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Do People Celebrate Cinco de Mayo

By History Channel

Cinco de Mayo—or the fifth of May—is a holiday that celebrates the date of the Mexican army's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War (1861-1867). A relatively minor holiday in Mexico, in the United States Cinco de Mayo has evolved into a commemoration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly in areas with large Mexican-American populations.

Benito Juárez

In 1861, Benito Juárez—a lawyer and member of the indigenous Zapotec tribe—was elected president of Mexico. At the time, the country was in financial ruin after years of internal strife, and the new president was forced to default on debt payments to European governments.

In response, France, Britain, and Spain sent naval forces to Veracruz, Mexico, demanding repayment. Britain and Spain negotiated with Mexico and withdrew their forces.

France, however, ruled by Napoleon III, decided to use the opportunity to carve an empire out of Mexican territory. Late in 1861, a well-armed French fleet stormed Veracruz, landing a large force of troops and driving President Juárez and his government into retreat. The Battle of Puebla

Certain that success would come swiftly, six thousand French troops under General Charles Latrille de Lorencez set out to attack Puebla de Los Angeles, a small town in east central Mexico. From his new headquarters in the North, Juárez rounded up a ragtag force of two thousand loyal men—many of them either indigenous Mexicans or of mixed ancestry—and sent them to Puebla. The vastly outnumbered and poorly supplied

Mexicans, led by Texas-born General Ignacio Zaragoza, fortified the town and prepared for the French assault. On May 5, 1862, Lorencez gathered his army—supported by heavy artillery—before the city of Puebla and led an assault.

The battle lasted from daybreak to early evening, and when the French finally retreated,



they had lost nearly five hundred soldiers. Fewer than one hundred Mexicans had been killed in the clash.

Although not a major strategic win in the overall war against the French, Zaragoza's success

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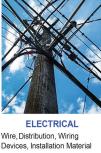
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