamoros, he was later scolded.

When it came to his business associates, Blanco resented being photographed with them. Only influential politicians and military men had merit. The other photographs giving land to poor farmers were meant to undermine Pancho Villa. Blanco shared his resentment with Montalvo concerning Villa. Montalvo was not interested in the anarchy in Mexico with its multiple civil wars. He had already seen enough psychotic behavior in the name of justice. Also the Revolution had different meanings to different Mexicans during those violent years. He listened only as a polite gesture while Blanco rambled about his most implacable adversary. ^{ix}

Montalvo refused to talk about politics since there were times when in the process of gathering herds of cattle in Tamaulipas, he encountered soldiers who did not wear standard uniforms and used weapons that were seen as appropriate. Sometimes makeshift insignias identified rank but gave slight clue as to group affiliation, such as a different division of Carranza's unit. Anonymity served rebel commanders who probably ignored Blanco's authority. There were moments when Montalvo could not get any cattle due to hostility toward Blanco.

A problem that Blanco inherited was what to do with the militant Hispanic Texans, such as Aniceto Pizaña and Luis de la Rosa who had now taken refuge in Matamoros from their intense guerrilla warfare in South Texas. Judge J.T. Canales and Blanco pressured Carranza to grant these men "Mexican revolutionary veterans" status and give them land in Tamaulipas. If not, they would face prison or execution in Texas.

When the vigilant Carranza's officials realized that Blanco was effective in governing Tamaulipas, Blanco was in good graces again. Once in command again, he continued to distribute land to farmers. In spite of revolutionary rhetoric, Carranza moved slowly on the issues of social reform and was irritated with Blanco's zealous reforms. For example, Blanco wanted to restore commerce and get people to vote over public issues.

While he resented the self-confident Blanco, Carranza was forced to flee the capital in 1920. While fleeing to Veracruz by railroad, Carranza rested in a dismal village and was assassinated by one of his guards. Blanco faced conflicts with General Alvaro Obregon. The wary Obregon saw Blanco as a threat to his authority. While

in Nuevo Laredo, Blanco was brutally murdered in 1922. Next day his bloated body was discovered floating down the Rio Grande. Blanco's death solved nothing. A nervous Obregon's now faced problems with powerful lobby groups such as the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico. In 1923 Obregon was finally recognized by the United States. The death and the legacy of Blanco were forgotten with political tension and rebellion that plagued Mexico and that destroyed Obregon in 1928.^x

In Texas, the strong-willed Mexican Aureliano Urrutia, who was once an official of the brutal, bullet-headed President Victoriano Huerta, was now a prominent doctor in San Antonio. After Blanco's death in 1922, the aristocratic Urrutia gave Blanco and other Carranza's officials a bad reputation through his prudent politics. As for Ismael Montalvo, he remained in the cattle business and invested his money in real estate. As always, he tried to avoid paying taxes and when the great depression dominated the 1930's, he started to hide his money in his home. By 1950 he was retired from public life and became active in local community services. When he died on September 22, 1967, his relatives discovered thousands of dollars hidden throughout his house. He detested the IRS.^{xi}

Foot notes:

ⁱ Armando de Maria y Campos, *La Vida del General Luico Blanco* (Mexico D.F., 1963), 18-19, 21. T.R. Fehrenbach, *Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 508-509; Gustavo Casaola, *Historia Grafica de la Revolucion Mexicana* (Mexico D.F.: Editorial Trillas, 1970), Vol 1, 197-210.

ⁱⁱ Interview with Ismael Montalvo, San Benito, January 16, 1965. The numerous volumes of the Marks and Brands, Cameron County Courthouse in Brownsville since 1900 illustrates Montalvo's livestock activities. For an example of Montalvo's brand and earmark, it is record in Book G, 157 in Marks and Records. It was certify on May 13, 1938. Also other numerous business, cattle and tax records are in the author's collection.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, third edition, (New York: Oxford University, 1987), 527-529.

^{iv} *Brownsville Herald*, March 2, 1915; Maria y Campos, 45-49, 203. Interview with Ismael Montalvo, February 12, 1965.

^v Quoted in Maria y Campos, 47-49. Anieto Pizafña, *Apuntes Biograficos de Un Revolucionario del Año de 1915*, 41-42. Manuscript is in the author's collection. On the author's research see Nathalie Prise, "Delving Into Past Fascinating Task: San Benito Senior Compiling Documented History of Valley," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, Texas), November 20, 1964.

^{vi} On the airplane matter see the *Brownsville Herald*, June 9, 1915; interview with Ismael Montalvo, February 12, 1965; interview with J. T. Canales, March 5, 1964;

interview with Juan Garcia Longoria, May 10, 1962; interview with Pilar Torres, May 12, 1962; Guadalupe Aguirre, June 10, 1970 and with Martin Vela on June 12, 1970. Longoria, Torres, Aguirre and Vela were *Sediciosos*, followers of Luis de la Rosa. Historian James Sandos discovered data about the *Sediciosos* inner conflicts in Report of Agent F. Fukuda, January 27, 1917, Bureau of Investigation, 232-84, Record Group 65, U.S. National Archives, Washington D.C.

For more on this turbulence see *La Cronica*, (Laredo), April 9, 1910; *Diario de los Debates* (Mexico City), July 15, 1914; *Brownsville Herald*, August 1, 2, 1910; August 12, 29, 31, September 9, 23, October 30, 1915; February 12, March 3, June 12, 1916; *Laredo Daily Times*, July 15, 1916; Tracy Hammond Lewis, *Along the Rio Grande* (New York: Lewis Printing Company, 1916), 79.

vii Interview with Ismael Montalvo, February 12, 1965; interview with J.T. Canales, June 10, 1964; interview with Beatriz Pizafía, December 22, 1978. She was the daughter of Aniceto Pizafía. The author knew the Pizafía family well and inherited most of Aniceto Pizafía's papers.

viii Maria y Campo, 210, 211. Blanco faced other complex problems, such as the unrest along the Tamaulipas-Texas border. See *El Democrata* (Monterrey), July 12, 22, 25, August 15, 18, 20, 1915; *Monitor* (McAllen), November 10, 22, 23, 24, 1915; *San Antonio Light*, November 22, 23, 1915.

ix Maria y Campo, 189; General Manuel W. Gonzalez, *Con Carranza: Episodios de la Revolucion Mexicana* (Monterrey, Nuevo Leon: Talleres J. Cantu Leal, 1934), Vol 11, 107; interview with Ismael Montalvo, February 20, 1965.

x Maria y Campo, 216-220; Casasola, Vol 1, 624-626, 707-713. The death of Carranza touched most Hispanics in South Texas. Montalvo owned a popular pamphlet, *La Verdad Sobre la Murete de Carranza* (San Antonio, Texas: Libreria de Quiroga, 1920)

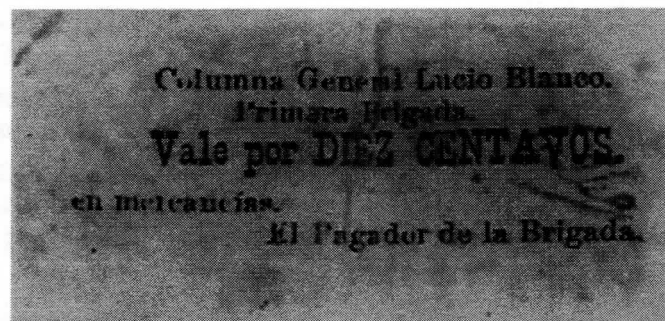
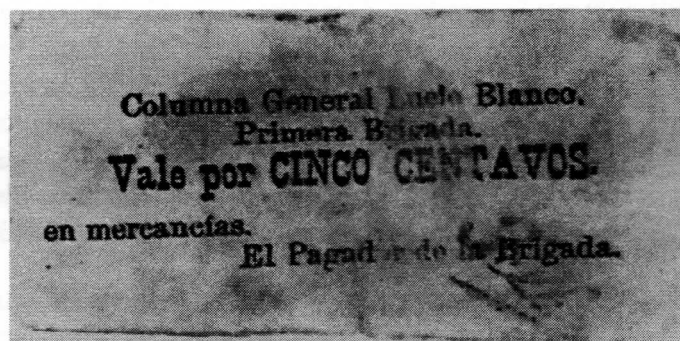
xi When Montalvo died in 1967, his cattle business that had flourished with Blanco was seen as part of the *Sedicioso* (bandit) activities. See "Mexican Bandits Made Forays into Valley," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen), November 15, 1967, E 9. For more on Aureliano Urrutia see *Bodas de Oro del Doctor Aureliano Urrutia: Dr Aureliano Urrutia, su Gestion Cientifica, su Accion Politica* (San Antonio, Texas: Artes Graficas, 1946). Urrutia played a major role in the development of the League of United Latin American Citizens (Lulac). He was involved in serious political disputes with J.T. Canales in several meetings. See *El Paladin* (San Antonio, Texas), June 14, 1929, October 3, 1930. x Maria y Campo, 210, 211. Blanco faced other complex problems, such as the unrest along the Tamaulipas-Texas border. See *El Democrata* (Monterrey), July 12, 22, 25, August 15, 18, 20, 1915; *Monitor* (McAllen), November 10, 22, 23, 24, 1915; *San Antonio Light*, November 22, 23, 1915.

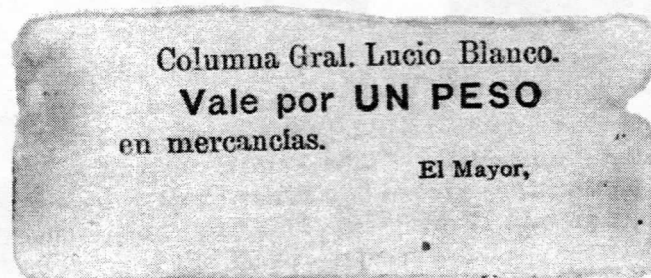
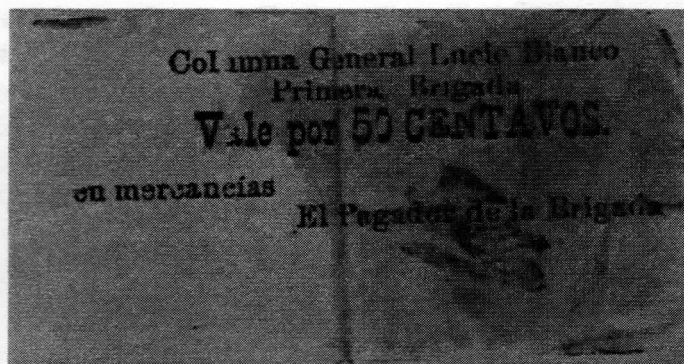
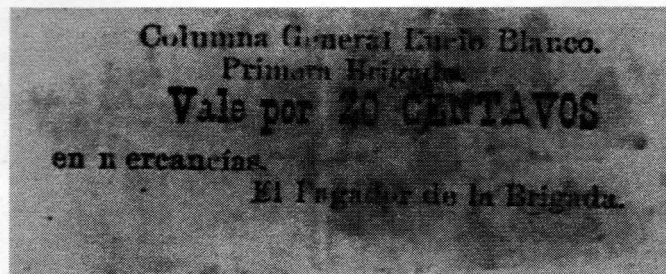
^x Maria y Campo, 189; General Manuel W. Gonzalez, *Con Carranza: Episodios de la Revolucion Mexicana* (Monterrey, Nuevo Leon: Talleres J. Cantu Leal, 1934), Vol 11, 107; interview with Ismael Montalvo, February 20, 1965.

^x Maria y Campo, 216-220; Casasola, Vol 1, 624-626, 707-713. The death of Carranza touched most Hispanics in South Texas. Montalvo owned a popular pamphlet, *La Verdad Sobre la Murete de Carranza* (San Antonio, Texas: Libreria de Quiroga, 1920)

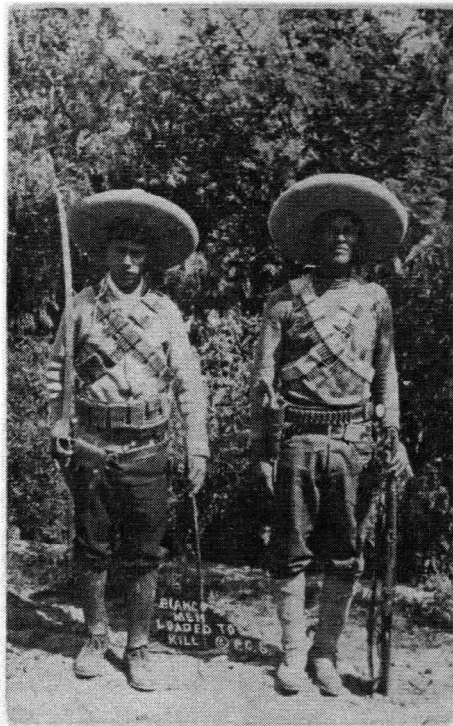
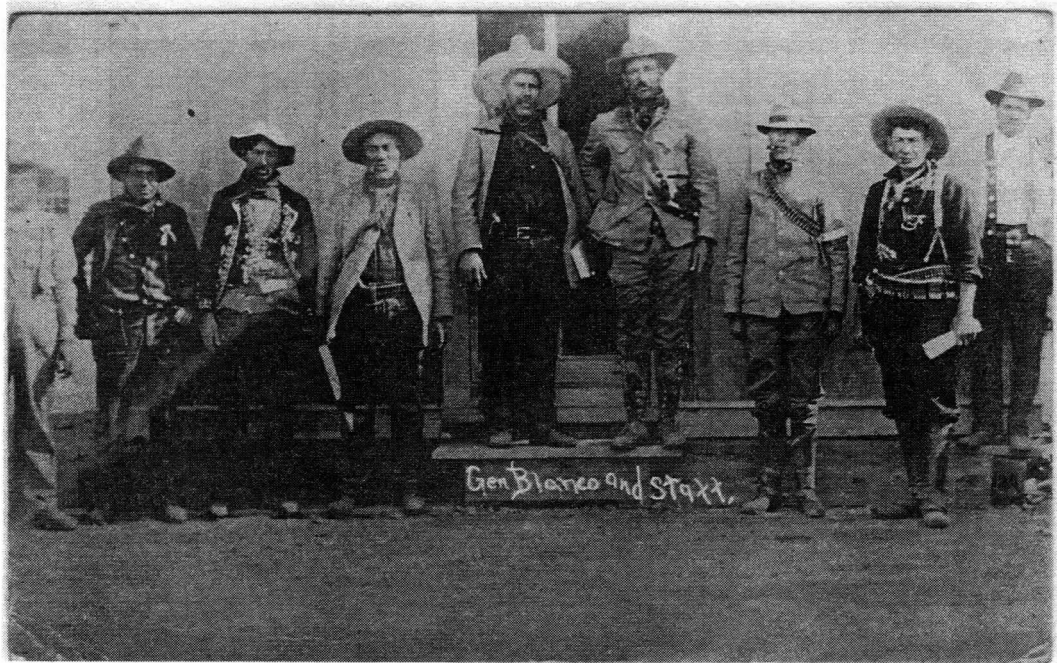
^{xi} When Montalvo died in 1967, his cattle business that had flourished with Blanco was seen as part of the *Sedicioso* (bandit) activities. See "Mexican Bandits Made Forays into Valley," *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen), November 15, 1967, E 9. For more on Aureliano Urrutia see *Bodas de Oro del Doctor Aureliano Urrutia: Dr Aureliano Urrutia, su Gestion Cientifica, su Accion Politica* (San Antonio, Texas: Artes Graficas, 1946). Urrutia played a major role in the development of the League of United Latin American Citizens (Lulac). He was involved in serious political disputes with J.T. Canales in several meetings. See *El Paladin* (San Antonio, Texas), June 14, 1929, October 3, 1930.

NOTES ISSUED BY GENERAL LUCIO BLANCO





Images from Gaytan's Paper Currency of Mexico



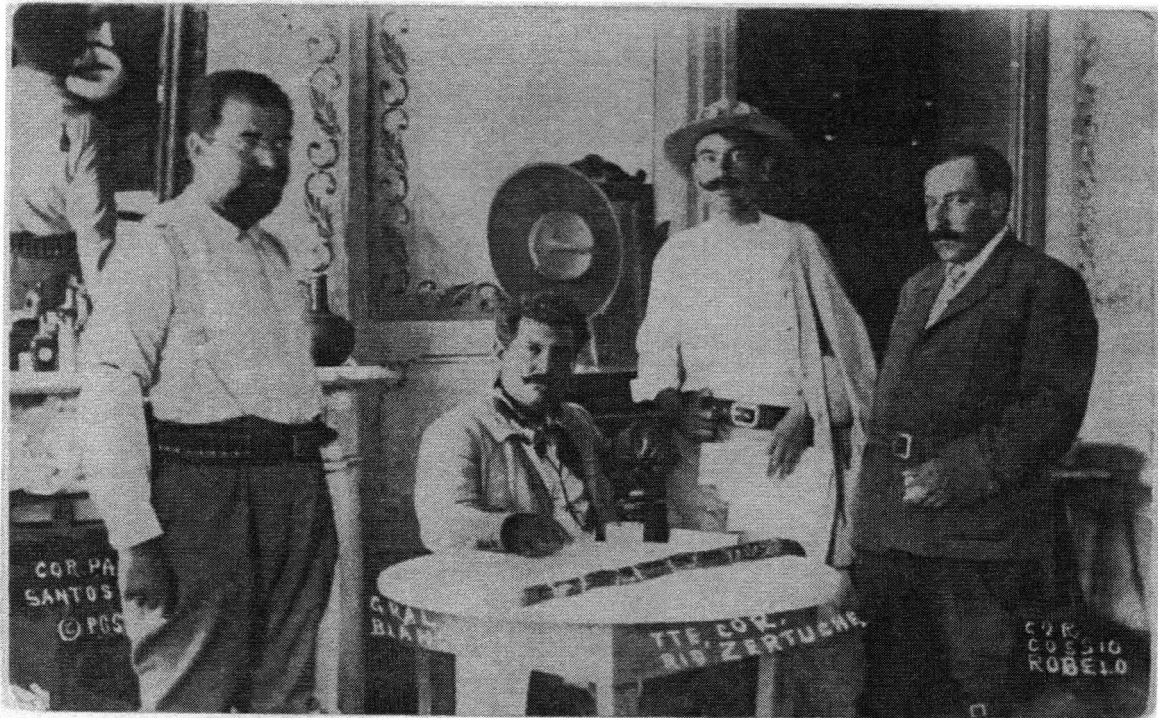
Two of General Blanco's well Armed Men



The Body of General Blanco



General Blanco at a Land Distribution Reception





Montalvo Home and Office 1916, Photo © Carlos Larralde PhD

San Benito Bank & Trust Co. San Benito, Texas		In Account With <i>Demand Montalvo Jr.</i>	
Dr.			
1914	1700	8	13515
16	18	15	17
24	21	18	5540
19	14	25	200
101	14615	30	27382
5	3355	2	11250
9	2	3	1010
10	21	6	39610
21	12679	13	9950
26	50	15	4550
28	2600	20	27014
101	1552	21	140
14	60	27	100
18	14902	11	112
20	90	5	13331
7	41868	13	43
15	10000	18	4511
22	72	18	39811
30	194	25	85
11	50	12	180
2	150	6	12660
7	55	10	31
14	16989	10	880
19	79	19	100
9-2	120	22	2073

Montalvo's 1924 San Benito Bank & Trust Co. Book
Photo © Carlos Larralde PhD

No.	Character	Count	Mark	Sex	Month	Year	Location
1	Whitebelly	1	∞	2	Feb	1-1923	San Antonio
1	Whitebelly	1	∞	2R	Feb	5-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Brown	5	∞	2M	Feb	6-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	3	∞	2M	Feb	11-1923	San Antonio
1	Horned	10	∞	2M	Feb	12-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	4	∞	2M	Feb	4-1923	Palo Verde
1	Dark Grey	5	∞	2G	Feb	20-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2G	March	11-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2G	March	16-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2M	March	16-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2M	March	4-1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2M	April	1923	San Antonio
1	Dark Grey	∞	∞	2M	April	1923	San Antonio

1923 Montalvo Cattle Record, Photo © Carlos Larralde PhD

A special thanks to Elmer Powell for providing the spark for this project on Lucio Blanco and for providing some of the images for this article,