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Interview no. 125

Crampton Jones

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Col. H. Crampton Jones (1893-)
INTERVIEWER: Robert H. Novak
PROJECT: The Mexican Revolution
DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 18, 1974
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 125
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 125
TRANSCRIBER: Robert H. Novak
DATE TRANSCRIBED: April, 1974

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Member of Pershing Expedition of 1916.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Personalities and events of the Pershing Punitive Expedition into México.

45 minutes (1 7/8 tape speed); 13 pages.

Interview with Col. H. Crampton Jones by Robert H. Novak on April 18, 1974.

N: Colonel Jones, to start why don't you just give me a little bit of biographical background about yourself.

J: All right. I was born November 4, 1893 in a little army post on the Columbia River, Vancouver Barracks or Fort Vancouver. It's across from Portland, Oregon. My father was an officer in the old Sixth Infantry. The army then was rather small. He had gone to West Point in the same year, 1882, that his classmate General Pershing had gone. I was then, naturally, brought up in the army, an army brat as we call ourselves, and traveled with my father and mother and sister from one army post to another, across the continent and twice to the Philippine Islands. Before I was twelve I had been around the world by army transport. So I naturally had a love of the army and I followed my father to West Point, entering there in 1912. I graduated 1916 in June. Villa had already raided Columbus, New Mexico, which was of course in March 1916, while I was still a cadet. We followed with interest the events

of the Punitive Expedition. I was assigned to the field artillery branch of the army and specifically to the old Fourth Field Artillery, which is known as pack artillery, mountain batteries. The weapon is a 2.95 inch howitzer, equivalent to the 75 millimeter French gun in caliber. Of course, the weapon is divided into four loads for a mule and packed on the top of the mules so that they can go anywhere in the mountains, just anywhere. I joined the Fourth Field Artillery as a first lieutenant, having been promoted rapidly. A West Point graduate is first a second lieutenant, but Woodrow Wilson, the President, had urged Congress to pass a law that increased the army by five yearly increments, because the European war was on and he saw the need for a larger army. It was only 75,000 officers and men together at that time. That Punitive Expedition urged Congress to put not only the one increment through, but all five of them at once. That made me a first lieutenant. I then joined Battery "C" of the old Fourth Artillery down there at camp in Colonia Dublán near Casas Grandes, about 125 miles south of the border at Columbus. I did not join immediately after graduation in June, but was granted the usual so-called "graduation leave," which I took. I then joined in the middle of September 1916. I went by rail to Columbus, New Mexico and got off the train there and transferred to a truck train. That was generally the mode of transportation south of the border for long distances. It took two days to arrive at Colonia Dublán. The roads were very poor; in fact, there were no real roads at all. Almost each day the truck train would seek out a new road because the ruts became so deep, filled either with mud or with dust.

Incidentally, one could see a truck train 20 or 30 miles away by the cloud of dust that it raised. There were about 24 or 25 trucks in a train, four wheel drive. Many of them were FWD, which means four wheel drive, and some were the White Company trucks. So I arrived at my station and commenced my duties as a young officer. We call a young officer a shavetail, and that title lasts until some younger officer comes along. My duties were generally camp duties because the movement of troops, the chase after Villa, had finished. I found that my battery had been long enough in this one camp to construct for themselves adobe barracks, an adobe mess hall, and quarters for the officers, simply mixing the clay there with a little straw and building very comfortable buildings. The cavalry had not done quite so much. Each two men in one shelter tent had dug down and built up the side wall so that they could stand up in a small tent using the shelter tent as a roof only. But it was decided by my battery commander to be advisable to have more comfortable quarters. The men were not occupied in chasing Villa anymore. We had marches and we had target practice, and a young officer such as I would spend time on routine duties -- taking early morning reveille and supervising stables, the grooming and feeding of the animals. But I was assigned to special duty two times. It was rather interesting one time when the commander of a wagon train got a month's leave and came back to the United States to visit his family; I was assigned as commander of this long wagon train. It consisted of two wagon companies of 24 four-mule team escort wagons. Its duty was to haul forage for the cavalry farther south. We took hay and oats from

the train at Casas Grandes over Charcos Pass, which was 20 miles away, on down into the valley to El Valle, in an adjacent river valley, and back again -- it was a three day trip each way. That was very interesting -- for the month that I was in command I was the only officer, though I did have a civilian veterinarian who was very capable. We were able to travel day after day and this little veterinarian, Doc Welch, I remember as being very faithful and fine. Incidentally, his father had had a livery stable in San Francisco at the time of our engagement with the Filipinos in the insurrection of 1899 and had sold the mules to the U. S. government. I had beside Doc Welch a very fine wagonmaster -- no, I should call him a trainmaster since we had two wagon companies -- old Sergeant Toft had been in the cavalry for many years and he handled those teamsters very well. The teamsters, incidentally, though in uniform and called soldiers, were really just muleskinners from the farm. They didn't know much, if anything, about the manual of arms, and yet each was armed and had by his seat a boot with a rifle. In addition, though, I had a guard, and sitting on the other side of the seat from the driver or teamster I had an infantryman. Then at night I could park the vehicles, usually in a circle as they did in the old Indian days, and had a guard around camp. We encountered Mexicans on the road, a troop of cavalry now and then, but they were carrancistas and of course friendly. The chase after Villa was given up, as everyone knows, about Christmastime of 1916. It was decided that the expedition should withdraw. I supposed that everyone realized that we might be drawn into World War I, which had

been going on for two to three years in Europe. Incidentally, I think it might be interesting for people to know about little experiences I had before we withdrew. I happened to be on Christmas Day 1916 the officer of the guard, in charge of the prisoners in a wire stockade. That day has been recorded as a very stormy weather day all along the Mexican border. It affected us down there at Colonia Dublán next to Casas Grandes because Gen. Pershing had planned an enormous barbecue for the men. For two days he had prepared these steers and they were being barbecued in a trench. But when this storm came along, one could not see but a few feet in front of him, and of course the barbecued beef was ruined, coated with mud and dust. The only roof that we had at Colonia Dublán, our camp, was on the signal corps building; it was galvanized iron. It blew up and into the stockade, setting fire to the tents in there. We huddled the prisoners in one corner -- four of them had been charged with murder, so it was a difficult situation. One other special duty job that I had while I was still down in México, and that with the quartermaster department, was that of officer in charge of the issue of meat. The expedition had a contract with the two Houghton brothers who had a large ranch halfway down from Columbus, as I remember, to Casas Grandes. They would supply each day to us 12 head of cattle. The Mexicans would slaughter them and we would hang them in a long adobe house which had no windows, hang them on one side, and issue the other 12 which had been slaughtered the day before. You see, of course there was no refrigeration. The meat was palatable, but at first men who had been

used to refrigerated meat or meat held longer were not pleased with it, but gradually they began to like it, and it was all right. Then we were ordered out and we marched. My regiment did not come out as far as Columbus but branched off to the northeast below Columbus, joining the railroad between Columbus and El Paso at about midpoint where water cars were spotted for us. We arrived at Fort Bliss, I think in about the middle of January, 1917, and went into camp. It's there that we were on April 6, when war was declared against Germany. My regiment was divided into two parts, forming a new regiment and maintaining the old. The new regiment was the Fifteenth Field Artillery, to which I was assigned.

- N: Let me go back and ask you just a couple of questions I have about the Punitive Expedition and then we could talk about your experiences in World War I.
- J: Well, of course, that's all been written up, about World War I. I was assigned, as I say, to the Fifteenth Field Artillery, which was part of the Second Division, which went overseas early and fought well. But I had been ordered to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as an instructor where I taught gunnery and materiel. I only went to France following the armistice where I was on duty, various duties, and then had a leave. I then came home, back here to Fort Bliss, where I was assigned early in 1920 to the 82nd Horse Artillery and where I met Harriet Howze, the general's daughter. We were married that year.
- N: Let me ask you this regarding the Pershing Expedition at the time you were at Colonia Dublán. What was the general morale among the soldiers

that had been chasing Villa? Was there a feeling of discouragement that they hadn't captured him? How would you assess the morale of the veterans of the expedition?

J: The men were good -- they were good soldiers. They knew the whole situation. They were anxious to go on to do something if there was something to be done. These were wonderful men in the old army, and they would suffer hardships and not complain. For example, it began to get quite cold before we withdrew and the men had only these olive drab sweaters that had been issued. Before I joined, all of the weather had been temperate and they went into México in summer uniforms. But it began to get a little cold, but there was no complaining. The men not having, of course, entertainment provided for them would try to entertain themselves. Perhaps the greatest entertainment was that of the card games, of poker and of gambling. The first, or payday, every soldier had a little money, but pretty soon it would get concentrated in the hands of the best players, even to the point where in one regiment some men and the supply sergeant, for example, of an adjacent battery seemed to have been most successful. I say that because when we had arrived here at Fort Bliss from México he had enough money to buy several cars and establish his own taxi system -- I remember that quite well. Well, that was one form of entertainment, but there was not very much. We tried to keep the men busy, taking care of animals and on marches and target practice, but I don't believe that after I arrived in México that there was any enemy action -- possibly that engagement at Carrizal, I don't remember the date -- but not much else.

- N: How about this idea that you read about that the Pershing Expedition was sort of a training ground for World War I for the soldiers -- how would you assess that?
- J: I don't think that it was at all assured that we would enter World War I at that time, certainly when the expedition entered México. On the other hand, I believe that President Wilson and the War Department, which was the name then for the present Pentagon -- I don't believe that the War Department fully expected us to be in the war, though the motto of the army is "In peace be prepared for war." So it provided an excuse, let us say, for ordering out National Guard troops, establishing them in camps along the border, not to enter México, but to congregate for training. It did serve that purpose and it was a help in our initial deployment and engagement in World War I. That's about all I can say -- the continuation of the tradition of in peace prepare for war.
- N: Could we talk about some of the personalities you remember from the expedition? For instance, how do you remember General Pershing -- any incidents in particular that would tell us anything about his character?
- J: Well, General Pershing was a very good friend of my father and he seemed to take a liking to me, invited me to his own private mess and things of that sort. He always would send, through me, his regards to my father because they were cadets together. When General Pershing went into the cavalry, my father went into the infantry; I don't remember their ever serving together. My father, when the expedition was in México, was in command of a regiment of infantry, the Fourteenth Infantry, camped at

Douglas, Arizona. But that's about all -- General Pershing was very nice to me. I think it's because he liked my father. I knew the staff officers of General Pershing and I had contact with them in connection with my duties as commander of the wagon train. I would report back to them each time I made a round trip to El Valle and back. We were on the road all the time.

N: How about George Patton -- I guess he was Lieutenant Patton at that time. Did you have any contact with him?

J: I did not know him at that time. He was an earlier class at West Point. He was 1909, as I remember, and I'm a class of 1916. So we were not cadets together. But when I came back from World War I to Fort Bliss, General Patton, then a major I believe, as I was, was on the staff of General Howze, my father-in-law, and we were here together at that time. That was, of course, following the expedition -- I did not know him during the expedition. I knew him and his wife better from 1924 to 1927 in the Hawaiian Islands when we were together in the Hawaiian Department there, the Hawaiian Division. He was then the S-3 or operations officer for the Hawaiian Division. We were very close to them socially because Beatrice Patton was a good friend of ours. We would visit them at Hamilton near Boston and were there when their daughter Beatrice Jr. was married to General Walters, Johnny Walters. That's perhaps all you're interested in. I admired him as a soldier and in the manner in which he commanded the Third Army in World War II. I had contacts with him in that war but was not in his Third Army -- I was in Bradley's First Army and then General Simpson's Ninth Army

at the end.

N: How about General Howze -- what could you tell us about General Howze?

J: Well, of course he's my father-in-law, and General Howze I knew very well. He, incidentally, went to West Point when my father was already there. He followed my father and General Pershing and entered in 1883. So he was a class behind General Pershing and my father. But my father became ill and was turned back, as they say, to the class of 1887, which is the class that General Howze was in. General Howze, though, in turn became sick and was turned back to the class of 1888 and graduated in that year. So each one for the same reason turned back one year. General Pershing, though, continued and graduated without illness in 1886, the regular time. General Howze was, of course, in the Punitive Expedition. He was a major then of the Eleventh Cavalry. The Eleventh practically led the expedition and the chase after Villa. General Howze had formed a crack squadron of picked men and picked horses at the final stages of the chase for Villa and made the longest 24 hour march that I know of -- it was 75 miles, the same man on the same horse, of course leading, the man would walk a while. But that is a measure of the endurance and training of those soldiers. General Howze was a Medal of Honor man. He was engaged in Indian fighting following his graduation in 1888 in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for escaping an encirclement by the Indians and going with a corporal back to the post and getting reinforcements that saved the command. General Howze commanded, before he came here to Fort Bliss, at the end of 1919, just before

I did, the Third Division of our army on the Marne in the last stages of the Argonne in World War I and had then taken his Third Division to occupy the Rhine following the armistice. But then he was ordered back here with a view to organizing the First Cavalry Division, which was done commencing at the time I came in 1920. It was finally organized one or two years later when all the troops were assembled.

N: The last name that I'd like to ask you about is Major Tompkins, Tommy Tompkins -- did you know him?

J: Yes, I knew Tommy Tompkins quite well. He was a widower when I came back from World War I. He commanded the Seventh Cavalry here then, Custer's own. He was a colorful man. I was a bachelor and he was a widower, so I would see him at parties and in Juárez and other places. I got to like him very much. His daughter, incidentally, married Dick Singer -- I think West Point class of about 1920 -- who was also in my regiment in Hawaii in 1924 in the Eleventh Field Artillery. Tommy Tompkins had a faculty of arousing enthusiasm in his regiment. The regiment, of course, had a colorful record already, and Tommy would develop that. Every man was proud to be in the old Seventh. There are many stories about him, and I liked him very much. Now if you are interested in the Pershing Expedition, I'm sure you've probably read Chasing Villa by his brother, Colonel Frank Tompkins. Tommy wasn't the kind who would write stories much -- Colonel Frank Tompkins, his brother, was.

N: Just one more personality I'd like to ask about, switching over to the

other side -- what did the soldiers think about Pancho Villa?
What was the general attitude toward Pancho Villa at the time
you were at Colonia Dublán?

J: Well, you see, he was only a name to them. In the old army, a soldier would know generally what the situation was, but specifically they cared only about the immediate commanders and orders. They knew they were on an expedition into México but the individual soldier didn't know whether it was a punitive expedition or whether it was to prevent further incursions of our United States. The men in general don't think above their own command -- that's for the higher-ups, for the staff officers. And even the staff officers, General Pershing himself -- of course, I can't be sure of this -- couldn't have been sure of how long the expedition would last, when they would be withdrawn, or of anything like that. He was a subordinate, he took orders, and that's the way it is. You have a daily mission, you have a longer mission perhaps, and you carry it out, but you don't always know the situation back of the particular mission. And that's the way it is with soldiers -- they're not interested too much in anything beyond their own command and making a good record for their own command, performing their duties in the most outstanding manner.

N: That's about all the questions I have, unless you have any other experiences of yours, specific incidents that you'd like to tell us about.

J: I think one little interesting thing is that on the banks of the Casas Grandes River we used to hunt ducks. They would come from the north

to the south and light on the water. I had sent back for my shotgun and we officers would hunt there. We would ride on our horses up the river until we spotted them ahead and then turn our horses over to the orderly to hold. I was puzzled by the small mounds that we rode up upon along the river. I spotted on one of them some pieces of shell and pottery. One time I took some men with entrenching tools, shovels and picks, to excavate and found that these were old dwellings and had been occupied about a thousand years before by Indians who had migrated farther south. Now, following that, there's quite a bit of excavation in that area of Casas Grandes. I did not save any of the relics, little white shells, each pierced to make a necklace and things of that sort, but we would excavate a whole room and find charred rafters, we would find a big pot in the corner where they kept grain or water. Nowadays, of course, they know more about it.

N: I guess that's about all I have. Thank you very much, Colonel Jones.

J: Not at all, Mr. Novak -- I'm very happy to have helped you.