

12-10-1970

Interview no. 4

Frank Brito

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Frank Brito by Leon C. Metz and Dale L. Walker, 1970, "Interview no. 4," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Frank Brito

INTERVIEWER: Leon C. Metz and Dale L. Walker

PROJECT:

DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 10, 1970

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 4

TRANSCRIPT NO.: 4

TRANSCRIBER:

DATE TRANSCRIBED:

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Personalities and experiences in his Army career, especially with the Rough Riders during the Spanish American War.

45 minutes (1⁷/₈ tape speed)

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK BRITO, LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO, NOVEMBER 9, 1970
Dale Walker, Leon Metz
Relates experiences of Rough Rider Days

I was born August 24, 1877.

Alice Roosevelt Longworth was always coming around the regiment, and she always liked my horses. "Monty," she would say, "I want you to take me through the camp." She wanted me to speak Spanish to her because the language was so interesting. She was 14 or 15 at the time.

My brother (no name given) enlisted with me on May 5. He was from Bakersfield, California, and we hadn't seen each other in 15 years. It didn't matter anyway. Whereas we were not unfriendly, we always quarreled and never agreed on anything. After we were mustered out, he reenlisted, went to the Philippines and disappeared. No one ever saw him again.

I was working for the Circle Bar near Pinos Altos when my brother came by. We stayed in camp until April when we received a message from my father to come home at once. It took about ten hours to ride home, and we did it in a hurry because we figured someone was dead--or was in danger of dying. When we arrived late at night, all the lights were on and this increased our apprehension. Father said, "Don't you know that the United States has declared war on Spain? I want you two at the recruiting office early tomorrow morning so that you can enlist and go fight for your country."

An officer at the recruiting center in Silver City said that I couldn't enlist because I wasn't 21. I lacked six months of being that age. So I went to another officer and he took me with no trouble at all. According to him, "The army would weed me out anyhow." But they didn't, even though a lot of good men did not qualify for one reason or the other.

I was transferred from "H" troop to "I" troop. First-Lt. Charles Ballard was our commanding officer. (There is a Southwest Studies relating to Ballard.)

Horses were issued in San Antonio. You were given a ticket and a horse, and a board of army officers judged whether or not you knew your business. They accepted the fact that even the best rider would occasionally get thrown, so many men obtained a second opportunity after being pitched off their mounts once.

I found that policemen from New York were excellent riders, although they couldn't break horses.

When we left for Tampa, Florida, we had to remove the horses from the trains after every two or three hundred miles. Horses had to be fed, watered and groomed. It amounted to real hard work. Most of the trip we rode on top of the train with the black smoke blowing all over us; we looked like Indians upon arrival in Florida.

There was a misunderstanding about our camp in Florida. Someone else already had our place. Roosevelt was furious, and the issue finally went to Washington where it was resolved in our favor. We did no training in Tampa.

In Tampa I was placed in charge of one of the prisoners of war because I spoke Spanish. We already had six or seven prisoners. They had slipped up to the train and cut the tendons of horses. It was Major Dunn who had me guard these prisoners.

Our regiment was composed of 1,500 men. I knew every one in my troop, but very few outside of that. Mostly we got acquainted after the war during the conventions. Hamilton Fish was the sergeant in my troop. McGinnis was Captain of "I" troop. Dr. George P. Hamer was our regimental doctor.

Hal Sayer was an adjutant from West Point who did not get along with anyone. He was just a kid, but he liked to show his authority. I understand that someone killed him out West.

Alvin C. Ash had been a border patrolman in El Paso and a good friend of mine. I believe that Ash's wife is still living in El Paso. Anyway, during the expedition into México with Pershing, Ash wanted to form a separate unit composed of former Rough Riders. There were eight or ten of us who wanted the job. Pershing liked the idea, but Washington turned it down. Perhaps it was just as well. There wasn't as much fighting there as everyone thinks. Most of the expedition was spent in building roads and digging wells.

Two fellows ran the print shop where I worked. Press was about eighteen inches square. Every week it put out about 75 copies of the Pinos Altos Miner. I set type in Spanish and probably learned more there about grammar than I did in school.

Mother Hearst sent a cap to all the employees, but overlooked Kid Washington who was the janitor. He asked me to write a letter to Mother Hearst saying that there was one lone forsaken cowboy down here who wouldn't have one of those caps if it were jammed up her ass.

I don't like to talk about Pat Garrett (and he didn't). He was a friend of mine and that's all I have to say. I knew Wayne Brazel as a quiet young man who didn't drink. However, he often tended bar part-time in the Cowboy Saloon which was a headquarters for cowboys in Las Cruces. Saloon is where Budget Shop is now.

I was jailer for twenty years under the Lucero brothers. Jail had a tin roof and chicken wire over the windows--but no one ever escaped.

(Brito's parents were Santiago and Selma Brito, both born in México. After the Spanish American War, Brito was sheriff of Doña Ana County.)