

# HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH: SOARING WITH THE AZTEC EAGLES

THE ONLY MEXICAN MILITARY FORCE TO FIGHT OUTSIDE THE BORDERS OF MEXICO



## MEXICO GOES TO WAR

In May 1942, Mexico was thrust into World War II when two oil tankers bearing the Mexican flag were sunk off the coast of Florida by a German U-Boat (submarine). This blatant attack on a neutral country in Allied waters led President Manuel Ávila Camacho to request a declaration of war on the Axis powers from the Mexican legislature.

President Manuel Ávila Camacho: "War, which Mexico desired to outlaw for all time from the methods of civilized existence, but which, in cases like this, and in the present state of world disorder, constitutes the only way of asserting our right to independence and of preserving unharmed the dignity of our Republic."



German U-Boat



Mexican oil tanker SS Potrero del Llano burns off the coast of Florida



The 201st used Disney's Panchito Pistoles as their squadron mascot. The character, which came from the cartoon *The Three Caballeros*, was a popular film in many countries including Mexico.

## ESCUADRÓN 201 - "AZTECAS AGUILAS"

In 1944, 36 volunteer pilots and 264 ground personnel, who comprised the 201st Fighter Squadron began their training in Guadalajara, Mexico, where the U.S. Army Air Force had established the construction and use of various airfields within the country. At the request of the U. S. military, the Mexican airmen and their crews were sent to the United States for more advanced training.

## TRAINING WITH WASP

In Pocatello, Idaho, the 201st pilots received gunnery training by WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots). The WASP towed banners behind their airplanes for target practice.



- Sources**
- Monument to Aztec Eagles, McAllen, TX - <https://www.mcallen.net/veterans/wwii/wallsandstatues/escuadronwall.aspx>
  - Monument at Foster Army Air Field - <https://texashistoricalmarkers.weebly.com/foster-army-air-field.html>
  - School Dedicated to Squadron 201 - <https://www.milenio.com/estados/cumple-69-anos-escuela-pidio-combatiente-mexicano-avila-camacho>
  - CAF Dispatch, Vol. 9 #48, 2021

- Cynthia Buchanan, Aztec Eagles & WASP - <https://cafriseabove.org/wasp-trained-mexican-squadron-201-and-other-fighter-pilots-in-army-air-corps/>
- <https://uboat.net/boats/u564.htm>
- <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/aztec-eagles-mexican-air-force>
- <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196417/mexican-air-force-aircrews/>
- <https://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/1942-05-28a.html>

# ACTION IN THE PACIFIC

When Squadron 201 finished flight training in 1945, they entered World War II immediately. Although the war in Europe was ending, war still raged in the Pacific against Japan. The Aztec Eagles arrived in the Philippines in March of 1945.



**June 1945**

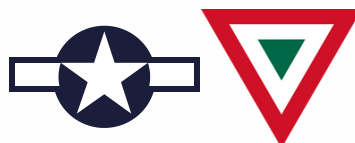
The Aztec Eagles fly fighter missions twice daily with the U.S. 310th Fighter Squadron over the Philippines.



**July 1945**

The 201st performs a bombing mission against the Port of Karenko, Taiwan, and flies its last convoy escort mission in the Philippines.

The 201st not only displayed the roundel of the U.S., but also the Mexican Air Force. In addition the airmen included the tri-colors of the Mexican flag on their vertical stabilizer/rudder.



The Republic built P-47 was the designated aircraft of the 201st.

- Americans nicknamed the P-47 "The Jug" and Mexican pilots followed suit referring to the plane as the translated "El Jarro."
- The Aztec Eagles flew 4 fighter missions, 53 ground support missions and dozens more training and escort missions.

# SPANISH INFLUENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES



A Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Philippines in 1521. The explorer claimed the islands as a Spanish colony.

Spanish influence for over 300 years heavily impacted culture: including architecture, food, and language.



Because of the Spanish influence on both Mexico and the Philippines, the troops of Squadron 201 were often able to communicate in Spanish with much of the Filipino population. Despite a distance of 8,830 miles, the two cultures found connections with each other through centuries of shared Spanish influence.

# THE LEGACY OF THE AZTEC EAGLES

Escuadrón 201 left an important legacy not only on WWII, but on the countries and communities with which they were associated. Monuments to the Aztec Eagles are located in many different cities and countries around the world; a prime example of the legacy that this unlikely group of servicemembers left on the history of World War II and the reach their example had around the globe.



Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) attends a ceremony honoring the Aztec Eagles at the Squadron 201 monument in Manila, Philippines.



Before sending the 201st off for training, President Camacho asked the airmen if they had any last requests before leaving. Sgt. Angel del Castillo stepped up and asked for a proper school to be built in his village of Tepoztlán. Upon their return to Mexico in 1945, the school had been built and dedicated to the 201st Fighter Squadron. Escuela Primera Escuadrón 201 remains open today.



At least two monuments to the Aztec Eagles exist in Texas. Cities in Texas like McAllen and Victoria have dedicated memorials to those who served in the 201st. Foster Army Air Field in Victoria was one of the bases where airmen from the Aztec Eagles began their training.

# TRY THIS

IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Use these free activity resources in your classroom, both themed after the Aztec Eagles and their service during WWII. These activities can be used to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, support your lessons, or as an extension activity for students. The two activities included are designed for various grade levels.



Link below!

## Squadron 201: Aztec Eagles Mapping Activity

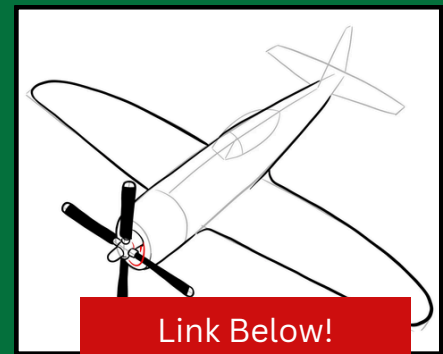
(Grades 5+)

Students use coordinates and plot them along lines of latitude and longitude to follow the service and history of the Aztec Eagles during World War II. In addition, students can map the location of major events and participants of World War II allowing them to truly visualize the global scale of the conflict.

## Draw and Design Your Own P-47 Thunderbolt

(Grades 3+)

Students can follow this detailed tutorial to draw their own P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft. For higher grade levels, this activity can be enhanced by having them design and color their aircraft while including the insignias used by the Aztec Eagles.



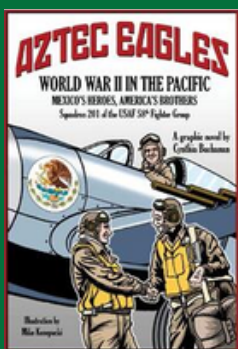
Link Below!

## Read the Blog Post

Read a detailed story of Squadron 201 and their service during WWII. The article was written by guest author, historian Desiree Ann C. Benipayo, and details the events that led up to the Aztec Eagles service and the events that left their legacy. Benipayo is the Vice President of the Philippine WWII Memorial Foundation.

## Explore Further Resources on the Aztec Eagles

Author, playwright, editor, and literary consultant, Cynthia Buchanan has spent years researching and providing some of the most detailed historical accounts of Squadron 201's service during World War II. Her writing has appeared in The New York Times, Newsweek, Washington Post, Air Power History, and more. Cynthia's educational resources provide rich detail into the service of the Aztec Eagles, including the graphic novel prototype Aztec Eagles of "World War II: Mexico's Heroes, America's Brothers," taught as curriculum at the Air Force Academy and Naval Academy.



<https://flynaec.org/wp-content/uploads/Aztec-Eagles-Mapping-Activity.pdf>



<https://sketchok.com/vehicles/jets-and-planes/how-to-draw-the-republic-p-47-thunderbolt/>



<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/store/the-fiction-force>



<http://www.azteceagles.net/>