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Pursuing Pershing

by DR. FRANK E. VANDIVER

(Vice-President and Provost of Rice University)

I certainly do appreciate that introduction. "Pursuing Pershing"—I got to thinking on the way down here tonight how long I had been at this and became sort of depressed. I came to Rice in 1955 and I found a piece of correspondence the other day—it was a letter to Dr. Houston asking for a little help to start this project; it was dated 1959 . . . that's how long it's been. And when you see the two large volumes, you can see that I didn't leave out a single day. Pershing lived a long time, 88 years. He was born in 1860 and died in 1948. There were not many people worth knowing that he didn't know. He really was a remarkable coverer of the waterfront. He selected his friends apparently with a wild abandon, but it turned out to be with extreme care.

People will write a biography for all kinds of reasons. You may decide to write a biography because a publisher tells you, "Oh, you can make lots of money doing this" and suddenly that sparks an interest in the man that you never had heard of. Or, you can decide that the character that you have been worrying about for awhile is a real unmitigated swine, and only you can tell the world what a thorough swine he was. Now that's a fun kind of book to write. You don't have to be judicious, you can just be prejudicial. And then there is the book that finally grows on you over the years, the kind of subject—Pershing is that for me—the kind of subject that keeps nagging at you, comes at you from different directions. I was doing other things and Pershing kept popping up. I finally decided that there must be more to Joseph Pershing than a stuffed tunic, and a stuffed tunic was all I knew about. All I could remember about "Black Jack" was assorted pictures staring morosely from various textbooks, in which he looked either granite-faced or like he had just eaten a green persimmon. There must have been more to him than that and, so, I began working on Pershing. I pursued him to about every place he went, and that's another reason you can do a biography. Take a man who went a lot of good places and follow him assiduously. Pershing went a lot of good places. He was all over the United States; he was in Cuba; he was in Europe; he was in the Far East, particularly in the Philippines. I pursued him in all those places. I didn't go all over the United States as he did, but I tried to find the most important places he had been—and if I didn't go I found some marvelous hench-person to go for me.

By the way, that's one of the great virtues of this Institution. Let me give you a plug for Rice University while I'm at it. There are not many universities that would sustain the kind of endless research that I do. Rice does. It has not only borne with endless discussion of John J. Pershing, it has put up a lot of the money for it.

Let me give you a few examples of the problems involved in pursuing a man like Pershing. First, a thumbnail sketch. He was a graduate of West Point. He went there late in life. He entered when he was 22 years old. He served in the Calvary at the tag-end of the Indian Wars. And he was on Western Frontier duty for a good long time. He served as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the University of Nebraska, one of his more important early assignments. He served on the staff of the General-in-Chief of the Army, Nelson Miles, in Washington in the 90's. He taught at West Point. He served in the Spanish-American War. He was the first Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, which means he was the man who ran the first Bureau of Military Government that this country set up after the Civil War. He was in the Philippines fighting for many, many years—most conspicuously against the Moros in the Southern Philippines. You may have noticed in recent newspaper articles that the Moros are still fighting all comers. They are still trying to beat the Filipinos. They have taken on everybody for 350 years with marvelous abandon. There are a few enemies that they remember admiringly and one of them is John Pershing. From the Philippines he went on to Mexico, then to ultimate fame in Europe. My first thought was to go to the far places first, because I could have more fun doing that. Also, you can rationalize this. You can decide that if you don't go to the far places first, you might not get there later and the people who knew him will be gone. Which turns out to be true. So, the first place I went was the Philippines. I went there in 1962. I was looking for a legendary Filipino hero, the indomitable Emilio Aguinaldo. Emilio Aguinaldo was indeed alive; he was in the veterans home in Quezon City outside of Manila. He was in his 90's. He was confined to a wheelchair and, as he said, he had lived a long life; had encountered a lot of unpleasant people and these two circumstances made it possible for him to have a lot of "crotchets." And one of his crotchets was that he wouldn't talk the language of his enemies. That excluded a lot of languages of the world. He would speak only Tagalog, which meant I had to have someone to interpret for me. The American Embassy in Manila was very nice about this; they found someone to go with me for the interview. I think they were as interested in this interview with Aguinaldo as I was. I had prepared all these careful questions for Aguinaldo, most of which he told me he couldn't answer. I asked what he could tell me about Pershing. He said, "certainly, I can tell you something about Pershing. He was a soldier." I could see it was going to be a long day. But the interview became fascinating. He went into the questions of how he organized the resistance in all the Islands, particularly in the Southern Philippines. Pershing had encountered the last of the insurrectionist resist-

ance before he went up against the Moros. Aguinaldo talked a lot about the Moro problems that he had had. Although the insurrection took place also in Moroland, it turns out that Aguinaldo did not control it then. Nobody has ever controlled the Moros. And I asked him about what it was like to fight Pershing. He said that Pershing was of such low rank in those days that he couldn't really say. But he spoke about having met him several times. He spoke about him as an acquaintance, which was extremely interesting; and he told me several other stories to follow in the Philippines.

I then went down to try to pursue him in Moroland, which is an exciting place to go if you are a Christian or profess to be one. If you are going to Moroland, abandon Christianity rapidly—aim to be anything else. The Moros are the Prophet's most eastern followers. They don't have very many copies of the Koran in Mindanao and Jolo . . . but they think they know it well. Certain facets of it they do know, and one of them is that you can go instantly to Paradise if you kill a Christian, or an Infidel. Since this quality lingers on, American Embassy officials in Manila told me quite honestly that they couldn't help me—"no one has been there—we don't know anything about Moroland." I was at last introduced to a member of the Philippine Congress who represented Mindanao, and he said, "Why do you want to go South?" I explained my quest. And he said "Ahh! you want to study General Pershing; you will be most welcome there. He is still a hero to the Moros." And he was. That was my first real confirmation that there was a good deal more to the man than met the eye.

I pursued him from the Philippines to Mexico, into Northern Chihuahua, where he was allegedly in pursuit of Pancho Villa. And I went down there in about 1964 and interviewed a man named Praxides Jines Duran, who was governor of Chihuahua at the time. General Jines, who was a merry soul, kept saying he did not speak English—he may not have spoken it, but he understood it well enough. And he kept correcting me, through the interpreter. He introduced himself as the "Second Bandido." He had been Villa's second in command a good deal of the time when Pershing was down in Mexico. And I put him the question: What was it like to fight Pershing? I got on tape a fascinating hour-long dissertation by one professional soldier about another professional soldier. He said that you can't really ask that question; you have to ask "how does a professional soldier wage war?"

Then I pursued Pershing—and various assistants of mine pursued him—all over Europe. I suppose the most effective pursuer is here in this room. I have been extremely fortunate in people who have helped me in doing research in various parts of the world. My languages are not exceptional, but then Linda Laswell Crist is fluent in French and did a lot of work for me in both England and France. And without her kind assistance there would be no discussion of World War I, I promise you. Pershing's main career, of course, is in the war, and his reputation rests on what he did as commander of the American Expeditionary Force. So a good portion of Volume Two, in fact three-quarters of it

als with World War I. There is rather more on WWI than people are going to want to know. So, you can see in all this an outline of some of the ideas of pursuing him.

Now let me tell you about some of the problems of pursuing a man like Pershing. I gave you an idea in discussing the interview with Guinaldo—the interviewed can sometimes take over the process. That happened to me more often than I wish it had. I interviewed Bernard Baruch. Baruch had been a close friend of Pershing after the war. And had in fact been his chief financial advisor during the Depression. Wouldn't it have been nice to have Bernard Baruch be your financial advisor during the Depression? In fact, he said "Pershing was one of three people who called me Barney, not Bernie. And I tell you what I did for him, he went broke in 1929 and I called the New York banks and told them, 'Pershing's account is my account.'" So he had no financial problems, of a serious kind. But Baruch was the kind of person who had been interviewed thousands of times. He grabbed the tape recorder out of my hands, put it just where he wanted it and turned it on and off just when he wanted to.

On the same Eastern swing when I interviewed Baruch, I also interviewed Herbert Hoover. He was gun-shy or was interview shy . . . He said "Don't turn on the tape recorder, I don't talk into tape recorders. I've had a lot of trouble with tape recorders." But he said I could take notes. So I was assiduous in taking notes, and Hoover was one of my favorite interviewees. I would have loved to have stayed with him for days and heard him talk about being President, because he was a man who recalled anecdotedly, which was just the kind of thing I was after. The main anecdote that fascinated me concerned Pershing after Hoover had been in the White House for a time. His wife said to him one day "Herbert, it's time we gave a party." She said: "This time we have to invite General Pershing. We've had lots and lots of people to the White House, but we have not had the most important soldier in the United States." "That's right." "Well, why don't you invite General Pershing." "I can't invite him." "Why?" "I'm scared of him." "You're *scared of him?*" "You're the President of the United States," "Yes, but *he* is General Pershing." That is my favorite quote.

I interviewed General William Simpson in San Antonio. William Simpson commanded the U.S. 9th Army in the Second World War, and retired as a four star General. He had been a Second Lieutenant in the Philippines when Pershing was out there fighting the Moros, and remembered him marvelously well. Simpson has a clear mind and I remember Susie and I went over to do this interview—it was on one of the earlier swings, doing all the generals living in San Antonio and there was a whole flock of them. Most of them, if they had not served with General Pershing, claimed to have served with him. So you had to talk with them. But here was William Simpson, who really had and he was going on at great length about the Moros. He was fascinated by the Moros, as am I, and he was talking about his experiences with

them and General Pershing's experiences with them and in the middle of this Mrs. Simpson came into the room. She listened for awhile interrupted, said: "Ah Bill, turn that thing off, stop that, he doesn't want to hear that. He can get all of that stuff out of books. What he wants to know is what Pershing was like to women." I agreed! So, she started talking and said, "If you were in a room with 200 officers in dress uniform and Pershing came in, he was the only man in the room that any of the women would see." She added, "I suppose they would now call that sex appeal, in my day, it was animal magnetism." She talked about Pershing's memory and I was soon to discover in multiple interviews that his memory was legendary. I think that is the exact word—legendary. The legend grew with the passage of time. She and Mrs. Simpson confirmed that shortly after they were married, they were living at Ft. Bliss, Texas. This would have been 1915. Pershing came to take command of Ft. Bliss and there was a hop given in honor of the new commanding officer. Pershing was standing in line receiving all these people and he hadn't seen Simpson since Simpson was a Second Lieutenant on the Island of Jolo in the Southern Philippines. There they had met once, when Simpson had handed Pershing a brass Agong-agong, a beautiful kind of brass drum with no ends—just a round piece of brass beautifully worked by the Moros. They beat on it to make a drumming sound with it. They are very proud of the work that they do on these agong-agongs. This had been presented to Simpson to be given to General Pershing when he saw him. He tracked all over the Islands and finally handed it over. Pershing had thanked him and had introduced him to Mrs. Pershing. That was the one interview they had had. Coming through the Ft. Bliss line, Mrs. Simpson was introduced first to Pershing and he said, "Ah, I see you corraled that big Moro fighter." Turning, he added, "How are you, Simpson? I haven't seen you since you presented the agong-agong." Simpson was astounded. In San Antonio, I also interviewed General Courtney Hodges. Hodges had the same tale about Pershing's memory. In Mexico, during the Punitive Expedition, Hodges was a Captain and he was walking along late one night in the dust, which was all the ground there was, and passed Pershing's tent. "I pledge you my boots," Hodges said, the tent flap was closed and this sepulchral voice said "Come in, Captain Hodges. He had never met the general. He went in and found Pershing sitting at his field desk, writing—he never looked up, "Hodges, do you make it a habit to have dusty boots?" "Dusty boots?" "No General." Fine, just don't do that again, Captain." And that was the end of the interview. They met later, in 1917; they met in the winter in a trench up near Cantigny—the Germans were nervous. There had been heavy fire on both sides for a couple of days, and there was a lot of nervous shooting going on. Hodges was scurrying along his trench worrying about his command and he saw a man up on the parapet with a pair of night glasses, surveying the battlefield. In a kind of re-enactment of the Lincoln at Fort Stevens episode, Hodges grabbed the man's coat—

st like Oliver Wendell Holmes grabbed Lincoln's coat—and said "Get down you damn fool, you're drawing fire." And down came John Pershing, slowly putting back his night glasses and he looking up at him. "Ah, good evening, Colonel Hodges, do you still have dusty boots?"

Pershing has posed a series of interesting problems for me, because I am a historian of the old school. I was introduced into the intricacies of graduate work at the time when the main tools of research were manuscripts, printed sources and an occasional artifact. So, I had begun with the idea of tracking down Pershing's papers, Pershing's written artifacts. It finally was borne in upon me that Pershing is one of those remarkably transitional figures, not only in the military sense. His career spanned 60 active years. He transformed the old army into the new army. And he is the architect of the modern army. He set up the school system which did, indeed, create the staff system that fought the Second World War. But he is a transitional figure historically.

He spans an age when the sources were the sources I knew. And he moved into an age which spawned various new sources: Movies, radio transcriptions, and even, late in his life, television. He is not a figure who can be seen in one dimension only. He can be seen at least two dimensionally. And this encourages me. I was excited at the prospects of seeing him more, hearing him talk—I thought I could really *know* him. And yet, that is not true. It's a kind of snare and a delusion. You can see all kinds of newsreels in the National Archives. For instance, the motion picture branch has so much footage on the First World War that if you ask them about seeing movies about Pershing—they say, "What day, where and what hour. And they can practically roll any day of the war. So he can be seen and heard in all kinds of situations. But it finally dawned on me that from this kind of evidence can come real distortion—the distortion of a man posing. When he is being filmed, he knows it—almost invariably. When he is making a public speech, he's making a public speech. You feel closer. But I wonder if you even aren't fooled by distortion.

I'd like to pose some other questions and leave you with some puzzles about him. To what extent did his creation of the American Expeditionary Force cast the balance in the First World War? The British will tell you that we were not there. The French will tell that neither the British nor the Americans were there. The Belgians will say they stood alone in the Flanders. The Portuguese don't say anything. But the Americans have received precious little credit for a relatively short time at the front. And you can understand why. The Allies had been there for three years when we arrived. And they had absorbed astounding casualties. The way the Western Front was consuming men was so astronomical that it had ceased to be appalling by 1917. On the first day of July 1916 the British attacked on the Somme and in one day, lost 60,000 men. And that was just one day. At Verdun, where the battle went on for months, a million on both sides were casualties. By

the time Americans arrived, Europe was jaded, virtually bled white. But the British were preparing for an assault on Passchendaele, a bed-ragged piece of rubble five miles beyond the British front. If they could reach Passchendaele they would have broken through and breaking through was the great hope of the Western front by 1917. But they failed.

Americans arrived in a new war with a new army and with something else very hard for the Allies to understand, our men were so big the size of the American soldier was a cause for remark by all the allied commanders. The American troops were so large that the British had to increase rations for the Americans serving with them. We came with something else, too. One German said something about us at Belleau Wood that perhaps will answer the question I posed. He was assessing the trouble fighting at Belleau Wood, and reported that "the moral effect of our own gunfire cannot seriously impede the advance of the American infantry." Now that infused a whole new view into the war. We came with numbers, we came with blood at a time when the Allies needed both numbers and blood. But how well did we fight? This is the one way to measure Pershing as a soldier. He came as the most experienced American combat soldier, and he was training U.S. troops. But he was referred to by his allied counterparts—Douglas Haig, Petain, Foch—as "that American Indian fighter." We were regarded as a non-military power, which we were, and all the experience he had was in fighting the Indians or the Moros, which, so far as the Allies were concerned, were Indians. He had no understanding of the World War, the process of mass extinction, and that's true. How fast could he learn, how fast could he expand an army that was under a hundred thousand when the War began to the two million he began to talk about six-months after he took over the A.E.F. I think he has to be measured on two levels: First, he would tell you, and he did, not in so many words, but in the way he acted—that he wanted to be measured against his colleagues in leading allied armies. He wanted to be measured against Douglas Haig; he wanted to be measured against Petain or Joffre. Probably Joffre, whom he had great admiration for. Not so much Foch, who was in a somewhat different role. Pershing felt in his heart that until he fought a big World War battle, he wasn't their equal, and he couldn't talk to them on the same level. Now he could and was, but he didn't believe it inside.

So he has to be measured as a commander, and I think he has to be measured, too, and perhaps more significantly for history, as the first of a new breed of American generals. I know it is fashionable to say the Civil War is the first of the modern wars and in many ways that is true. It is fashionable among some to say the General Grant was the first of the modern generals. And I don't think that's true. I think that the first of the modern generals were formed on the Western front. Pershing is not the first of the modern generals, but he is the first American modern general. By that I mean the general who is both

eld commander and steps back beyond that to organize, to build, to direct, to be a theater commander, not just simply an Army Commander. He's a conductor, rather than a player. And to a large extent he's a desk soldier, and he hated it; he always hated being a desk soldier, and he got a lot of desk duty. But he had to organize the AEF from nothing.

How well could he, how fast could he, move from the narrow vision of an almost 19th century cavalry soldier, whose world was circumscribed by 40 miles a day and beans and hay to grasp the crises of the Western Front. It is by his growth that I think he will have to be judged by history. Also he deserves to be judged as a prophet—to what extent is he responsible for organizing the staff for the Second World War? How right was he when he said at the Armistice: "This is a big mistake; we should have taken Berlin. The German army doesn't think that it is beaten and we will have to do it all over again in twenty years." These are interesting questions and I wish I could tell you that I answered all of them in even 1200 pages. He remains a fascinating enigma to me. A man who was so cold and remote that he frightened everybody and yet who was so warm-hearted and so human that the misery of his men, the misery of the families of his men, could often reduce him to tears. The condition of the military hospitals could do the same thing, and the sight of little children invariably did, because he was the victim of a terrible tragedy in 1915 when his wife and three daughters burned to death in a fire in the Presidio in San Francisco. The only survivor was his son. I think it's fair to say that when he was given the rank of General of the Armies—the only time that rank has ever been conferred—it was allegedly conferred on George Washington, but there is some doubt that it actually was—Congress was probably right. I don't think we have had another General of the Armies to compare with him. Thank you.



Dr. Frank E. Vandiver, Vice-President and Provost of Rice University.



Mr. Cooper K. Ragan, member of the Board of Directors of the Friends, and Dr. Vandiver.

Black Jack: the life and times of John J. Pershing, by Frank E. Vandiver (Texas A&M University Press, 1977) was published in May of 1977 and has already gone into a second printing. In July of 1977 it was one of the selected titles made available to members of The History Book Club. Early in 1978, *Black Jack* was selected for the Friends of the Dallas Public Library Award "for the most useful and informative book in the field of general knowledge" in the Texas Institute of Letters literary competition for 1977 publications. "Texas Books in Review" in its Best Book Awards for 1977 chose *Black Jack* as the outstanding non-fiction selection. Most importantly, this title was a finalist among titles nominated for the National Book Award in the biography and autobiography category, and it was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

General Pershing's Visit to Rice

February 5, 1920 was Pershing Day in Houston. General John J. Pershing visited Rice Institute in the course of that day. President E. C. Lovett asked the general's permission to send him a set of the *Book of the Opening* ("it will give me pleasure to read them and find out something more of the purpose and aims of this great school"), had him sign a special parchment, and requested that he plant a pecan tree on the campus. Dr. Lovett noted that this planting was the first individual planting of its kind in Rice's history ("a tree that in its maturity shall symbolize to the successive generations of students a valiant soul").

There follows a selection of photos, taken from Rice's official archives housed in the Woodson Research Center of Fondren Library, relating to these campus events.



Visitors parked in front of Administration Building for ceremonies connected with the visit to the Rice Institute of General John J. Pershing.



Cloister of Physics Amphitheatre, left to right: Captain Baker, General Pershing, Mayor Amerman, Governor Hobby.



General Pershing shovelling dirt for planting pecan tree. Gov. Hobby behind him.



General Pershing autographing parchment memorating his visit to the Rice Institute. Dr. Lindsay Blayney in background. Thursday, February 5, 1920.



General Pershing and President Lovett, followed by Professor Lindsay Blayney of the Rice faculty.

The following listings include gifts and memorials received between September 1, 1977 and December 31, 1977.

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The Music Library received a gift of the recording of ORGANIST DAVID CRAIGHEAD PLAYING CONCERTO FOR ORGAN WITH PERCUSSION ORCHESTRA, by Lou Harrison, XENIA, A DIALOGUE FOR ORGAN AND PERCUSSION, by Samuel Adler, and VARIANTS FOR ORGAN, by Paul Cooper from Dr. Paul Cooper of the Shepherd School of Music.

In honor of DR. & MRS. MAX FREUND, Mr. & Mrs. Louis Kestenberg donated GESCHICHTE DER DEUTSCHEN IM STAATE NEW YORK BIS ZUM ANFANG DES 19 JAHRHUNDERTS by Friedrich Kapp.

Dr. Arthur W. Gottschalk of the Shepherd School of Music donated four personal music scores, ROULADES FOR SYMPHONIC BAND, and a sound recording CHICAGO IN THE 1920's to the Music Library.

A considerable number of ARCHITECTURAL PRINTS were received from Mrs. Lee Hodges of Colleyville, TX.

In memory of ALBERT and CHARLES IANKES, sixteen volumes of THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE UNION AND CONFEDERATE NAVIES IN THE WAR OF THE REBELLION were donated by Miss Anna Bob Taylor.

A gift of the fortieth edition of WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA was made by Mr. & Mrs. H. Malcolm Lovett.

Mrs. Charles Cobler donated AMERICAN FOLK SCULPTURE by Robert Bishop as a memorial for MRS. ANNIE BESS MOORE MCGREGOR.

Jean de la Fontaine's CONTES, TOME II was given in memory of MR. SAMUEL MIRON by Professor & Mrs. André Bourgeois.

THE WAR IN THE DESERT by Richard Collier was given by Leopold L. Meyer as an expression of his affection for MR. & MRS. EDDY C. SCURLOCK.

In honor of MISS E. PENDER TURNBULL on the occasion of her birthday, Lola Kennerly and Mrs. A. D. Michal donated two books, ADA, COUNTESS OF LOVELACE: BYRON'S LEGITIMATE DAUGHTER by Doris Langley Moore and MILTON THE PURITAN by A. L. Rowse.

FENCING: ANCIENT ART AND MODERN SPORT by Charles L. DeBeaumont, and SCHOOLS AND MASTERS OF FENCE FROM THE M. A. TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY by Egerton Castle, were given by Mrs. Betty Jean Kolenda in honor of MRS. EVELYN BYRD VAN BUSKIRK, U.S. Woman's National Fencing Champion in the 1920's.

In honor of DR. FRANK E. VANDIVER, a gift of ten volumes of *THE PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR*, edited by Francis Trevelyan, was made by Dr. E. T. Smith.

BLACK JACK: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN J. PERSHING by Frank E. Vandiver was donated by Elva Kalb Dumas as a memorial gift for MRS. A. C. WOOD.

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SPECIAL GIFT

The Fondren Library is pleased to acknowledge the acquisition of *TWELVE ORIGINAL LETTERS OF THOMAS MOORE* purchased with funds given in memory of MRS. BETTY ROSE DOWDEN. Mrs. Dowden served on the Board of the Friends of Fondren for several years and was the wife of Dr. Wilfred S. Dowden, Professor of English at Rice and editor of *The Letters of Thomas Moore*, a two-volume edition published in 1964 by Oxford University Press. Dr. Dowden's work with Thomas Moore has led to the acquisition and organization of an extensive collection of the papers and letters of Moore in the Fondren's Woodson Research Center.

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