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Pancho Villa



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Pancho Villa

Francisco "Pancho" Villa (born José Doroteo Arango Arámbula; 5 June 1878 - 20 July 1923) was a [Mexican Revolutionary](#) general and one of the most prominent figures of the Mexican Revolution.

As commander of the [División del Norte](#) (Division of the North) in the [Constitutionalist Army](#), he was a military-landowner

Francisco "Pancho" Villa

([caudillo](#)) of the northern Mexican state of [Chihuahua](#). Given the area's size and mineral wealth, it provided him with extensive resources. Villa was also provisional [Governor of Chihuahua](#) in 1913 and 1914. Villa can be credited with decisive military victories leading to the ousting of [Victoriano Huerta](#) from the presidency in July 1914. Villa then fought his erstwhile leader in the coalition against Huerta, "First Chief" of the Constitutionalists [Venustiano Carranza](#). Villa was in alliance with southern revolutionary [Emiliano Zapata](#), who remained fighting in his own region of [Morelos](#). The two revolutionary generals briefly came together to take Mexico City after Carranza's forces retreated from it. Later, Villa's heretofore undefeated División del Norte engaged the military forces of Carranza under Carrancista general [Álvaro Obregón](#) and was defeated in the 1915 [Battle of Celaya](#). Villa was again defeated by Carranza, 1 November 1915, at the [Second Battle of Agua Prieta](#), after which Villa's army collapsed as a significant military force.

Villa subsequently led a raid against a small [U.S.-Mexican](#)



Pancho Villa

Birth name	
Nickname(s)	
Born	5 June 1878 La Coyotada, San Juan del Río, Durango , M
Died	20 July 1923 (aged 45) Parral, Chihuahua , Mexico
Buried	Parral, Chihuahua M
Allegiance	Mexico (<i>antireeleccionista</i> revolutionary force)
Rank	General
Commands held	División del Norte
Battles/wars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mexican Revolution First Battle of Ciudad Juárez Battle of Zacatecas First Battle of Agua Prieta First Battle of Nogales Battle of Guerrero Battle of Celaya Battle of Columbus New Mexico Third Battle of Ciudad Juárez Agreement with Mexican government
Spouse(s)	María Luz Corral (b. July 2, 1892; m. May 29, 1911; d. July 6, 1981) (aged 89).
Signature	

[Governor of Chihuahua](#)

[border town](#) resulting in the [Battle of Columbus](#) on 9 March 1916, and then

1913-1914

Salvador R. Mercado
Manuel Chao

retreated to escape U.S. retaliation. The U.S. government sent [U.S. Army](#) General [John J. Pershing](#) on [an expedition](#) to capture Villa, but Villa continued to evade his attackers with guerrilla tactics during the unsuccessful, nine-month incursion into Mexican sovereign territory. The mission ended when the United States entered [World War I](#) and Pershing was recalled.

In 1920, Villa made an agreement with the Mexican government to retire from hostilities, following the ouster and death of Carranza, and was given a [hacienda](#) near [Parral, Chihuahua](#), which he turned into a "military colony" for his former soldiers. In 1923, as presidential elections approached, he re-involved himself in Mexican politics. Shortly thereafter he was assassinated, most likely on the orders of Obregón.

In life, Villa helped fashion his own image as an internationally known revolutionary hero, starring as himself in Hollywood films and giving interviews to foreign journalists, most notably [John Reed](#). After his death, he was excluded from the pantheon of revolutionary heroes until the Sonoran generals Obregón and Calles, whom he battled during the Revolution, were gone from the political stage. Villa's exclusion from the official narrative of the Revolution might have contributed to his continued posthumous popular acclaim. He was celebrated during the Revolution and long afterward by [corridos](#), films about his life, and novels by prominent writers. In 1976, his remains were reburied in the [Monument to the Revolution](#) in Mexico City in a huge public ceremony not attended by his widow [Luz Corral](#).

Early life

Villa told a number of conflicting stories about his early life, and his "early life remains shrouded in mystery." According to most sources, he was born on 5 June 1878, and named José Doroteo Arango Arámbula at birth. His father was a sharecropper named Agustín Arango, and his mother was Micaela Arámbula. He grew up at the *Rancho de la Coyotada*, one of the largest haciendas in the state of [Durango](#). The family's residence now houses the [Casa de Pancho Villa](#) historic museum in [San Juan del Rio](#). Doroteo later claimed to be the son of the bandit Agustín Villa, but according to at least one scholar, "the identity of his real father is still unknown." He was the oldest of five children. As a child, he received some education from a local church-run school, but was not proficient in more than basic literacy. He quit school to help his mother after his father died. He became a bandit at some point early on, but also worked as a sharecropper, muleskinner (*arriero*),

butcher, bricklayer, and foreman for a U.S. railway company. According to his dictated remembrances, published as *Memorias de Pancho Villa*, at the age of 16 he moved to [Chihuahua](#), but soon returned to Durango to track down and kill a hacienda owner named Agustín López Negrete who had raped his sister, afterward stealing a horse and fleeing to the [Sierra Madre Occidental](#) region of Durango, where he roamed the hills as a thief. However, the veracity of this story is questionable. Eventually, he became a member of a bandit band headed by Ignacio Parra, one of the most famous bandits in Durango at the time. As a bandit, he went by the name "Arango".

In 1902, the [rurales](#), the crack rural police force of President [Porfirio Díaz](#), arrested Pancho for stealing mules and for assault. Because of his connections with the powerful Pablo Valenzuela, who had allegedly been a recipient of goods stolen by Villa/Arango, he was spared the death sentence sometimes imposed on captured bandits. Pancho Villa was forcibly inducted into the [Federal Army](#), a practice often adopted under the Diaz regime to deal with troublemakers. Several months later, he deserted and fled to the neighboring state of Chihuahua. In 1903, after killing an army officer and stealing his horse, he was no longer known as Arango but Francisco "Pancho" Villa after his paternal grandfather, Jesús Villa. However, others claim he appropriated the name from a bandit from [Coahuila](#). He was also known to his friends as [La Cucaracha](#) or ("the cockroach").

Until 1910, Villa is said to have alternated episodes of thievery with more legitimate pursuits. Villa's outlook on banditry changed after he met [Abraham González](#), the local representative for presidential candidate [Francisco Madero](#), a rich hacendado turned politician from the northern state of Coahuila, who opposed the continued rule of Díaz and convinced Villa that through his banditry he could fight for the people and hurt the hacienda owners.

At the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, Villa was thirty-two years old.

Madero, Villa, and the Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution began when [Francisco Madero](#) challenged incumbent President Porfirio Díaz in the 1910 elections. Díaz arrested Madero and staged fraudulent elections, but Madero had united a broad base of pro-democracy, anti-re-electionists who sought an end to the Díaz regime. In his Plan de San Luis Potosí, Madero called for revolutionary action against the Díaz regime on November 20, 1910, and declared himself provisional president of Mexico. In Chihuahua, the leader of the anti-re-electionists,

Abraham González, reached out to Villa to join the movement. Villa captured a large hacienda, then a train of [Federal Army](#) soldiers, and the town of San Andrés. He went on to beat the Federal Army in Naica, Camargo, and Pilar de Conchos, but lost at Tecolote. Villa met in person with Madero in March 1911, as the struggle to oust Díaz was ongoing.



Villa as he appeared in the United States press during the Revolution

Although Madero had created a broad movement against Díaz, he was not sufficiently radical for anarcho-syndicalists of the [Mexican Liberal Party](#), who challenged his leadership. Madero ordered Villa to deal with the threat, which he did, disarming and arresting them. Madero rewarded Villa by promoting him to colonel in the revolutionary forces.

Much of the fighting was in the north of Mexico, near the border with the United States. Fearful of U.S. intervention, Madero ordered his officers to call off the siege of the strategic border city of [Ciudad Juárez](#). Villa and [Pascual Orozco](#) attacked instead, capturing the city after two days of fighting, thus winning the first [Battle of Ciudad Juárez](#) in 1911. Facing a series of defeats in many places, Díaz resigned May 25, 1911, afterward going into exile. However, Madero signed the [Treaty of Ciudad Juárez](#) with the Díaz regime, which

kept the same power structure, including the just defeated Federal Army. The rebel forces, including Villa, were demobilized, and Madero called on the men of action to return to civilian life. Orozco and Villa demanded that hacienda land seized during the violence bringing Madero to power be distributed to revolutionary soldiers. Madero refused, saying that the government would buy the properties from their owners and then distribute them to the revolutionaries at some future date. According to a story recounted by Villa, he told Madero at a banquet in Ciudad Juárez after the victory in 1911, "You, sir [Madero], have destroyed the revolution... It's simple: this bunch of dandies have made a fool of you, and this will eventually cost us our necks, yours included." This proved to be the case for Madero, who was murdered during a military coup in February 1913 in a period known as the [Ten Tragic Days](#) (*Decena Trágica*).

Once elected President in November 1911, Madero proved a disastrous politician, dismissing his revolutionary supporters and relying on the existing power structure. Villa strongly disapproved of Madero's decision to name [Venustiano Carranza](#) (who had previously been a staunch supporter of Díaz until Díaz refused to appoint him as Governor of Coahuila in 1909) as his

Minister of War. Madero's "refusal personally to accommodate Orozco was a major political blunder."^[22] Orozco rebelled in March 1912, both for Madero's continuing failure to enact land reform and because he felt himself insufficiently rewarded for his role in bringing the new president to power. At the request of Madero's chief political ally in the state, Chihuahua Governor Abraham González, Villa returned to military service under Madero to fight the rebellion led by his former comrade Orozco. Although Orozco appealed with him to join his rebellion, Villa again gave Madero key military victories. With 400 cavalymen, he captured Parral from the Orozquistas and then joined forces in the strategic city of Torreón with the Federal Army under the command of General [Victoriano Huerta](#).

Huerta initially welcomed the successful Villa, and sought to bring him under his control by naming Villa an honorary brigadier general in the Federal Army, but Villa was not so easily flattered or controlled. Huerta then sought to discredit and eliminate Villa by accusing him of stealing a fine horse and calling him a bandit. Villa struck Huerta, who then ordered Villa's execution for insubordination and theft. As he was about to be [executed by firing squad](#), he made appeal to Generals [Emilio Madero](#) and Raul Madero, brothers of President Madero. Their intervention delayed the execution until the president could be contacted by telegraph, and he ordered Huerta to spare Villa's life but imprison him.

Villa was first imprisoned in [Belem Prison](#), in Mexico City. While in prison he was tutored in reading and writing by [Gildardo Magaña](#), a follower of [Emiliano Zapata](#), revolutionary leader in Morelos. Magana also informed him of Zapata's [Plan de Ayala](#), which repudiated Madero and called for land reform in Mexico. Villa was transferred to the Santiago Tlatelolco Prison on 7 June 1912. There he received further tutelage in civics and history from imprisoned Federal Army general [Bernardo Reyes](#). Villa escaped on [Christmas Day](#) 1912, crossing into the United States near [Nogales](#) on 2 January 1913. Arriving in [El Paso, Texas](#), he attempted to convey a message to Madero via Abraham González about the upcoming coup d'état, to no avail; Madero was murdered in February 1913, and Huerta became president. Villa was in the U.S. when the coup occurred. With just seven men, some mules, and scant supplies, he returned into Mexico in April 1913 to fight Madero's [usurper](#) and his own would-be executioner, President Victoriano Huerta.

Fighting Huerta, 1913–14

Huerta immediately moved to consolidate power. He had Abraham González, governor of Chihuahua, Madero's ally and Villa's mentor, murdered in March 1913. (Villa later recovered González's remains and gave his friend and

mentor a proper funeral in Chihuahua.)

Huerta faced opposition from Zapata, who continued leading the revolutionary peasant movement in Morelos under a slightly revised Plan de Ayala. The governor of Coahuila, [Venustiano Carranza](#), who had been appointed by Madero, also refused to recognize Huerta's authority. He proclaimed the [Plan of Guadalupe](#) to oust Huerta as an unconstitutional usurper. Considering Carranza the lesser of two evils, Villa joined him to overthrow his old enemy, Huerta, but he also made him the butt of jokes and pranks. Carranza's political plan gained the support of politicians and generals, including [Pablo González](#), [Álvaro Obregón](#), and Villa. The movement was collectively called the *Ejército Constitucionalista de México* ([Constitutionalist Army of Mexico](#)). The *Constitucionalista* adjective was added to stress the point that Huerta had not legally obtained power through lawful avenues laid out by Mexico's [Constitution of 1857](#). Until Huerta's ouster, Villa joined with the revolutionary forces in the north under "First Chief" Carranza and his Plan of Guadalupe.



Constitutionalist
Generals [Obregón](#), Villa
with U.S. Army General
[Pershing](#), posing after
a 1913 meeting at [Fort
Bliss, Texas](#)
(immediately behind
Gen Pershing is his
aide, 1st Lt. [George S.
Patton Jr.](#)). Obregón
later lost his right arm
fighting Villa's forces
during the 1914-15 civil
war between the
winners who had
ousted [Victoriano
Huerta](#).

The period 1913-1914 was the time of Villa's greatest international fame and military and political success. He recruited soldiers and able officers (both patriotic Mexicans and [mercenary](#) soldiers), including [Felipe Ángeles](#), Manuel Chao, [Sam Dreben](#), [Felix A. Sommerfeld](#) and [Ivor Thord-Gray](#), and raised money using methods such as [forced assessments](#) on hostile hacienda owners and train robberies. In one notable escapade, after robbing a train he held 122 bars of silver and a [Wells Fargo](#) employee hostage, forcing Wells Fargo to help him sell the bars for cash. A rapid, hard-fought series of victories at Ciudad Juárez, [Tierra Blanca](#), [Chihuahua](#), and [Ojinaga](#) followed.

The well-known American journalist and fiction writer [Ambrose Bierce](#), then in his seventies, accompanied Villa's army during this period and witnessed the [Battle of Tierra Blanca](#). Villa considered Tierra Blanca, fought from 23 to 24 November 1913, his most spectacular victory, although General Talamantes died in the fighting. Bierce vanished on or after December 1913. His disappearance has never been solved. Oral accounts of his execution by firing squad were never verified. U.S. Army Chief of Staff [Hugh L. Scott](#) charged Villa's American agent, Sommerfeld, with finding out what happened, but the only result of

the inquiry was the finding that Bierce most likely survived after Ojinaga and died in Durango.

[John Reed](#), who graduated from Harvard in 1910 and became a leftist journalist, wrote magazine articles that were highly important in shaping Villa's epic image for Americans. Reed spent four months embedded with Villa's army and published vivid word portraits of Villa, his fighting men, and the women [soldaderas](#), who were a vital part of the fighting force. Reed's articles were collected as *Insurgent Mexico* and published in 1914 for an American readership. Reed includes stories of Villa confiscating cattle, corn, and bullion and redistributing them to the poor. President [Woodrow Wilson](#) knew some version of Villa's reputation, saying he was "a sort of Robin Hood [who] had spent an eventful life robbing the rich in order to give to the poor. He had even at some point kept a butcher's shop for the purpose of distributing to the poor the proceeds of his innumerable cattle raids."

Governor of Chihuahua

Villa was a brilliant tactician on the battle field, which translated to political support. In 1913, local military commanders elected him provisional governor of the state of Chihuahua against the wishes of First Chief Carranza, who wished to name Manuel Chao instead. As Governor of Chihuahua, Villa recruited more experienced generals, including Toribio Ortega, Porfirio Talamantes, and Calixto Contreras, to his military staff and achieved more success than ever. Villa's secretary, Pérez Rul, divided his army into two groups, one led by Ortega, Contreras, and Orestes Pereira and the other led by Talamantes and Contreras' former deputy, Severiano Cenicerros.

Villa's war tactics were studied by the [United States Army](#), and a contract with Hollywood was made whereby Hollywood would be allowed to film Villa's movements and 50% of Hollywood's profit would be paid to Villa to support the Revolution.

As governor of Chihuahua, Villa raised more money for a drive to the south against Huerta's Federal Army by various methods. He printed his own currency and decreed that it could be traded and accepted [at par](#) with gold [Mexican pesos](#). He forced the wealthy to give loans to fund the revolutionary war machinery. He confiscated gold from several banks, and in the case of the Banco Minero he held a member of the bank's owning family, the wealthy Terrazas clan, as a hostage until the location of the bank's hidden gold reserves was revealed. He also appropriated land owned by the *hacendados* (owners of the *haciendas*) and redistributed it to the widows and family of dead revolutionaries.

Villa's political stature at that time was so high that banks in [El Paso, Texas](#) accepted his paper pesos at face value. His generalship drew enough admiration from the U.S. military that he and Álvaro Obregón were invited to [Fort Bliss](#) to meet Brigadier General [John J. Pershing](#). Returning to Mexico, Villa gathered supplies for a drive to the south.

With so many sources of money, Villa expanded and modernized his forces, purchasing draft animals, cavalry horses, arms, ammunition, mobile hospital facilities (railroad cars and horse [ambulances](#) staffed with Mexican and foreign volunteer doctors, known as *Servicio sanitario*), and other supplies, and rebuilt the railroad south of Chihuahua City. He also recruited fighters from Chihuahua and Durango and created a large army known as the *División del Norte* (*Division of the North*), the most powerful and feared military unit in all of Mexico. The rebuilt railroad transported Villa's troops and artillery south, where he defeated the Federal Army forces in a series of battles at [Gómez Palacio, Torreón](#), and eventually at the heart of Huerta's regime in [Zacatecas](#).

Victory at Zacatecas, 1914

After Villa successfully captured the strategic prize of Torreón, Carranza ordered Villa to break off action south of Torreón and instead to divert to attack [Saltillo](#). He threatened to cut off Villa's coal supply, immobilizing his supply trains, if he did not comply. This was widely seen as an attempt by Carranza to divert Villa from a direct assault on Mexico City in order to allow Carranza's forces under Obregón, driving in from the west via [Guadalajara](#), to take the capital first. This was an expensive and disruptive diversion for the *División del Norte*. Villa's enlisted men were not unpaid volunteers but paid soldiers, earning the then enormous sum of one peso per day. Each day of delay cost thousands of pesos.

Disgusted but having no practical alternative, Villa complied with Carranza's order and captured the less important city of Saltillo, and then offered his resignation. Felipe Ángeles and the rest of Villa's staff officers argued for Villa to withdraw his resignation, defy Carranza's orders, and proceed to attack Zacatecas, a strategic railroad station heavily defended by Federal troops and considered nearly impregnable. Since the colonial era, Zacatecas was the source of much of Mexico's silver, and thus a supply of funds for whoever held it. Villa accepted his staff's advice and cancelled his resignation, and the *División del Norte* defied Carranza and attacked Zacatecas. Attacking up steep slopes, the *División del Norte* defeated the Federals in the *Toma de Zacatecas* (Taking of Zacatecas), the single bloodiest battle of the Revolution, with Federal casualties numbering

approximately 7,000 dead and 5,000 wounded, and unknown numbers of civilian casualties. (A memorial to and museum of the *Toma de Zacatecas* is on the *Cerro de la Bufa*, a key defense point where the Federal Army was entrenched.)

Villa's victory at Zacatecas in June 1914 broke the back of the Huerta regime. Huerta left the country on 14 July 1914. The Federal Army collapsed, ceasing to exist as an institution. In August 1914, Carranza and his revolutionary army entered Mexico City ahead of Villa. Civil war between the winners was the next stage of the Revolution.

Alliance with Zapata against Carranza, 1914-15

Once Huerta was ousted, the power struggle between factions of the revolution came into the open. The revolutionary caudillos convened the Convention of Aguascalientes, attempting to sort out power in the political sphere rather than on the battlefield. This meeting set out a path towards democracy. None of the armed revolutionaries were allowed to be nominated for government positions, and Eulalio Gutierrez was chosen as interim president. Emiliano Zapata, a military general from southern Mexico, and Villa met at the convention. Zapata was sympathetic to Villa's hostile views of Carranza and told Villa he feared Carranza's intentions were those of a dictator and not of a democratic president. Fearing that Carranza was intending to impose a dictatorship, Villa and Zapata broke with him. Carranza opposed the agreements of the Convention, which rejected his leadership as "first chief" of the Revolution. The Army of the Convention was constituted with the alliance of Villa and Zapata, and a civil war of the winners ensued. Although both Villa and Zapata were defeated in their attempt to advance an alternative state power, their social demands were copied (in their way) by their adversaries (Obregón and Carranza).

Carranza and Alvaro Obregón retreated to Veracruz, leaving Villa and Zapata to occupy Mexico City. Although Villa had a more formidable army and had demonstrated his brilliance in battle against the now defunct Federal Army, Carranza's general Obregón was a better tactician. With Obregón's help, Carranza was able to use the Mexican press to portray Villa as a sociopathic bandit and undermine his standing with the U.S. In late 1914, Villa was dealt an additional blow with the death from typhus of one of his top generals, Toribio Ortega.

While Convention forces occupied Mexico City, Carranza maintained control over two key Mexican states, Veracruz and Tamaulipas, where Mexico's two

largest ports were located. Carranza was able to collect more revenue than Villa. In 1915, Villa was forced to abandon the capital after a number of incidents involving his troops. This helped pave the way for the return of Carranza and his followers.

To combat Villa, Carranza sent his ablest general Obregón north, who defeated Villa in a series of battles. Meeting at the [Battle of Celaya](#) in the Bajío, Villa and Obregón first fought from 6 to 15 April 1915, and Villa's army was badly defeated, suffering 4,000 killed and 6,000 captured. Obregón engaged Villa again at the [Battle of Trinidad](#), which was fought between 29 April and 5 June 1915, where Villa suffered another huge loss. In October 1915, Villa crossed into Sonora, the main stronghold of Obregón and Carranza's armies, where he hoped to crush Carranza's regime. However, Carranza had reinforced Sonora, and Villa was again badly defeated. [Rodolfo Fierro](#), a loyal officer and cruel hatchet man, was also killed while Villa's army was crossing into Sonora.

After losing the [Battle of Agua Prieta](#) in Sonora, an overwhelming number of Villa's men in the *Division del Norte* were killed and 1,500 of the army's surviving members soon turned on him, accepting an amnesty offer from Carranza. "Villa's army [was] reduced to the condition to which it had reduced Huerta's in 1914. The celebrated Division of the North was thus eliminated as a capital military force."

In November 1915, Carranza's forces captured and executed Contreras, Pereyra, and son. Severiano Ceniceros also accepted amnesty from Carranza and turned on Villa as well. Although Villa's secretary Perez Rul also broke with Villa, he refused to become a supporter of Carranza.

Only 200 men in Villa's army remained loyal to him, and he was forced to retreat back into the mountains of Chihuahua. However, Villa and his men were determined to keep fighting Carranza's forces. Villa's position was further weakened by the United States' refusal to sell him weapons. By the end of 1915, Villa was on the run and the United States government recognized Carranza.

After Celaya, 1915: from national leader to guerrilla leader

After years of public and documented support for Villa's fight, the United States refused to allow more arms to be supplied to his army, and allowed Carranza's troops to be relocated over U.S. railroads. [Woodrow Wilson](#) believed that supporting Carranza was the best way to expedite

establishment of a stable [Mexican government](#). Villa felt betrayed by the Americans. He was further enraged by Obregón's use of searchlights, powered by American electricity, to help repel a *Villista* [night attack](#) on the border town of [Agua Prieta, Sonora](#), on 1 November 1915. In January 1916, a group of *Villistas* attacked a train on the [Mexico North Western Railway](#), near [Santa Isabel](#), Chihuahua, and killed a number of American employees of the [American Smelting and Refining Company](#). The passengers included eighteen Americans, fifteen of whom worked for American Smelting. There was only one survivor, who gave the details to the press. Villa admitted to ordering the attack, but denied that he had authorized the shedding of American blood.

After meeting with a Mexican mayor named Juan Muñoz, Villa recruited more men into his guerrilla militia and had 400 men under his command. Villa then met with his lieutenants Martin Lopez, Pablo Lopez, Francisco Beltran, and [Candelario Cervantes](#), and commissioned an additional 100 men to the command of [Joaquin Alvarez](#), [Bernabe Cifuentes](#), and Ernesto Rios. Pablo Lopez and Cervantes were later killed in the early part of 1916. Villa and his 500 guerrillas then started planning an attack on U.S. soil.

Attack on New Mexico

On 9 March 1916, General Villa ordered nearly 100 Mexican members of his revolutionary group to make a cross-border [attack against Columbus, New Mexico](#). While some believed the raid was conducted because of the U.S. government's official recognition of the Carranza regime and for the loss of lives in battle due to defective cartridges purchased from the U.S., it was accepted from a military standpoint that Villa carried out the raid because he needed more military equipment and supplies in order to continue his fight against Carranza. They attacked a detachment of the [13th Cavalry Regiment \(United States\)](#), burned the town, and seized 100 horses and mules and other military supplies. Eighteen Americans and about 80 *Villistas* were killed.

Other attacks in U.S. territory were allegedly carried out by Villa, but none of these attacks were confirmed to have been carried out by *Villistas*. These were:

- 15 May 1916. [Glenn Springs, Texas](#) - one civilian was killed, three American soldiers were wounded, and two Mexicans were estimated killed.
- 15 June 1916. [San Ygnacio, Texas](#) - four soldiers were killed and five soldiers were wounded by bandits, six Mexicans were killed.
- 31 July 1916. [Fort Hancock, Texas](#) - two Americans were killed. The two

dead Americans were soldiers from the [8th Cavalry Regiment](#) and Customs Inspector Robert Wood. One American was wounded, three Mexicans were reported killed, and three Mexicans were captured by Mexican government troops.

Pancho Villa Expedition

In response to Villa's raid on Columbus, President Wilson sent 5,000 men of the U.S. Army under the command of General Frederick Funston who oversaw John Pershing as he pursued Villa through Mexico. Employing aircraft and trucks for the first time in U.S. Army history, Pershing's force chased Villa until February 1917. The search for Villa was unsuccessful. However, some of Villa's senior commanders, including Colonel Candelario Cervantes, General Francisco Beltrán, Beltrán's son, Villa's second-in-command [Julio Cárdenas](#), and a total of 190 of his men were killed during the expedition.

The Mexican population was against U.S. troops in Mexican territories. There were several demonstrations of opposition to the Punitive Expedition and that counted towards the failure of that expedition. During the expedition, Carranza's forces captured one of Villa's top generals, Pablo Lopez, and executed him on 5 June 1916.

German involvement in Villa's later campaigns

Before the Villa-Carranza irregular forces had left to the mountains in 1915, there is no credible evidence that Villa cooperated with or accepted any help from the German government or agents. Villa was supplied arms from the U.S., employed international [mercenaries](#) and doctors including Americans, was portrayed as a hero in the U.S. media, made business arrangements with Hollywood, and did not object to the 1914 [U.S. naval occupation of Veracruz](#). Villa's observation was that the occupation merely hurt Huerta. Villa opposed the armed participation of the United States in Mexico, but he did not act against the Veracruz occupation in order to maintain the connections in the U.S. that were necessary to buy American cartridges and other supplies. The German consul in Torreón made entreaties to Villa, offering him arms and money to occupy the port and oil fields of [Tampico](#) to enable German ships to dock there, but Villa rejected the offer.

German agents tried to interfere in the [Mexican Revolution](#), but were unsuccessful. They attempted to plot with Victoriano Huerta to assist him to retake the country and, in the infamous [Zimmermann Telegram](#) to the Mexican government, proposed an alliance with the government of Venustiano Carranza.

There were documented contacts between Villa and the Germans after Villa's split with the Constitutionalists. This was principally in the person of Felix A. Sommerfeld (noted in Katz's book), who allegedly funneled \$340,000 of German money to the [Western Cartridge Company](#) in 1915, to purchase ammunition. Sommerfeld had been Villa's representative in the United States since 1914 and had close contact with the German naval attaché in Washington [Karl Boy-Ed](#), as well as other German agents in the United States including [Franz von Rintelen](#) and [Horst von der Goltz](#). In May 1914, Sommerfeld formally entered the employ of Boy-Ed and the German secret service in the United States. However, Villa's actions were hardly that of a German [cat paw](#); rather, it appeared that Villa resorted to German assistance only after other sources of money and arms were cut off.

At the time of Villa's attack on [Columbus, New Mexico](#) in 1916, Villa's military power had been marginalized (he was repulsed at Columbus by a small cavalry detachment, albeit after doing a lot of damage), his theater of operations was mainly limited to western Chihuahua, he was [persona non grata](#) with Mexico's ruling Carranza constitutionalists, and the subject of an [embargo](#) by the U.S., so communication or further shipments of arms between the Germans and Villa would have been difficult.

A plausible explanation for contacts between Villa and the German after 1915 is that they were a futile extension of increasingly desperate German diplomatic efforts and *Villista* dreams of victory as progress of their respective wars bogged down. Villa effectively did not have anything useful to offer in exchange for German help at that point. When assessing claims of Villa conspiring with Germans, portrayal of Villa as a German sympathizer served the [propaganda](#) needs of both Carranza and Wilson and has to be taken into account.

The use of [Mauser rifles](#) and [carbines](#) by Villa's forces does not necessarily indicate a German connection. These weapons were widely used by all parties in the [Mexican Revolution](#), Mauser longarms being enormously popular. They were standard issue in the [Mexican Army](#), which had begun adopting 7 mm Mauser system arms as early as 1895.

Final years: guerrilla leader to hacienda owner

Following his unsuccessful military campaign at [Celaya](#) and the 1916 incursion into New Mexico, prompting the unsuccessful U.S. military intervention in Mexico to capture him, Villa ceased to be a national leader and became a guerrilla leader in Chihuahua. While Villa still remained active, Carranza shifted

his focus to dealing with the more dangerous threat posed by Zapata in the south. Villa's last major military action was a raid against Ciudad Juárez in 1919. Following the raid, Villa suffered yet another major blow after [Felipe Angeles](#), who had returned to Mexico in 1918 after living in exile for three years as a dairy farmer in Texas, left Villa and his small remaining militia. Angeles was later captured by Carranza's forces and was executed on 26 November 1919.

Villa continued fighting, and conducted a small siege in Ascención, Durango, after his failed raid in Ciudad Juárez. The siege failed, and Villa's new second-in-command, his longtime lieutenant Martín López, was killed during the fighting. At this point Villa agreed that he would cease fighting if it were made worth his while.

On 21 May 1920, a break for Villa came when Carranza, along with his top advisers and supporters, was assassinated by supporters of [Álvaro Obregón](#). With his nemesis dead, Villa was now ready to negotiate a peace settlement and retire. On 22 July 1920, Villa was finally able to send a telegram to Mexican interim President [Adolfo de la Huerta](#), which stated that he recognized Huerta's presidency and requested amnesty. Six days later, de la Huerta met with Villa and successfully negotiated a peace settlement.

In exchange for his retirement from hostilities, Villa was granted a 25,000 acre hacienda in Canutillo, just outside [Hidalgo del Parral](#), Chihuahua, by the national government. This was in addition to the [Quinta Luz](#) estate that he owned with his wife, [María Luz Corral de Villa](#), in [Chihuahua, Chihuahua](#). The last remaining 200 guerrillas and veterans of Villa's militia who were still loyal to him would reside with him in his new hacienda as well, and the Mexican government also granted them a pension that totalled 500,000 gold pesos. The 50 guerrillas who still remained in Villa's small cavalry would also be allowed to serve as Villa's personal bodyguards.

Personal life

As Villa's biographer [Friedrich Katz](#) has noted, "During his lifetime, Villa had never bothered with conventional arrangements in his family life," and he contracted several marriages without seeking annulment or divorce. On 29 May 1911, Villa married María Luz Corral, who has been described as "the most articulate of his many wives." Villa met her when she was living with her widowed mother in San Andrés, where Villa for a time had his headquarters. Anti-re-electionists threatened the locals for monetary contributions to their cause, which the two women could not afford. The widow Corral did not want to seem a counter-revolutionary, and went to Villa, who allowed her to make

a token contribution to the cause. Villa sought Luz Corral as his wife, but her mother was opposed; however, the two were married by a priest "in a great ceremony, attended by his military chiefs and a representative of the governor. A photo of Corral with Villa, dated 1914, has been published in a collection of photos from the Revolution. It shows a sturdy woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a floor-length embellished skirt and white blouse, with a [rebozo](#) beside a smiling Villa. After Villa's death, Luz Corral's marriage to Villa was challenged in court twice, and both times it was upheld as valid. Together, Villa and Luz Corral had one child, a daughter, who died within a few years after birth.

Villa had long term relationships with several women. Austreberta Rentería was Villa's "official wife" at his hacienda of Canutillo, and Villa had two sons with her, Francisco and Hipólito. Others were Soledad Seañez, Manuela Casas with whom Villa had a son, and Juana Torres to whom he wed in 1913 and with whom he had a daughter.

At the time of Villa's assassination in 1923, Luz Corral was banished from Canutillo. However, she was recognized by Mexican courts as Villa's legal wife and therefore heir to Villa's estate. President Obregón intervened in the dispute between competing claims to Villa's estate in Luz Corral's favor, perhaps because she had saved his life when Villa threatened to execute him in 1914.

Rentería and Seañez eventually were granted small government pensions decades after Villa's death. Corral inherited Villa's estate and played the key role in maintaining his public memory. All three women were often present at ceremonies at Villa's grave in Parral. When Villa's remains were transferred in 1976 to the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City, Corral refused to attend the huge ceremony. She died at the age of 89 on July 6, 1981.

An alleged son of Pancho Villa, the lieutenant colonel Octavio Villa Coss, was reportedly killed by [Juan Nepomuceno Guerra](#), a legendary drug lord from the [Gulf Cartel](#), in 1960.

Villa's last living son, Ernesto Nava, died in [Castro Valley](#), California, at the age of 94, on 31 December 2009. Nava appeared yearly in festival events in his hometown of [Durango, Mexico](#), enjoying celebrity status until he became too weak to attend.

Assassination in 1923

On Friday, 20 July 1923, Villa was killed while visiting Parral. He frequently made trips from his ranch to Parral for banking and other errands, where he

generally felt secure. Villa was usually accompanied by his entourage of *Dorados*, or bodyguards, but for some unknown reason on that day he had gone into the town without most of them, taking with him only three guards and two other employees. He went to pick up a consignment of gold from the local bank with which to pay his Canutillo ranch staff. While driving back through the city in his black 1919 Dodge touring car, Villa passed by a school, and a pumpkinseed vendor ran toward his car and shouted *Viva Villa!*, a signal to a group of seven riflemen who then appeared in the middle of the road and fired more than 40 rounds into the automobile. In the fusillade, nine dumdum bullets, normally used for hunting big game, hit Villa in the head and upper chest, killing him instantly.

Claro Huertado (a bodyguard), Rafael Madreno (Villa's main personal bodyguard), Danie Tamayo (his personal secretary), and Colonel Miguel Trillo (who also served as his chauffeur) were also killed. One of Villa's bodyguards, Ramon Contreras, was badly wounded but managed to kill at least one of the assassins before he escaped, and was the only survivor. Villa is reported to have died saying, "Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something," but there is no contemporary evidence that he survived his shooting even momentarily. Historian and biographer Friedrich Katz, wrote in 1998 that Villa died instantly. Time also reported in 1951 that both Villa and his aide (Tamayo) were killed instantly.

Telegraph service was interrupted to Villa's hacienda of Canutillo, probably so that Obregón's officials could secure the estate and "to prevent a possible Villista uprising triggered by his assassination."

The next day, Villa's funeral was held and thousands of his grieving supporters in Parral followed his casket to his burial site while Villa's men and his closest friends remained at the Canutillo hacienda armed and ready for an attack by the government troops. The six surviving assassins hid out in the desert and were soon captured, but only two of them served a few months in jail, and the rest were commissioned into the military.

Although there is a theory that the family of Jesús Herrera, which had been feuding with Villa, was behind the assassination, a more plausible theory is that Villa was assassinated because he had talked publicly about re-entering politics as the 1924 elections neared. Obregón could not run again for the presidency, so there was political uncertainty about the presidential succession. Obregón favored General Plutarco Elías Calles for the presidency. In Villa's opinion, his agreement to withdraw from politics and retire to an hacienda indicated he might re-enter politics. That would complicate the political situation for Obregón and the Sonoran generals.

While it has never been proven who was responsible for the assassination, most historians attribute Villa's death to a well planned conspiracy, most likely initiated by Plutarco Elías Calles and [Joaquín Amaro](#) with at least tacit approval of the then president of Mexico, Álvaro Obregón.

At the time, a state legislator from Durango, [Jesús Salas Barraza](#), whom Villa once whipped during a quarrel over a woman, claimed sole responsibility for the plot. Barraza admitted that he told his friend, who worked as a dealer for General Motors, that he would kill Villa if he were paid 50,000 pesos. The friend was not wealthy and did not have 50,000 pesos on hand, then collected money from enemies of Villa and managed to collect a total of 100,000 pesos for Barraza and his other co-conspirators. Barraza also admitted that he and his co-conspirators watched Villa's daily car rides and paid the pumpkinseed vendor at the scene of Villa's assassination to shout "Viva Villa!" either once if Villa was sitting in the front part of the car or twice if he was sitting in the back.

Despite the fact that he did not want to have a sitting politician arrested, Obregón gave in to the people's demands and had Barraza detained. Initially sentenced to 20 years in prison, Barraza's sentence was commuted to three months by the governor of Chihuahua, and Barraza eventually became a colonel in the Mexican Army. In a letter to the governor of Durango, Jesús Castro, Barraza agreed to be the "fall guy" and the same arrangement is mentioned in letters exchanged between Castro and Amaro. Others involved in the conspiracy were [Félix Lara](#), the commander of federal troops in Parral, who was paid 50,000 pesos by Calles to remove his soldiers and policemen from the town on the day of the assassination, and [Meliton Lozoya](#), the former owner of Villa's hacienda from whom Villa was demanding payback funds he had embezzled. It was Lozoya who planned the details of the assassination and found the men who carried it out. It was reported that before Barraza died of a stroke in his Mexico City home in 1951, his last words were "I'm not a murderer. I rid humanity of a monster."

Legacy

Villa was buried the day after his assassination in the city cemetery of [Parral, Chihuahua](#), rather than in Chihuahua city, where he had built a mausoleum. Villa's skull was stolen from his grave in 1926. According to local folklore, an American treasure hunter beheaded him to sell his skull to an eccentric millionaire who collected the heads of historic figures. His remains were reburied in the [Monument to the Revolution](#) in Mexico City in 1976. The [Francisco Villa Museum](#) is a museum dedicated to Villa located at the site of

his assassination in Parral. There are [period newsreels showing views of the assassination](#) location in Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua.

Villa's purported death mask was hidden at the Radford School in [El Paso, Texas](#), until the 1980s, when it was sent to the [Historical Museum of the Mexican Revolution](#) in Chihuahua. Other museums have ceramic and bronze representations that do not match this mask.

Villa has relatively few sites in Mexico named for him. In Mexico City, there is a [Metro División del Norte](#) station, in an oblique honoring of Villa via the name of his revolutionary army.

Gallery



Monument to Pancho Villa in Bufa [Zacatecas](#) mountain range



Equestrian bronze of Villa in [Chihuahua, Chihuahua](#)



Image of Francisco Villa

In popular culture

Villa was famous during the Revolution and has remained so, holding a fairly mythical reputation in Mexican consciousness, but not officially recognized in Mexico until long after his death. As the "Centaur from the North" he was considered a threat to property and order on both sides of the border, feared, and revered, as a modern Robin Hood.

In Mariano Azuela's novel *[The Underdogs](#)*, anti-federal soldiers talk about him as an archetype of an anti-authoritarian bandit: "Villa, indomitable lord of the sierra, the eternal victim of all governments... Villa tracked, hunted down like a wild beast... Villa the reincarnation of the old legend; Villa as Providence, the bandit, that passes through the world armed with the blazing torch of an ideal: to rob the rich and give to the poor. It was the poor who built up and imposed a legend about him which Time itself was to increase and embellish as a shining example from generation to generation." However, a little later, one character distrusts the rumors: "Anastasio Montañéz questioned the speaker more particularly. It was not long before he realized that all this high

praise was hearsay and that not a single man in Natera's army had ever laid eyes on Villa."

Whatever the reality behind the legends, even after his defeat Villa remained a powerful character still lurking in the Mexican mind; in 1950 [Octavio Paz](#) wrote, in his morose but thoughtful book on the Mexican soul, *[The Labyrinth of Solitude](#)*, "The brutality and uncouthness of many of the revolutionary leaders has not prevented them from becoming popular myths. Villa still gallops through the north, in songs and ballads; Zapata dies at every popular fair. ... It is the Revolution, the magical word, the word that is going to change everything, that is going to bring us immense delight and a quick death."

Pancho Villa remains a controversial figure in the [United States](#). *USA Today* reported, "A terrorist in 1916, a tourist attraction in 2011. ... On Jan. 8, 1916, 18 U.S. businessmen were massacred by Villa's men in a train robbery in northern Mexico. It was not the first or last of Villa's atrocities; he personally shot a priest who begged for clemency for his villagers, as well as a woman who blamed him for her husband's death."

In films, video, and television

Villa appeared as himself in the films *[Life of Villa](#)* (1912), *Barbarous Mexico* (1913), *With General Pancho Villa in Mexico* (1913), *[The Life of General Villa](#)* (1914) and *[Following the Flag in Mexico](#)* (1916).

Films based on Pancho Villa have appeared since the early years of the Revolution and have continued to be made into the twenty-first century. Hollywood's role in the shaping of the image of Villa, the Mexican Revolution, and U.S. public opinion has been the subject of a scholarly study. The 1934 biopic *[Viva Villa!](#)* was nominated for an [Academy Award for Best Picture](#). In 2003, [HBO](#) broadcast *[And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself](#)*, with [Antonio Banderas](#) as Villa that focuses on the making of the film *[The Life of General Villa](#)*.

Actors who have portrayed Villa include:

- [Raoul Walsh](#) (1912, 1914) *[The Life of General Villa](#)*
- [Wallace Beery](#) (1917) *[Patria](#)*
- [George Humbert](#) (1918) *[Why America Will Win](#)*
- [Wallace Beery](#) (1934) *[Viva Villa!](#)* with Phillip Cooper (Pancho Villa as a boy)
- [Juan F. Triana](#) (1935) *[El Tesoro de Pancho Villa](#)*
- [Domingo Soler](#) (1936) *[Vámonos con Pancho Villa](#)*

- [Maurice Black](#) (1937) *Under Strange Flags*
- [Leo Carrillo](#) (1949) *Pancho Villa Returns*
- [Pedro Armendáriz](#) (1950, 1957, 1960 twice)
- [Alan Reed](#) (1952) *Viva Zapata!*
- [Victor Alcocer](#) (1955) *El siete leguas*
- [Rodolfo Hoyos Jr.](#) (1958) *Villa!!*
- [Rafael Campos](#) (1959) *Have Gun - Will Travel: Season 3, Episode 6 (Pancho)*
- [José Elías Moreno](#) (1967) *El Centauro Pancho Villa*
- [Ricardo Palacios](#) (1967) *Los siete de Pancho Villa*
- [Yul Brynner](#) (1968) *Villa Rides*
- [Telly Savalas](#) (1972) *Pancho Villa*
- [Heraclio Zepeda](#) (1973) *Reed, México insurgente*
- [Antonio Aguilar](#) (1974) *La Muerte de Pancho Villa*
- [Héctor Elizondo](#) (1976) *Wanted: The Sundance Woman* (TV)
- [Freddy Fender](#) (1977) *She Came to the Valley*
- [José Villamor](#) (1980) *Viva México* (TV)
- [Jorge Reynoso](#) (1982) *Red Bells: Mexico in Flames*
- [Gaihor Brownne](#) (1985) *Blood Church*
- [Guillermo Gil](#) (1987) *Senda de Gloria* (TV series)
- [Pedro Armendáriz Jr.](#) (1989) *Old Gringo*
- [Mike Moroff](#) (1992) *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles, Young Indiana Jones and the Curse of the Jackal, "Mexico, March 1916", The*

In literature

- *El águila y la serpiente* by [Martín Luis Guzmán](#) (1930); it "can be considered as [Guzmán's] reminiscences of Villa and his movement.
- *The Friends of Pancho Villa* (1996), by [James Carlos Blake](#).
- In the [Southern Victory Series](#) novels *The Great War: American Front* and *The Great War: Walk in Hell* by [Harry Turtledove](#), Doroteo Arango is

a candidate for the Radical Liberal Party in the 1915 [Confederate States Presidential Election](#), representing Chihuahua, which the [CSA](#) purchased in 1881. He went on to be soundly defeated in the election to Whig candidate [Gabriel Semmes](#).

Villa's battles and military actions

Villa was one of Mexico's greatest military leaders. His string of victories since the beginning of the Mexican Revolution were decisive in bringing the downfall of Porfirio Díaz, the victory of Francisco Madero, and the ouster of Victoriano Huerta. He remains a heroic figure for many Mexicans. His military actions are worthy of listing individually.

- [First Battle of Ciudad Juárez](#) (1911 won)
- [Second Battle of Ciudad Juárez](#) (1913 won)
- [Battle of Tierra Blanca](#) (1913 won)
- Battle of Chihuahua (1913 won)
- Battle of Ojinaga (1914 won)
- First Battle of Torreón (1914 won)
- Battle of Gómez Palacio (1914 won)
- Battle of Saltillo (1914 won)
- [Battle of Zacatecas](#) (1914 won)
- [Battle of Celaya](#) (1915 lost)
- Battle of Trinidad (1915 lost)
- [Battle of Agua Prieta](#) (1915 lost)

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External links

- [Photos of Villa and the Mexican Revolution](#) - some graphic images, and some also in the book *The Wind That Swept Mexico*.

- [Images of Camp Furlong and Columbus, New Mexico - 1916](#)

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