

Why OCC professor studies mysteries of Villa

By STEVE BARNABY

Pancho Villa, was he a revolutionary hero or a bandit? That's the question that Dr. Charles Braun will answer in his new book, "Pancho Villa: Man and Myth." Braun, a professor of humanities and Spanish at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus, Farmington Hills, has had a 30 year love affair with Mexico. Having made 27 trips south of the border, the 57-year-old PhD has been studying Villa since 1946.

"Villa was something of a paradox," says Braun. "He neither smoked nor drank, but he left five widows, none of whom he bothered to divorce before marrying the next."

BRAUN WAS fortunate in his research in interviewing one of Villa's wives, who remains one of his staunchest supporters, even though Villa murdered her parents. Villa asked her to marry him, but her parents stood adamantly opposed to the match, says Braun.

"Villa asked the girl if he removed the opposition, if she would marry him. She said yes, and Villa proceeded to shoot the parents right in front of her," says Braun.



DR. CHARLES BRAUN

Assassinated in 1923, Villa led a life threatened with violence. He began his career of notoriety after beating a landowner who had attacked his sister. Forced to flee, Villa became a rustler. His first murder victim was a businessman who refused him food. "He was probably what many would call a bandit, but he did have

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ideals. Perhaps he strayed from them," makes Braun. "He was the epitome of machismo. He didn't hesitate to kill. He was a fatalist who wasn't afraid to die. Possessing tremendous physical stamina, he expected the same out of his troops."

ALTHOUGH NEVER becoming Mexico's president, Villa did become the governor of the state of Chihuahua. Under his rule, there was a "strange idea of justice," says Braun. One of his lieutenants was labeled the "ear remover."

"The ear remover definitely was a psychopath. He would cut off enemies' ears to mark them. If they were caught in the future defying Villa, they were automatically killed."

At one time leading an army of up to 4,000 men, Villa used a recruitment tactic of force.

"He just went into a town and picked out men. They hadn't any choice but to go with Villa. It was either join or die," says Braun.

Although well-known in Mexico and the United States, Villa is hated by nine out of 10 persons in the state of Chihuahua, says Braun.

"The people suffered terribly under Villa's rule. The persons found who admire him were those with ancestors who belonged to his army."

BRAUN admits it was difficult to sort the myth from reality in research. The story of "the scorpion" led Braun to a dead end at a Mexican museum.

It seems Villa was credited with pardoning a man from the death sentence after the man had killed a 10-inch scorpion in his jail cell. Braun was led to believe the scorpion was preserved in a museum.

"When I got to the museum and asked, the man just laughed and said many others had come looking for it. Scorpions, he said, only grow to two or three inches, and that's big. The story just wasn't true," says Braun.

Best known for his rivalry with U.S. General John ("Blackjack") Pershing, who never managed to capture the Mexican Robin Hood, Villa once posed for a picture alongside Pershing before he became a wanted criminal in 1910. Pershing's incursion into Mexico made the World War One leader famous.

Even his name was fictitious. While a rustler, Doroteo Arango (Villa's

real name) rode with a man named Pancho Villa. When the leader died, Arango adopted the name for himself.

Braun found out other strange things about the leader during his research. While supposedly fighting as a revolutionary, Villa held a deep prejudice against the Chinese for no particular reason that Braun could find. "He just hated them. He was like that."

ON THE OTHER hand, Villa admired Madero, one of Mexico's genuine liberal presidents.

"Villa was illiterate, never learning to read until he spent some time in prison when he was an adult. But he was clever and marvelous at military strategy."

Even after his death, Villa's life is embroiled in controversy. Shortly after his death, his body was dug up and decapitated. The head never was found.

"Many Mexican's believe that persons from a university in the United States stole the head to study the criminal brain," he says.



The price was high for the capture of Pancho Villa and his gang after they made a foray into New Mexico and killed a number of Mexican-Americans.



Famed for their rivalry, Pancho Villa (left) and General John Pershing weren't always enemies as is demonstrated by this photo taken in 1910. An interesting highlight to the

photo is the tall young soldier standing in back of Pershing. George Patton, later the famed World War II general.



**EL PUEBLO NUNCA
OLVIDARA A VILLA.
EL GRAN GUERRILLERO!**

Some call him a hero and others a villain, but Pancho Villa is known by all in his native state of Chihuahua, Mexico. This poster praises him. The translation: "People will never forget Villa, the great warrior."



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