# HONDURAS in the "GOOD OLD DAYS"
# La República de Honduras en los "Viejos Días Buenos"

## Part I -- 1969

The "good old days" in Honduras… When were they? That, of course, depends on the viewpoint of whoever is defining the good old days. The good old days for one person are surely bad old days for someone else. W. C. Fields had a quip for this: "Ah, for the 'Good Old Days'…I hope they never come again." From my point of view as a young, somewhat adventurous gringo, the good old days in Honduras were from 1969 to 1975. The country was a sleepy backwater, generally peaceful. Oh, yes, there were rough characters in Olancho and there was political violence and even a war with a neighboring republic in this period, and there was much abject poverty. But for a gringo geologist Honduras was a fun place to be, rustic and behind the times—being there was almost like returning to the 19th century. And I could come and go pretty much as I liked without watching over my shoulders for anything sinister. I could walk the streets of Tegus late at night without worries. I could ride my horse into remote mountain villages and know I could find food and shelter. As a gringo I had numerous privileges (mostly positive, though being routinely overcharged also came with the territory). It was a great time for a young *norteamericano* to be living and working in Honduras. What follows are some of my memories from this period and vignettes of Honduras in what for me were the good old days.

<u>Semana Santa 1969</u>

My first trip to Honduras took place during *Semana Santa* (Easter week) of 1969. I was a geology graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. Bill Muehlberger (WRM) had agreed to supervise my dissertation and suggested I work in Honduras where he already had three other UT graduate students doing field geology. I readily agreed to this, with only one slight apprehension: genuine Mexican food could be too hot for me….and I feared the food got hotter as you went further south (to my relief it did not). Two other UT geology profs, Steve Clabaugh and Fred McDowell, completed our *Semana Santa* party. En route we spent one night in Guatemala City and saw some Easter festivities in the *parque central* where an enormous throng of *Chapines* --a nickname that may refer to the general shortness of Guatemalans, especially those with much Maya blood— had gathered. I had no fear of getting lost in the crowd because we *norteamericanos* towered above them all, especially the big guy, WRM, who loomed large in life wherever he was, both in stature and demeanor.

The next day it was on to Toncontín airport in Tegucigalpa in a prop plane—at that time no jets served Tegus, with its somewhat short runway enclosed by terrain that made the approach difficult for jets. It was interesting to see, as we landed, houses (shacks) flash by at wing level.*

I do not remember where we overnighted in Tegus. There were no first class hotels. The Hotel Prado and the Gran Hotel Lincoln were the best in town, and none too good. We might have stayed at the Hotel Boston, a 2nd class affair, but reputable and secure. I do recall that we visited the bar at the Gran Hotel Lincoln, where there was a woman on a swing and where we also saw an odd-ball floor show: two guys on roller skates doing crazy dances up on table tops.

*According to a widely circulated story, sometime in the early-mid 70s, *Jefe de Estado* López Arellano informed Pan Am that if they refused to fly jets to the capital city (they were flying jets into San Pedro), he would suspend their rights to serve Honduras. The story goes that Pan Am ran a test…they flew a 707 into Toncontín with no passengers, only the crew on board. The landing was so dicey that in order to get the plane back in the air they reduced weight by removing all the seats. Don't know if that is true or not, but the first jets I ever saw come in to Toncontín were 737s, sometime around '73 or '74. And likely this was not until the runway had been extended somewhat.

Tegucigalpa in the “good old days”.  Note the SAHSA DC-3 in flight over the city.

Tegus in this epoch was not really a cosmopolitan city; it was more an overgrown village. There were no real skyscrapers.  In addition to the dearth of nice hotels, there were only four good restaurants (where good means “suitable for foreigners” and where if you asked if the water was purified you could believe the yes answer):  La Barbacoa (downhill a few blocks from the U.S. Embassy), Dino’s (my favorite), Villa Adriana (by reservation, out near Toncontín) and the very traditional and famous El Chico Club.  There were no American chain restaurants at all. There weren’t even any traffic signals in Tegus in 1969.  Traffic police stood on wooden platforms (painted with Coca-Cola ads) in the middle of major intersections, directing traffic by flamboyant hand gestures.  The US Embassy was a small affair compared to what is there now, and you could walk right up to the door, ask the marine on duty where somebody’s office was and be directed to it.  (A far cry from today’s security protocols.)  Yes, the capital was a rustic place, but with considerable charm, and generally safe.

Our business was geologic and in the field, so we did not linger in Tegus.  WRM had three graduate students in country already mapping quadrangles, and he was down to check on their work and let me look at a couple of possible field areas.  We traveled in three dark blue 1968 Jeeps, lent to the students by ICAITI (Instituto Centroamericano de Tecnología e Investigaciones) in Guatemala City.  Given the state of Honduran roads in those days, high clearance 4WD vehicles were a real necessity. The main north-south highway from Tegus to San Pedro was mostly gravel, classified as all weather, but featuring sections like the 31 hairpin curves climbing up out of the Comayagua valley to the Siguatepeque plateau.  The side roads were really bad, many transitable only in the dry season due unbridged rivers that were impassible in the rainy season. It was on this first trip that I had the brilliant idea that Honduras could gain some international fame (and tourism income) by hosting a road race throughout the country that would challenge the stoutest vehicles and bravest of drivers and mechanics. I do not remember our route, but I know we visited Zambrano (Bill DuPré’s thesis area), Comayagua (John Everett’s dissertation area) and El Rosario (Bob Fakundiny’s dissertation area.  Plus the two areas being offered for my consideration: the Minas de Oro and San Pedro Zacapa quads.

We reached Comayagua, the former capital of Honduras, on Good Friday and witnessed *penitentes* flagellating themselves and religious statues being carried through the streets. We were informed that we should not attempt to go anywhere during the Easter holidays, that travel on holy days was frowned upon and sometimes blocked. This, of course, was incompatible with our limited time in Honduras, so we traveled in spite of the ban. What we found was that the roads might be blocked here and there by religious fanatics, but that they did not let their religious scruples prevent them from accepting "donations" for passage through the blockades.

In Comayagua I learned that you could not buy postage stamps at the *correo*.* You had to take your letter there, get it weighed to learn what stamps were necessary, then trundle down to the *farmacia* or other place of business that had the concession to sell stamps. Then carry your letter back to the post office to mail it. A PCV (Peace Corps Volunteer) explained it thusly: postal employees were paid so poorly that if they could sell the stamps and collect the money, they would take the letters home, steam the stamps off the envelope, and re-sell them, pocketing the extra. Don't know if this was truly the case, but it was believable. In most large stores, such as hardware stores, the person who took the money was kept separate from the person who sold you the wanted item—you got a ticket for the item, took it to the cashier and paid for it, took the stamped ticket back to the service person who was holding the item for you. Excessively low wages do not promote employee loyalty.

In Fakundiny's El Rosario quad there is a small village with an unusual name: Cacaguapa. To the best of my knowledge there is only one possible translation of this moniker. "Caca" is Spanish slang for shit. "Guapa" means beautiful. This portion of Fak's quad was underlain by metamorphic rocks, predominantly schists. Like most geologists, Fak has an earthy sense of humor, and so was born the formation name "Cacaguapa Schist" which appears now on many geologic maps in Honduras.

It was in this area that I saw my first examples of traditional native fish traps made of poles lashed together to form a long cone-like funnel. These traps were placed in rapids, with cobble and boulder constructions flanking them to guide the fish into the traps. Once washed into the traps they could not get out, I presume due to the swiftness of the rapids. Another traditional means of fishing I learned about later was to use poison (related to rotenone) derived from a particular tree. The poison stuns the fish (by oxygen deprivation?) which then float up to the surface to be collected.

In Minas de Oro we met up with Vern Garton, mining exploration geologist for the famous New York & Honduras Rosario Mining Co., which had been operating in Honduras since 1878. Vern was exploring a copper deposit near Minas de Oro and was hoping I would do my dissertation field mapping in this quadrangle. But I saw that this would involve a lot of igneous and metamorphic petrography, which I had had my fill of for my master's degree, so I was not enthusiastic about the idea of mapping here. Two memories from Minas de Oro: It was here I was turned on by my first experience with *café de palo*—home grown, home roasted coffee straight from the tree. I was amazed by the rich flavor of this thick syrupy brew (served with lots of sugar, the preferred *campesino* way) that slid viscously down the side of the cup revealing a reddish-brown color. Folks in the U.S. just don't know how great coffee can be. Secondly, Vern had an ocelot kitten in his Minas de Oro house that was unbelievably cute. Made me want one. But, most unfortunately, this did not end well: the kitten was killed some months later, stoned by some kids. The simple truth is that it is almost always a bad idea to remove animals from the wild.

On our final field day we got into the San Pedro Zacapa quadrangle, but just a little ways before time ran out. The road in was terrible, even in the dry season. There was not a kilometer of pavement or fresh roadcuts (desirable for geologizing) in the entire 500 sq km quad. In fact,

*An exception was the main *correo* in Tegus. Here you could buy stamps. They did not have any glue on them, but there was a pot of paste on a desk not far from the stamp window, so you applied paste to the back of the stamp and squished it onto your envelope.

fully a third of the quad lay south of the *Río Ulúa* and was completely roadless and would have to be worked by foot or mounted. Nonetheless, I chose the Zacapa quad as my field area. My reasons were not very scientific: I didn't want more igneous petrography…Zacapa was sedimentary…including limestone with caves…and there was a big beautiful lake (which at this time I had not seen) in one corner of the quad. I chose it, and it worked out well for me. But it wasn't a scientific choice.

I will mention one other incident that occurred on this trip. We were examining an ignimbrite outcrop when Steve Clabaugh turned over a slab revealing a number of fat grubs. He picked one up, showed it around until he had our attention, then popped it in his mouth and ate it. He then offered the remaining grubs to the rest of us. I was the only one who met his challenge. Had I been alone on the outcrop I would certainly never have eaten one or even considered it. But I was not to be backed down by one of my professors, at least not on a non-geologic matter. Little did I know at the moment that I had passed a significant test; my action convinced Clabaugh that I would do OK in the field in spite of the lack of modern amenities. BTW, I have never eaten another one.

<u>Dissertation field work 1969-1970-1971</u>

I started mapping the Zacapa quad in June 1969. I flew into Guatemala City, picked up one of the blue Jeeps from ICAITI and drove the Pan American Highway through the eastern half of Guatemala, across El Salvador into southern Honduras, then and up the 90 kilometers of paved *Carretera del Sur* from the Gulf of Fonseca area to Tegus. Not long after I entered Honduras I began to notice anti-*Salvadoreño* slogans painted on boulders and walls. And I soon learned that HRN –Honduras National Radio-- was broadcasting lots of anti-*Salvadoreño* propaganda. What was this all about, I wondered?

In Tegus, I almost certainly stayed at "Doña Teresa's", a very cheap *pensión* favored by PCVs, who called it "D.T.'s". There was a dormitory for guys and another for girls. A few PCVs who had been there a long time had their own private rooms. Bathrooms were communal. It was very cheap, but suited the PCVs, as well as the occasional US graduate student like myself who might find it conveniently priced, and also safe. This was in 1969 when PCVs were expected to live poor; that changed in the mid-70s.

I met with my in-country *jefe*, the Director of the *Dirección General de Minas e Hidrocarburos* (DGMH) and acquired maps at the *Instituto Geográfico Nacional* (IGN) and got headed out to my field area with the loss of only a few days.

North from Tegus the *Carretera del Norte* (CdelN) pavement extended past Zambrano down to the Comayagua valley, but that was the end of it at that time. In spite of being gravel, the CdelN was (and still is) the most important commercial road in Honduras. For which reason numerous semi-tractor trailers and logging trucks were rumbling along it, sending up thick clouds of dust. The dust was worst in section of road crossing friable red shales of the Valle de Ángeles Group. To pass a semi, you had to get up close to it…choking on the dust, and sometimes blinded by it. I recall one time a thick cloud of dust totally prevented me from seeing the truck in front of me and I had to come to a stop…hoping that no one was plowing down on me from behind. I mentioned earlier the 31 hairpin curves in the ascent to the Siguatepeque plateau. To pass a semi on this section you waited until he reached a hairpin and swung wide to make the curve, and then you gunned your engine and passed him on the inside of the curve. It was the only way.

Eager to see the reportedly beautiful *Lago de Yojoa*, I elected to start mapping in the NE corner of my quad. Luckily, I was able to secure lodging and food at *Misión La Buena Fé,* (LBF) a Reorganized Latter Day Saints mission run single-handedly by an American nurse, Christina Turner, then in her sixties. Her religious ideas were not compatible with mine, but she was a fine person, happy to have me as a boarder, someone to speak English with, and perhaps prove

useful in other ways, though naturally I was out in the field almost every day so not really available to help out much. But my having a vehicle was a plus...the mission had none.

A small section of the old *Carretera del Norte* climbing out of the Comayagua Valley towards Siguatepeque.

LBF had been founded in the 1950s by an idealistic young couple who belonged to the Reorganized Latter Day Saints (sometimes referred to as "Missouri Mormons"). Unfortunately, over the years the mission had not prospered. When I arrived the mission was in tight financial straits. It consisted of a large L-shaped building and a few small wooden homes for people associated with the mission. None of the buildings were in great shape, but the location was splendid, in a narrow valley that funneled afternoon breezes through the whispering pines, relieving the tropical heat. I was given a bedroom in the main building. I fell in love with the place immediately, and before the summer field season was over I was subject to pipe dreams about somehow purchasing the place (not that I had any money) and settling in as a beneficent *hacendado* (not that I knew anything about running a farm or ranch)! Lack of funds would have

*Misión La Buena Fé* – my first home in Honduras. *Lago de Yojoa* in the background.

killed this pipe dream in any case, but I also like to think that I was smart enough to realize that being a gringo landowner in Honduras had its risks; the mission had some problems with squatters and a military man had recently confiscated an area not far from the mission. A landed gringo would have been a natural target. But in any case, the pipe dream was a pleasant contemplation.

It was here at LBF that I began to see some of the awful effects of the abject poverty. A very sick and skinny child was brought in one day for Christina to save, but the parents—possibly out of ignorance or possibly out of fear of fees (there would not have been any)-- had waited too late and this grimly emaciated boy perished a couple of days after his arrival. I saw many adults whose clothing bespoke poverty: I remember talking to a couple of men by the roadside one day, both in raggedy clothing but one really seriously poorly clothed: he had no underclothing and his manhood was exposed through long rents in his pants. Extreme poverty was easy to see in cities, too. In Tegus I saw a man walking along the street wearing a pair of pants that had been patched so often that the original material could not be clearly discerned—I believe the pants had originally been made of the deep blue cloth that *campesinos* favored back then, but they had been patched, re-patched, patches patched over again and again until it was not possible to be certain what was the original cloth. His pants had become a work of art and I really wanted to buy them, but of course did not embarrass him with any offer. On another occasion I saw an aged woman trundling slowly along a Tegus sidewalk; she stopped, squatted slightly, urinated (evidently she, too, wore no underclothes), and then trundled on. Daily in Tegus poor women could be seen washing clothes in the *Río Choluteca* near the *Puente Mallol*—standing knee deep in the seriously polluted water, beating clothing on river rocks. And on the bridge itself a group of beggar women would sit most of the day hoping for *una limosna* (alms). One woman in particular drew my attention for the flat-lensed black plastic glasses she wore; she maintained her spot –her office, I called it—there for years, until she finally disappeared. More beggars were always clustered around the entrance to the cathedral. And hungry children would wait around the entries to restaurants, hoping for leftover food from a client; on more than one occasion I invited a child in to sit at my table and finish my meal for me, a practice not especially appreciated by management.

As I mentioned, LBF mission had no vehicle, so from time to time, I could benefit the mission using my Jeep. But one trip was of truly questionable benefit. My Jeep's brake line ruptured. I had no money for vehicle repairs, but knew that I could get the vehicle repaired in Tegus at a government facility…but Tegus was 175 kilometers and two mountain ranges away. Still, I determined to drive it in, counting on gearing down and/or killing the ignition as needed. (I was young and foolish.) Upon learning that I was going to Tegus, Cerila, a woman who lived at LBF asked if I could carry her to Siguatepeque. I explained to her the danger of making the trip with no brakes, but she insisted she needed to go, in order to settle some family matter, so I told her she could come with me. (I was young and foolish.) As it turned out, she wanted to go to some village beyond Siguat down the road toward Jesús de Otoro. Not wanting to put her out on the side of the road (I was young and foolish), I decided to take her to her village, even though it was out of my route. Well, I had almost made it to Cirila's *aldea* when the narrow road suddenly plunged downhill, the brakeless jeep picked up speed; we entered a sharp curve that I could not make, and in the attempt the Jeep turned over on its side. Fortunately, no one was hurt. And if I had actually made the turn it is highly likely that the outcome would have been worse at the next sharp curve.

Before long a crowd had gathered and a number of men straining with ropes were able to right the Jeep. I started it up, and it ran, and then died from lack of fuel….the gas had leaked out while the vehicle was on its side. An hour later gasoline had been brought in by mule, and somehow I got the Jeep out of there, back to Siguat and on to Comayagua without further incident. I overnighted with Al and Grace, an older PCV couple who took me in as a really weary, dusty, mentally hassled and bedraggled compatriot in desperate need of commiseration, a rum and coke, hot bath, meal and English conversation. Bless them both!

My overturned Jeep, about to be righted by the muscle power of friendly *campesinos* with lassos.

Al and Grace lived at an agricultural school a few kilometers outside of Comayagua. As I drove out the gates of the school the next morning, I saw a kid, maybe 8 or 10 years old, obviously wanting a ride. And since I was headed back into Comayagua, which pretty much had to be his destination, I stopped to pick him up. (I was young and foolish, and also didn't much speak Spanish at the time.) Unfortunately, I could not communicate very well with him, but I was sure he'd tell me where he wanted off when we got to Comayagua. But he didn't. And he accompanied me through the town and out on the road to Tegus. I began to question him more, but could not understand his answers. By the time we were 10 or 15 km out from Comayagua, I noted he seemed nervous, and that made me really nervous. I stopped somewhere, probably at a filling station and found an adult I could speak to and understand and explained the situation. He came out and interviewed the boy. It turned out he lived back in Comayagua and I had, in effect, kidnapped him. I wasn't about to go back, so I gave the man some money to send the kid back home on the next bus!

The final adventure on this particular trip was when I arrived in Comayagüela – the sister city to Tegus—the road came into the city through the main market area, where the streets were jammed with vehicles and people…and me still driving with no brakes. People would not get out of the way. I had to kill the ignition several time to avoid running over people. What a nightmare! How insane of me to have made this trip with no brakes….but…I was young and foolish.

A few days later, brakes repaired and back in the field, I mapped for a few days in the vicinity of the small town of San José de Comayagua (SJC), where I had some memorable experiences. I could drive from LBF to SJC, but geologizing in the surrounding area had to be done on foot or mounted. Geologizing on foot is better, generally, because when mounted you don't dismount and look closely at the rocks as much as you should. But hiking the mountain trails in the fierce tropical heat can be exhausting. Especially if you have to machete your way through brush and briars to get to outcrops. A frightening incident occurred one afternoon when, weary of chopping, I got up on a big fallen pine that lay on a slope at the base of an outcrop. I used the pine as a bridge over a thicket of briars. As I walked up the sloping trunk, machete in hand, a hunk of bark

sloughed off the trunk and out from under my feet. Down I went, landing hard on the pine trunk and directly on top of my machete…which, fortunately for me, had turned flat, dragged flat, I think, by my body sliding down the tree trunk. Had it not turned flat, I would have been impaled. It's not at all uncommon for people to get terrible machete wounds in Honduras, but mostly these occur during drunken fights and it would be in seriously poor form to do yourself in on your own machete, but I nearly did.

For another foray out of SJC I rented a horse. I noted that the horse was small and skinny, but didn't feel I should complain considering the cost: the going rate for a horse was Lps. 2.00 a day, exactly the same that a field hand got paid for a day's work. We were headed up a steep trail and the horse was moving slowly, so to speed him up a bit, I gave him a kick. What was that? My heels had hit something hard when I kicked him. I kicked again, and again I hit something hard. On the third kick I realized that I was hitting the heels of my boots together under the horse's belly. Did I say he was a skinny horse? Holy kazoosis!

Hiking or riding, at the end of a hot and tiring field day one of the first things I wanted was a cold beer. So back in SJC after my ride I looked for a relatively prosperous looking store and stepped inside to ask "*Hay cerveza?"* to which the storekeep answered affirmatively, yes, he had beer. Then I would ask if he had cold beer. And he again replied in the affirmative and pulled a bottle of beer out from under the counter where it had been in the shade for some time. In the shade was considered "cold". Few storekeeps in small towns had refrigerators in these days. I quickly learned to like my thirst quenching shade-cooled beer, but also began to take note of where actually cold beers could be had. I took an extra copy of my quad and designated it my "waterhole map", on which I recorded the locations where cold or even cold-ish beers were sold. An important map!

Speaking of beer geography, in these days there were only three brands of beer sold in Honduras. Imperial, a pilsner that I liked except upon occasion when it had a slightly soapy taste, was sold in Tegus and throughout southern Honduras. Nacional was also sold in Tegus and, in fact, as its name implies, throughout Honduras, coast to coast. The third brand, Salva Vida, "*La Morena con Cuerpo*", was sold in northern Honduras, including my field area. There is a story behind the name "Salva Vida": the brewery was founded by the Vaccaro brothers of Standard Fruit fame. It is said that one of the brothers was asked, while sailing in his private yacht to Honduras, what he planned to name his new beer. Relaxing in a deck chair his eye fell upon a canvas-covered cork life ring and the name was inspired. I will confirm that after a long hot field day one of these beers can certainly seem like a life saver. Salva Vida was and is my favorite Honduran beer. The town of Taulabé, a little south of Lake Yojoa, was the only place I knew back then where all three brands could be purchased…a sort of meeting point of Honduran beer culture.

It was in a store in SJC that I saw my first *bamba.* And the time has come to say a little about Honduran money, the Lempira. The national currency is the Lempira, named after a legendary heroic Indian *caicique* who fought valiantly against the Spanish *conquistadores.* As a monetary unit, the Lempira was introduced in 1931, with a fixed value of 2:1 to the US dollar, that is, Lps 1 = $0.50 US. And from 1931 to 1937, Lempira coins were minted of .900 fine silver. These coins were the exact same size, weight and silver content as the U.S. Standing Liberty fifty cent piece, which is no surprise because the Lempira coins were minted at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia. How they acquired the nickname *bamba* I do not know.

In addition to the *bambas,* there was a silver 50 centavo coin, known in Honduran slang as a *tostón*, the same size and weight and silver content as a U.S. quarter. There also was a silver 20 centavo coin that was…you guessed it…the same size and weight and silver content as a U.S. dime; and it was called a *daime.* When the U.S. abandoned silver coinage in 1965, silver coins began to disappear from circulation. The same thing happened in Honduras, but in the *campo* backwoods folk occasionally brought in old coins to make purchases in stores and I found that I asking I could occasionally pick up a few silver coins if I was willing to pay a premium of Lps. 1.20 for Lps. 1.00 face value.

On the north coast of Honduras, where the banana companies held sway over much of the economy, U.S. coins circulated widely at least into the 1950s. The U.S. dime was circulated and gave birth to the slang name for the 20 centavo coin, mentioned above. The buffalo nickel was another one of the coins circulated, with a value of 10 centavos, and hence the Honduran 10 centavo coin became known as a *búfalo.* The U.S. Standing Liberty 50 cent piece also circulated and was called an *águila* for the bold eagle on its reverse side.

Deep in the *campo*, a different, more traditional money slang was still in widespread use when I first went to Honduras: *reales* and *pesos*. In colonial times the Spanish *peso* was a large silver coin—called a Spanish dollar in the British colonies in North America (and its size apparently was the basis for the later U.S. silver dollar). This monetary unit was divided into 8 *reales,* sometimes literally divided, by cutting the large coin into pieces. One *real* = 12 ½ *centavos*, dos *reales* = 25 *centavos,* and so on to 8 *reales* = 1 *peso*, exactly the same as the once common American slang, "2 bits, 4 bits, 6 bits, a dollar", and, indeed, the "bits" were just the Americanized term for the Spanish *reales*. So, in the *campo*, I have often heard small items priced in *reales* and – somewhat less commonly-- Lempiras referred to as *pesos*.

As noted earlier, when I arrived in Honduras in 1969 for my first summer field season it was pretty obvious that there was serious tension between Honduras and El Salvador. There were anti-Salvador slogans painted on walls, and the Honduran national radio was broadcasting negative stuff about El Salvador. Many Salvadorans lived in Honduras (300,000 or more, some 10%-- of the total population). They were hard working and skilled and they out-competed Hondurans in many fields, which led to resentment against them as "taking jobs away from Hondurans". In early June there was a big soccer match between Honduras and El Salvador, which took place in Tegus; Honduras won. But two weeks later when a follow-up match was held in San Salvador, the Salvadoran team won. Unfortunately, there was some violence after the game and Honduran fans returned home claiming to have been insulted and physically mistreated. This led to riots in Honduran cities, with *Salvadoreño*-owned businesses being looted and burned.

Back at my field headquarters, *Misión La Buena Fé*, I knew little of these events. But I knew the locals were agitated and I remember seeing a Honduran minister from the mission out and about, armed, hunting for a *Salvadoreño* who had lived near the mission peaceably for years. I was shocked that a minister would be doing such. But feelings were running very high in Honduras against Salvadorans and the general idea of the *Catrachos* (nickname for *Hondureños*) seemed to be to run them all out of the country and back to El Salvador.

The Salvadoran government had been complaining for months to the Honduran leaders about its people being mistreated. Which they were...Honduras in fact <u>was</u> trying to run them out of the country and use the land they had been occupying for INA land redistribution to poor Honduran *campesinos*. The Salvadoran regime got no satisfaction from the Honduran government. And so after the post-soccer game riots and destruction of Salvadoran properties in Honduras, on July 14 the Salvadoran military launched an attack (which, as it turns out, had actually been in the planning stages for a very long time-- months, if not several years). They attacked by land at three or four points, and were pushing the poorly prepared Honduran army back at all these places. The deepest incursion was around Nueva Ocotepeque where apparently there were significant civilian casualties (2000 by some reports). The Salvadoran Air Force (FAS) also attacked, but not very effectively; according to a Time article they flew several C-47s (military version of the DC-3) cargo planes over Tegus, opened the side doors and tossed some bombs out by hand.* [Incidentally, the air attacks were launched late in the afternoon so that they time the Hondurans would have to respond would be limited. But it also resulted in some of the FAS pilots getting lost and dropping their bombs on non-military targets, including the small rural town of Guaimaca!] The Honduras Air Force (FAH), on the other hand, flew several missions the next day and on subsequent days against El Salvador in their WW-II vintage Corsair fighters and did some real damage, one

*This same article reported that the Salvadoran army was using Texaco roadmaps to guide its invasion!

Honduran pilot by the name of Soto is still celebrated today as Honduras' ace, who downed three *Salvadoreño* fighters in one day.

FAH Corsairs flying in formation over Tegus during Military Day festivities.

Interestingly enough, three American pilots were involved in the Salvadoran air force...sort of latter-day soldiers of fortune. They were hired by the Salvadorans to fly P-51 Mustangs the Salvadorans had recently bought (with promised bonus of $2500 for every FAH aircraft they shot down), but they were unable to get the Mustangs combat ready until the day after the 4-day shooting war ended. They did fly patrol missions after the ceasefire. (Of course, most of these details were unknown to me until years later.)

Prior to the ceasefire, my in-country boss --the head of D.G. Minas e Hidrocarburos-- insisted that I come in from my field area, in case foreigners needed to be evacuated if the war went badly for the *Catrachos*. I came in to Zambrano where another Univ. of Texas geology grad student was working and stayed with him for a couple of weeks....close enough to reach the capital for evacuation if necessary. When I returned to the SPZ area the PCV at Taulabé told me I had had a close call: the day before I returned to the Tegus area, I had been doing some mapping in the vicinity of San José de Comayagua. I was wearing second hand US Army khaki clothing, as geologists commonly did in those days. Some *campesinos* passed by near where I was and saw me as a *Salvadoreño* soldier. Perhaps the rock hammer hanging from my belt looked like a pistol? They rushed into SJC and reported to local officials that a *Guanaco* (a nickname for Salvadoran; after the war, this nickname was used insultingly by Hondurans) soldier was in the vicinity. A posse was hastily formed-- armed, one can easily imagine, with machetes, .22s and old shotguns-- and swarmed out to capture me. Or would it have been to kill me? By the time they reached the hill where I had been reported, I had moved on to a nearby knob. But they spotted me and surrounded the little hill and came sneaking up to nab me. I never saw them. But --according to the PCV-- one of them finally recognized me (I had worked in the SJC area for several days earlier that same week) as the crazy gringo who knocks on rocks. And they withdrew without my ever having been aware of the danger I was in.

Although I remained near Tegus for two weeks before I was allowed to return to my field area, the actual fighting was over in 4 days, which is why the war is known as the "100 Hours War".* The OEA arranged a truce (which, IMHO, saved Honduras' bacon). But even after the Salvadoran troops withdrew, the border was closed for a long time and the damage to the Central American Common Market was extensive. Hard feelings persisted for many years.

On July 20th, while Hondurans were still reeling from the war with El Salvador, not even sure it was over, astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped down from the Lunar Module *Eagle* to become the first human being to set foot on the moon, uttering his famous aphorism “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” A day later, on July the 21st, I saw this event on the TV in the lobby of the Gran Hotel Lincoln. Why the delay? Remember, this was before instant worldwide communications. Newsreels –actual films—had to be processed and sent down by plane from Miami before Hondurans could witness this spectacular event in human achievements.

Because my ICAITI jeep had “MI” (*Misión Internacional*) plates, at the end of my field season, I was able to return to Guatemala the way I came, driving the Pan American highway across southern Honduras and back across El Salvador, passing through the war zone and seeing first hand some of the destruction, and troops stationed in the area, at the ready. I saw one group of Honduran soldiers tending a water-cooled machine gun!

And so closed my first field season in Honduras, an eventful couple of months!

*In the U.S., the war was referred to, somewhat disparagingly, as “the Football War” or the “Soccer War”, due to the soccer game that appeared to trigger the hostilities.

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