
Amigos de Honduras

Vol. XXV, No. 1

February 2018

SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT Joan M. Larimore (San Francisco del Valle, 1986-88)
amigosdehondurasjml@gmail.com

Thanks to all of you who have sent me Grant Funds, our bank account is a very healthy \$4176.84. We can afford three grants at \$500.00 each or one at \$1000.00 and one at \$500.00. If you know of anyone who needs a grant, please send the proposal to me and I will alert the Grant Committee. Also, if any group that previously received a grant needs more funds for additions or repairs, they can apply as well. A special thanks to recent donors: **Carol Spangler; Clyde & Joelle Morris-Buffa; Richard Drum; Ron Raefs; Brenda Crumpacker; Ed Fischer and Deborah Moskovitz**

Our Roster of Amigos members is now at 150. Approximately 40 members have been dropped. These members either let me know they were not renewing or did not respond to any of my reminders. Thanks to Fred Corvi's search for all volunteers who have ever been in Honduras, we occasionally add a new member. Many of us have been a member since our beginning in 1990. We will probably pick up some new

members at the July Reunion/Conference in Portland. NPCA receives our Newsletter thanks to Brant Miller, our pdf guy. Our yearly Washington State corporation dues have been paid as have our Peace Corps dues.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Loren Hintz (Olanchito, 1980-82)
ldhintz@bellsouth.net

Thanks to everyone who shared articles with me. I didn't have enough space for all of them. Ron Anderson shared photos and stories after the Honduran/Salvadoran war while Kent Myrick shared a 1964 bus riding adventure. Rodia Flores-Joslyn wrote an analysis of Honduran elections. I continue to hear rumors of reunions but don't have any details to share. Please after your reunion share some stories! It would be fun to reminisce with you. Email Phyllisshelton@cs.com for info on the July 7-8 Portland reunion.

Dec. 1 my wife and I flew to SPS to start the American Birding Association Birders Exchange Tour. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived all the area highways and bridges had been taken over by election protesters and we couldn't leave the airport. The group chartered a plane to Guatemala but

there wasn't room for 4 of us. Margaret and I plus two others volunteered to stay and fly out the next day on AeroMexico. (All of the US airlines cancelled service.) We were getting ready to camp out in the airport when some of the Honduran staff arranged for us to sleep in the Airport Security dorms! I bunked with employees who couldn't get home and my wife shared a lounge with other stranded women using table cloths as bedding. Everyone was friendly and helpful. I received numerous texts and emails of Honduran and US friends living in Honduras offering to help. Gracias!

So 27 hours after arriving in Honduras we left. I spent the next week looking at old photos, following the Spanish language news and Facebook posts, wearing Honduran comisetas and drinking IHCAFE ground coffee I bought in the airport. I should note that although many groups have cancelled trips to Honduras, much humanitarian and ecotourism activity goes on. For example in late January of this year the **Lake Yojoa Birding Blitz** was just completed. This is an annual birdwatching event to monitor the bird life in the Lake Yojoa basin and to promote Honduras as a top birdwatching and nature destination.

Special Assignment

Ron Anderson (Tegucigalpa, D.C., 1968-1971)

Much has been written of the July 1969 war between Honduras and El Salvador. As brief as it was intense, this armed conflict – also known as the Soccer War and the 100 Hour War – has generated a diverse collection of written works. Historical treatises, scholarly articles, personal accounts and online posts are but a few of the literary venues in which the topic is discussed. This is one more story to add to that collective body of writing.

Forrest Fischer approaches me with a wry smile and a quizzical look.

“You up for a special assignment?” he asks.

Fischer is the cheerful Deputy Public Affairs Officer for the U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Honduras. Our desks sit in adjoining rooms on the second floor of the United States Information Service office on Calle Real in Comayagüela, Honduras, just across the Rio Grande from Tegucigalpa.

“Well...yeah...” I reply, my words drawn out with the perceptible hesitancy that befits a mixture of emotions that include both curiosity and dread.



USIS Office in Comayagüela

[Hi Res](#)

It is late July 1969. I am a 26 year old Peace Corps Volunteer on the cusp of a second year in what will become a three year placement in the Capital city of that Central American Republic. And the shooting has only

recently subsided in the “Soccer War” between Honduras and El Salvador. Among the skills I brought to my placement as a technical volunteer were motion picture and still photography.

“We need a photographer...” Fischer says as he jumps on the hesitancy in my reply as if to shunt it aside lest dread come to rule my state of mind. He goes on to explain that the recent headline grabbing cease fire in the war is now about to enter a new stage – troop withdrawal. And the Organization of American States has made it known that it is eagerly seeking documentary footage of successful efforts to peacefully disengage the Salvadoran military from territory it occupies in Honduras.

“The OAS heard about you and they would like you to shoot that footage” he says.

Ah, yes. The old *Your Fame Precedes You* gambit, I think to myself.

“How can I refuse?” the words tumble out of my mouth before I can reel them back in.

“Great!” Fischer says. “We’ll need to get all the interagency clearances approved. They’ll temporarily reassign you from the Peace Corps to the OAS Mission. You’ll leave just as soon as that’s done”.

Conventional wisdom says the wheels of government turn slowly. These approvals are apt to take weeks, I tell myself. “So...when might I leave?” I ask.

“Tomorrow...or maybe the next day...or two, nobody really knows for sure quite yet. But it’ll be soon!” he says. “Better get packing.” He heads for the door to spread the good news then stops, turns and says

“Hey...and thanks!”

What have I done? I remember my career in broadcasting before the Peace Corps and the occasional requests from the news desk that I rush to the scene of a fatal car crash or a homicide investigation. The mere thought that I was about to confront an assignment where death was the story always sent shivers down my spine. Now I was about to enter a war zone in which, subsequent investigations would report, between 3,000 and 6,000 people were killed.

I gather up my photographic gear and film stock at the USIS office then head home to pack.



Volunteer and Gear at USIS

[Hi Res](#)

Departure from Toncontín

It’s early morning on the tarmac at Toncontín airport as I climb aboard one of two U.S. Army Huey helicopters that will ferry the OAS observer team with whom I am traveling to troop withdrawal sites in Honduras.

Each three man flight crew is composed of U.S. Army airmen out of Panama and they are part of a squadron of Hueys assigned to the OAS for the purpose of peace keeping. The helicopters are painted white with Army and OEA (Organización de los Estados Americanos) markings.

The Huey is nearly full and the flight crew is ready to start the turbine when a late arrival makes a dash for our helicopter and claims a seat. He

is Oscar Asfura, a friend of mine from the Cine Foto Asfura motion picture laboratory at which I have 16mm film processed.

“I have friends in high places” he winks at me as he stows his bag beneath the seat. About a year later, Oscar and his wife have a baby and invite me to the christening. In attendance at the ceremony is the child’s godfather, Oswaldo Enrique López Arellano, the President of Honduras.

A short time later we are airborne and climbing out of Tegucigalpa to cruising altitude, headed for our first destination. Two tiny specks of white over a vast sea of green, the Hueys fly in pairs so if one goes down there’s another one to attempt a rescue. I figure they’re painted white to stand out from all the green below should one have to put down on the forest floor.



OAS Flight Crew over Honduras [Hi Res](#)

Santa Rosa de Copán

We arrive at our first destination, Santa Rosa de Copán, around mid day. It is a staging area and communications hub for peace keeping operations in that sector of the country. Here we refuel, meet up with additional OAS observers and flight crews, review objectives for the next day’s withdrawals and spend the night in hotel lodgings leased by the OAS.

We also have dinner at the hotel’s restaurant. It is packed with locals and members of the OAS Mission most of whom wear OEA armbands

on their left sleeves. There is another presence in the room, too: More mercenaries in full combat fatigues from more countries across the globe than I have ever seen in any one place at any one time in my life.

Departure from Santa Rosa

Bob Lilley is a bit of a human dynamo who is bursting with ideas and irrepressible in his efforts to see them achieved. Described by some as a *super volunteer*, his Spanish language skills were top drawer from the earliest days we trained together at Puerto Rico’s Camp Crozier.

So I am not entirely taken aback when we arrive at the airstrip to board our early morning flights out of Santa Rosa and I find Lilley mingling with the crowds around the Hueys.

“I promised the people in my pueblo that the cease fire was real and that the Salvadoran army was withdrawing” Lilley tells me. And he aims to prove it. As a corroborating witness, he has brought along one of the villagers from his nearby site in Corquín. Having befriended some of the members from the OAS Mission, Lilley has secured two seats aboard the morning’s flights – one for himself and one for his Honduran friend from Corquín – so they could observe first hand that troop withdrawals took place as planned.

“Which helicopter are you in?” Lilley asks me.

“Whichever one gets me to the most troop withdrawal sites” I reply. The departure area at the airstrip is swarming with people and it isn’t at all clear which pair of Hueys is going where.

Ultimately, I climb aboard an aircraft in a pair bound for two withdrawal sites – one to the east and one to the southwest of Santa Rosa.

Lilley and the friend from his pueblo – along with Oscar Asfura – find seats in a pair of Hueys headed for a site to the southwest.

Cololaca Withdrawal

The small pueblo of Cololaca lies about 18 air miles east of Santa Rosa. There is no airstrip in the vicinity but, circling the area before we land, the flight crews determine that we can put down in an open area of Parque Central near a church. A 50 caliber machine gun nest can be seen in the church’s belfry. A Salvadoran flag flies from a mast that leans somewhat off plumb aside the cross atop the belfry.



Machine Gun Nest at Cololaca [Hi Res](#)

The helicopters land one at a time with the airborne Huey circling the landing site at low altitude until an all clear to descend is received from the flight crew on the ground. The two craft sit perpendicular to one another and about 50 yards from the north wall of the church.



Salvadoran Troops at Cololaca [Hi Res](#)

The Salvadoran military has occupied Cololaca with a platoon of

about 40 soldiers. The OAS team quickly sets to work introducing themselves to officers of the occupying force after which the two groups use maps to review military activities in the area. As the ranking officers of the OAS contingent and the Salvadoran military study the withdrawal documents, foot soldiers mingle among themselves. The local citizenry, who have gathered to observe the ceremony, look on from a discrete distance.



OAS Officers and Salvadoran Platoon Leader at Cololaca

[Hi Res](#)

Once the withdrawal documents are signed, the Salvadoran flag is lowered from the church belfry as troops in the platoon stand and salute. Thereafter, the Salvadorans prepare to exit the pueblo and some of the foot soldiers distribute their rations to locals who are on hand. The officers of the OAS Mission and Salvadoran military pose for some final pictures and, minutes later, the platoon marches single file out of Parque Central to begin its journey back to El Salvador.

The successful withdrawal from Cololaca goes off without a hitch and is now history.

Nueva Ocotepeque Withdrawal

Buoyed by the success at Cololaca, there are expectations of a repeat performance as we fly the 49 air miles to Nueva Ocotepeque.

But those expectations are quickly dashed on arrival at the day's second withdrawal site.

For starters, we are not the first Hueys to land at Nueva Ocotepeque that day as at least one other OAS helicopter sits at the airstrip on which we land at the edge of town. And our arrival is not greeted with the same courtesies extended to us when we deplaned in Cololaca. The rotors had not even stopped turning on our airships when two military jeeps mounted with 50 caliber machine guns race down a dirt road from town toward the airstrip. The machine guns are manned by soldiers and they are pointed at us.

When the soldiers step out of their jeeps they have a hostile demeanor and they are armed. We are told to board the jeeps for a trip into town. The U.S. Army flight crews object and demand to be left at the Hueys to guarantee that no harm comes to the aircraft. Guards are assigned to stay with the flight crews and their helicopters. The rest of us are ordered into jeeps and driven down the dusty road to town.

On the short drive from the airstrip it is clear that Nueva Ocotepeque has suffered a fate far worse than Cololaca in this war. Debris extends in alluvial fans outside the doorway of virtually every structure we pass, a testament to the ransacking of the town. Cololaca was not ransacked and the only evidence of a Salvadoran military presence was the machine gun nest in the church belfry, the Salvadoran flag flying above it and a platoon of about 40 soldiers. In stunning comparison, Neuva Ocotepeque is occupied by a brigade of some 5,000 Salvadoran troops.

When we arrive at what appears to be the Salvadoran military headquarters across from Parque Central, we are ordered to get out of the jeeps and, despite a significant number of soldiers in the vicinity, we are free to

walk pretty much wherever we choose.



Salvadoran Troops at Nueva Ocotepeque

[Hi Res](#)

There is a great deal of commotion at this location and more than a few new faces from the OAS Mission who I had not previously seen.

One of them is a North American in a plaid shirt, OEA armband and wearing dark horn rimmed glasses.

He walks up to me and asks "You from the Hueys that just landed?" "Yeah" I reply. "Is that OEA arm band you're wearing legit?" he asks. "Yes it is – I'm assigned to shoot footage for the OAS" I tell him. "Okay, stick with me. Shoot some pictures if you like." he says.

Before I can ask *what is going on here*, a Salvadoran reporter wearing a white construction helmet and holding a microphone begins to ask questions of the North American. Wanting no part in this interview, I step back and begin to shoot stills.



What is Going on Here Interview [Hi Res](#)

In one of those stills three Salvadoran officers and one civilian are framed as they stand side by side. One of the officers wears a red beret with a circular patch bearing a skull and cross bones. His smile beams from ear to ear. I learn later that he is Colonel Mario “El Diablo” Velazquez Jandres, commander of the brigade that occupies Nueva Ocotepeque and architect of the most substantial battle of the war in which 1,000 Honduran soldiers were driven from the town by El Diablo’s force of 5,000. Four hundred Honduran soldiers died in the battle. One hundred civilians were killed.

Minutes later, we are all ushered into a room. A scribe stands to the left of three men in nearby chairs and begins to read from a document. Two of the seated men are members of the OAS Mission, one of whom is my newfound North American acquaintance. The third is El Diablo – and he does not look happy as the scribe reads from the document.



Reading of Grievances [Hi Res](#)

The acoustics in the room are poor and it is crowded, so, from my camera position opposite the participants, the subject matter of the

document being read is not clear. But the mood in the room is decidedly grim.

A signing ceremony follows recitation of the document during which El Diablo and a succession of OAS officials sign its pages.

The assemblage disbands following the signing ceremony and the North American in the plaid shirt walks over to me. “Let’s take a tour” he says whereupon we leave the building and begin to walk down the center of the now largely deserted street outside. As we walk, we look into buildings as we pass.

Free from those who might eavesdrop on our conversation, he tells me his name is Richard A. Poole, a U.S. diplomat, a member of the OAS Committee of Seven and that he carries the rank of Ambassador in efforts to resolve the conflict between Honduras and El Salvador. He asks me to summarize my background and what brought me to Nueva Ocotepeque that day. I comply and include my relationship with the Peace Corps.

Then Poole says “There has been an incident here today and three people have been taken prisoner by the Salvadorans to be tried as spies. The penalty for spying is execution. They are on their way to El Salvador now under armed guard.” He adds “One of the three is apparently a United States Peace Corps Volunteer. You know anything about that?”

I tell Poole about Bob Lilley’s departure from Santa Rosa earlier the same morning aboard an OAS helicopter. I mention Lilley’s Honduran friend and that Oscar Asfura was also aboard the flight. Poole says my information fits what he’s learned and that it was Asfura who was recognized by a Salvadoran

acquaintance who then reported the presence of a Honduran in the town to the military. After that, everyone aboard the first flight of Hueys into Nueva Ocotepeque that day was forced to present their IDs for inspection. That’s when Lilley and his Honduran traveling companion were discovered.

“The Salvadorans are very angry and filed a grievance with the withdrawal documents. That’s what the scribe read prior to the signing ceremony. Right now, they trust no one. Colonel Velazquez asked me who you were. I told him you are my personal photographer.” Then Poole asks “Do you have any IDs on you that mention Honduras?” When I tell Poole of my Peace Corps ID he directs us into a ransacked building to inspect its interior. Once inside and out of sight from prying eyes, Poole tells me to put the Peace Corps ID into the bottom of my boot and lace it back up.

Not long after Poole and I finish our tour, the Salvadorans hand Nueva Ocotepeque over to the OAS Mission.



Salvadoran Commander Hands Over Nueva Ocotepeque to OAS Officer [Hi Res](#)

The Salvadoran brigade withdraws from the pueblo in a procession that takes twenty minutes or more to pass our vantage point. El Diablo, flanked by his officers, waves at each passing motorized vehicle and contingent of troops.

Afterward, Poole says we’ve got to get back to Santa Rosa so he can

report today's incident to the Embassy. I have no objection to this plan as I've just shot my last roll of film. We pack up and head for the helicopters.

First Departure from Nueva Ocotepeque

Two Hueys lift off from the airstrip at Nueva Ocotepeque in the late afternoon carrying Poole, other members of the OAS Mission and me. We're headed northeast toward Santa Rosa de Copán.

But there are some problems. We're low on fuel, the ceiling is dropping and night will soon begin to fall.

The flight crews check our fuel, pick a mountain ridge ahead of us and advise that when we clear the ridge if the ceiling beyond doesn't look good we'll have to return to Nueva Ocotepeque. That will leave us with just enough fuel for one more attempt to reach Santa Rosa in the morning.

Clearing the ridge we find the ceiling is, indeed, too low and the dwindling daylight too feeble to fly safely. The Hueys bank sharply into a 180° turn and we head back to Nueva Ocotepeque.

We spend the night near the helicopters in an abandoned building that borders the airstrip. We eat military rations by the light of a campfire and stand two man shifts of two hours each keeping watch over the Hueys. Fitfully, we sleep on the dirt floor.

Second Departure from Nueva Ocotepeque

Early the next morning we depart Nueva Ocotepeque once more and head northeast toward the same mountain ridge at which we were forced to turn back the night before.



Hueys Fly in Tight Formation Ferrying OAS Personnel [Hi Res](#)

The flight crews say that if we don't have suitable weather when we clear the ridge we'll have no choice but to find someplace we can land and wait, hoping for the weather to improve.

When we lift over the ridge, the view on the other side could not have looked more disheartening.

A fog bank stretches as far as the eye can see. Mountain tops jut through the mist and look like islands on an endless sea of clouds. These conditions are even worse than those of the previous evening. Now we must find a site at which we can land to wait out the weather. And we have to find it fast. Each minute we're in the air now is one less minute we'll have as flight time to reach the airstrip in Santa Rosa.

The two Hueys split up to more quickly survey nearby ridge lines for prospective landing sites. Shortly after, one of the flight crews reports a potential site. Both helicopters join up again to hover above it and evaluate the site's potential. The verdict: It's worth a try.

Helicopters are top heavy airships. Landing them on a slope whose left to right pitch is too great can cause them to flip over on their sides. When the main rotors are turning a helicopter that flips on its side becomes a crash. The left to right pitch at this site is on the ragged edge of being too great. The only way to know for sure is to try and gently set one of the Hueys down in the

landing area and determine if it feels like it could flip over at any point. And there is one more constraint the flight crew points out to us – the site is too narrow to allow the rotors on both Hueys to turn at the same time. So the first ship to set down – provided it doesn't tip over – must quickly stop its rotors and secure them in line with the fuselage before the second ship can descend.

The Huey with the lower fuel load will conduct the pitch test so as to burn less fuel. The other ship will hover above to observe the landing attempt and effect a rescue should the pitch prove too great and the landing result in a crash. I'm in the Huey that will remain airborne during the first ship's attempt to land.

The first helicopter begins its descent. Slowly it drops its uphill skid onto the landing site then inches the downhill skid nearer and nearer the ground until contact is made. The pilot slowly backs off the ship's rotor speed and the Huey remains upright. Success! Both ships can land to wait out the fog.

Our landing site atop the ridge borders a small milpa on the other side of which sits a tiny mud brick hut. Through a window of the hut a campesino family of four has watched wide eyed as we dropped out of the sky and landed in a narrow clearing they have made alongside their crop. Our landing would have never occurred had it not been for this family's agricultural efforts atop the ridge.

Return to Santa Rosa

It takes about an hour for the morning fog to burn off and for optimal flight conditions to be restored. Wasting no time, the flight crew spins the turbine to life, the rotors whip through the mountain

top air and my Huey lifts off from the ridge. Minutes later, the second ship is airborne and we again head to the northeast.

From this point on, the flight back to Santa Rosa de Copán is uneventful. On our arrival in Santa Rosa, Poole says goodbye when we deplane the Hueys and he hurries off to the OAS communications center to send word to the Embassy of the incident at Nueva Ocotepeque.

I line up a seat in an OAS aircraft that's ferrying personnel back to Tegucigalpa.

Reunion in Tegucigalpa

"We thought you'd been taken prisoner!" Forrest Fischer tells me upon my return to the USIS office in the capital city. "You were the only Peace Corps Volunteer the Embassy knew of who was authorized to be in Nueva Ocotepeque and who could have been captured there." Then he adds with a hint of that same wry smile with which this odyssey began "They said you could be executed as a spy."

"No such luck." I say. "Somehow, I slipped through the net." "Is there any news about Lilley, his Honduran friend and Asfura?"

"They're negotiating now for the three of them to be released." Fischer says. "It looks promising."

In fact, the three are repatriated a week or so afterward.

On my next encounters with Lilley and Asfura I ask them about their incarceration in El Salvador. Both report they were told each day that they would be executed as spies. Then, suddenly, one day it is announced they are being sent back to Honduras after which they are released.

OAS Documentary

The motion picture footage I shot on this assignment was sent off to be processed and edited. The footage appeared in the documentary film *OEA: Gestión de Paz* that was distributed throughout Latin America. In the fall of 1969 I was afforded an opportunity to view the film when a copy arrived at the USIS office. Internet searches I've conducted over the years have thus far found no trace of the film in online archives.



Volunteer Photographer with OAS Team at Santa Rosa de Copán [Hi Res](#)

Except for the Santa Rosa picture above, the photographs in this article were taken by the author. Click the Hi Res link on a photo caption to open a browser window displaying a high resolution image of the photograph. Other photographs from the author's Peace Corps service in Honduras can be found at [this link](#).

HONDURAN ELECTIONS ANALYSIS Part I (Rodia Flores SPS, Tegucigalpa)

(Ed. Note: Rodia is a Honduran Economist who was a housemate and friend to many PCVs. She volunteered to write an article about the Nov. 2017 election and the history before it. In May we will publish the first part of her analysis which includes the 2013 election and 2009 coup. Rodia wrote based upon interviews with former classmates who are now reporters and columnists for various Honduran newspapers

and other friends. The article has been edited for space considerations.)

2017 Honduran presidential election There was no doubt, the Election Day had arrived. Early in the morning on Sunday Nov. 26, 2017, voters started the long lines to cast their vote. There was a great expectation among voters. Honduras was calm, but the air was politically charged with fear and uncertainty. Individuals were nervous thinking, what could the incumbent do at this time to become reelected president? Nervousness and skepticism were felt everywhere, expecting that any sign of fraud would open the doors for a revolt. Polling places closed earlier than during previous elections and many Hondurans around the country lost their opportunity to vote. However, high expectation continued as the results favored their candidates. Suddenly, again, an abrupt situation changed this joy. The story seen four years ago was about to be repeated. Four years ago a blackout interfered with the vote count. At that time, there was not a power interruption. It was the Internet connection that went down for many hours in the middle of the ballot counting. When the connection was recovered, the official candidate (Juan Orlando) started winning. Could this happen again?

The 2017 Presidential Candidates

There were three main candidates, Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) for the National Party (Nationalista), Salvador Nasralla for the Democratic Alianza (Alianza Democrática), and Luis Zelaya for the Liberal Party.

Two major issues in the 2017 election: Political campaigns in Honduras started very early (two years) after the president was elected. The campaign was strong, noisy,

dirty, dishonest, and offensive. Each candidate tried to destroy the other candidate's opportunities to be elected. Besides the presidential election, there were elections for 128 members of the National Assembly and for all the local races including Municipal Mayor and vice-Mayor. This campaign had two peculiar aspects. The *first* and more controversial was Juan Orlando Hernandez's (JOH) re-election, and *second*, the alliance between the PAC (Nasralla) and LIBRE.

a) Los Angeles Times points out that Juan Orlando Hernandez was orchestrating his way to the presidency since 2012 when he was a head of the Honduran Congress. According to the LA Times, JOH prepared the removal of "four out of five Supreme Court justices and their replacement with partisan allies." After this, JOH was first elected president in 2013. (Levitsky, Steven and Flores, Carlos, "Honduran Democracy is under assault" Los Angeles Times, 12/14/2017). According to Enrique Sandres a columnist from Diario El Heraldo, Juan Orlando Hernandez's aggressiveness permitted him to run as a presidential candidate flagrantly violating the Constitution. The Constitution prohibits the re-election. This was possible after a decision in May 2015 of the new Supreme Court appointed by JOH that left an open door for that purpose. So, the court gave Juan Orlando the legitimacy to run for second time for the presidency. This is one of the political strategies prepared for Juan Orlando before and after he was elected president. (Sandres, Enrique, "Elecciones en Honduras 2017" Diario el Heraldo, Dec. 2017).

Fear of another dictator? Many Honduran were skeptical about Juan Orlando's re-election. Many still

remember those years when the country was ruled by dictators (also from the National Party). Thus, four years of Juan Orlando as president have been enough to demonstrate that he is among the most authoritarian governments in the hemisphere. Many journalists and human rights activists, including Berta Caceres have been killed during his administration. Almost all of these crimes have been ignored and characterized by their impunity. (Blitzer, Jonathan: "The Death of Bertha Caceres," The New Yorker, March 11, 2016)

b) On the other hand, Salvador Nasralla the "El rey de la television" (the king of the television) in an act of discontent and frustration formed the Anticorruption Party (Partido Anticorrupcion, PAC). This new political party enjoyed spectacular growth since the 2013 elections and imposed itself as strong political force equal to LIBRE (Zelaya's party). Both the PAC and LIBRE were seen as an obstacle to the traditional parties (National and Liberal). LIBRE was considered an enemy of the system, and PAC was attracting the new generation of voters, including those that marched with torches fighting against the pillage of the Honduran Institute of Social Security (HISS) including outraged youth, the unemployed, and the ones who lost their relatives due to the lack of medication in the (HISS), and all of the affected by the system.

Nasralla's party (PAC) was a danger. The Electoral Supreme Tribunal (EST) took the decision to take the PAC from Nasralla and dissolve it to benefit the traditional parties that felt menaced by the PAC. The Electoral Superior Tribunal is formed by one representative of the National party, one of the Liberal Party, and one for the Christian Democrats but no

members from LIBRE nor PAC which won more votes in 2013 than the Christian Democrats. (In the EST the CD have voted in line with the National Party.) Salvador Nasralla of PAC formed a coalition with LIBRE and the smaller PINU to form the Alianza Democratica.

The election results Marches, chaos, disturbs, firing, and despotism have characterized the election in Honduras. The National Electoral Tribunal had promised to give the results at 7:00 PM on election night. The political crises were generated after the election and exacerbated after counting the votes. Here, David Matamoros president of the National Electoral Tribunal, after seeing the results favored Salvador Nasralla (Alliance party), ordered a stop to the counting of votes. People demanded to continue with the counting, so in this situation and due to pressure from the international representatives, Mr. Matamoros presented the first result on Monday Nov. 27 at 1:30 A.M. showing results favored Nasralla. Once again, the counting process was suspended by Matamoros for more than 6 hours. This was the starting point when the system started favoring President Hernandez. (Sandres, Enrique, "Elecciones en Honduras 2017" Diario el Heraldo, Dec. 2017).

When the counting re-started, the lead suddenly shifted from challenger Salvador Nasralla, to the incumbent president for his second term. David Matamoros, the electoral commission president and a member of the Honduran president's National Party, declared Juan Orlando Hernandez winner despite an earlier call from OAS's Mr. Luis Almagro to hold back. The result finally was reported two weeks after a fiercely contested vote.

Consequently, and as stated before, after a few hours, violent protesters invaded the streets of the main cities. Once again, security forces restrained the marches. According to the Houston Chronicle eleven people died, “some at the hands of security forces. This rose suspicious about the legitimacy of the electoral process” (Houston Chronicle: “Honduran fiasco, The Trump administration must demand transparency, honesty in vote count.” Dec. 11, 2017).

To control this ardent demonstration of discontent, the Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez imposed a curfew to repress protesters. Many of them were killed and even more were arrested.

Was a fraud the possible cause of this situation? Yes, doubts and accusation of fraud were considered not only by voters but also for the Alliance and Liberal parties. In addition, the Organization of American States (OAS) through Secretary Luis Almagro argued that there were “irregularities, error and systematic problems,” and called for a recount. (Malkin, Elizabeth, “Honduran President declared winner, but O.A.S. calls for new election.” The New York Times, December 17, 2017)

On Wednesday (three days after the election), President Hernandez rejected the suggestion of Almagro claiming that “the electoral process was widely observed by the International Community including the Observation Electoral Mission of the Organization of American States” and thus the election was valid. On Dec. 21 Mr. Almagro sent a letter to the President affirming that his suggestion to review the results was an effort to stop the death of many Hondurans (by then there were 32). (Torres, Alexis: “Almagro

responds to Honduran government after his rejection of the American States Organization request.” Diario Tiempo, Dec. 28, 2017).

Before and during the Election Day, authorities were aware of the possible effects after the election results. Frustration, anger, impotence, hate and all possible adjectives invaded hundreds of Honduran voters. Asking a house wife Zulema de Ortega said: “I perfectly understand why people are emboldened, I am one of them, and I feel like exploding that I cannot go to the street to march with them.” Also Suyapa Caballero (a business lady) said: “I cannot let the Congress impose on us that corrupt man again. I participate on the marches every day.”

Problems persisted. Many Honduran blamed Washington because in the middle of the problem (two days after the election), the US president sent a document certifying that Honduras had improved the human rights requirements and could obtain millions of dollars in USAID. This was a sign that the US president was showing support for Hernandez.

In addition, the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa stated that the election results were “free” and “transparent.” This was an obvious message of acceptance that the Honduran elected president was Juan Orlando Hernandez. Heide Fulton, Chargé d’Affairs of the US Embassy said “all parties remain calm while that process unfolds” (Valdes, Gustavo, Andone, Dakin, Brocchetto, Marilia: “Honduras begins vote recount in unresolved election.” CNN, December 4, 2017).”She also asked Honduran population to wait patiently for the results. Later Ms. Fulton visited the Electoral Tribunal Superior Electoral

which was seen as a pressure to declare the new winner. Her government, she said “wanted the conclusion of a “credible and transparent” electoral process. (“Honduras Opposition call for annulment of presidential election results.” Press TV, December 10, 2017). **Ed. Note:** In Jan. 2018 the US embassy in Honduras released a statement which said in part: “The close election results, irregularities identified by the OAS and the EU election observation missions, and strong reactions from Hondurans across the political spectrum underscore the need for a robust national dialogue.” <https://hn.usembassy.gov/state-ment-heather-nauert-spokesperson-presidential-elections-honduras/>

In conclusion: Honduras’s last two elections have been criticized by fraud, protests, violence, death, anger, international inference, and all possible and despicable actions. In addition, excess of power, authoritarian governments, and military actions controlling protesters have been present.

Contrasting ideologies among political leaders or just a disguised copy? According to lawyers and political analysts the Honduran Constitution still doesn’t allow a second run to the presidency. In this case, what caused the coup of then president Manuel Zelaya on June 28, 2009 was his vision to go beyond a single presidential period. His purpose was to install fourth ballot box to ask voters about a referendum to amend the constitution. This would allow him to run for a second period.

It seems that President Hernandez brought back that concept on a very sophisticated way. He started creating this plot since he was

president of the National Congress during the Porfirio Lobo' presidency. No political or legal forces stopped him. As a result he became the official candidate for the National Party. Problems arose after the elections, particularly during counting the ballots. The ballot counting was stopped for several hours. The Alliance Party was winning but when the ballot counting continued, the National Party started raising the number of ballots counted.

Immediately, the discontent among the population popped up. They argued that another fraud was set up and the next day there were marches in all main cities burning buildings and destroying everything they found. The question is: Did a fraud really exist? Until today no one has proved with certainty. There was some evidence but only time will clarify it.

Recommendations: At this point, and for the security of the Honduran population, for the recovery of respect worldwide, and for preventing a similar situation, it is recommended that the Superior Electoral Tribunal be formed by individuals basically apolitical (if that exists). This practice will avoid members of determinate party favor his/her candidate for personal benefits. Second, disable the president's ability in removing Judges to place the ones selected by him. In other words, the president has to be subject to the Electoral Tribunal decision. Instead of creating bigger military forces, it would better to start at once educating the population to eliminate violence, drugs, gangs and ultimately poverty.

A CENTRAL AMERICAN BUS RIDE

Kent D. Myrik (Tela, San Juan Pueblo 1962-64)

Jan. 19, 1964 I was returning to Honduras from a bus trip to Costa Rica, travelling with an American named Pete Houseknecht, whom I had met the day before. The bus that brought Pete and me from Somoto, Nicaragua to the Honduran border was something to write home about! They had told us in Managua that if we left there at 4 AM, we would be in Somoto at 8 and the border at 8:30. Well, we reached Somoto at 8:45 to begin with, and there was no other bus in sight. We were told another one would come at 10, so we waited, sitting on our suitcases in the dusty Parque Central. At 9:45 a rickety old VW Microbus creaked up with a nearly flat tire. It carried 4 large bales of barb wire and 2 solid wooden oxcart wheels on its top. Its windows were all broken out, the doors wouldn't shut, and the hood was loose. The two bus men got out a jack and one removed the 3 remaining lug nuts while the other fiddled with the jack. By the time the lug nuts were all off, the other man had discovered that the jack didn't work so they bolted the tire back on, made everyone get out of the bus, and went to a filling station to put air in the tire.

When they came back, people started climbing in all the doors and windows. Pete and I threw our luggage on top, being careful of the barbed wire, and got in front. There were 12 adults and several children in the thing! Along the road, the bus stopped at every other tree, and picked up about 8 more people. They rode hanging onto the outside and on top, except for one woman who had a live chicken with its feet tied, and an uncovered pan of about 3 dozen eggs in her hands. Somehow

she got a seat where we were squatting. People got out at several places along the way, climbing out through the windows since it was impossible to get out the door through all the people and eggs. When we lacked about 5 km for the Honduran border, the bus stopped halfway up a hill. A man got off and unloaded the barb wire from the top of the bus. But it was a mistake to stop going uphill! The bus had never started except my pushing, which was now impossible.

The driver tried popping the clutch in reverse, backing down the hill, but this gave the bus such a jerk that one of the hen lady's eggs landed in my lap! After what she said to him, he didn't try that again, but turned the bus around and popped the clutch heading downhill, the way we had come. It wouldn't stay running long enough to turn around so he tried backing up the hill. It went a short distance then chugged asthmatically and stalled. They did something under the hood and repeated the process, rolling downhill, popping the clutch, backing uphill and stalling, then doing it all over again 5 times. We gained a little on the hill each time and finally reached the summit, where we turned around and headed down the other side. On the top of the next hill the bus stalled again and the radiator boiled over!

At least this was something they were prepared for. They pushed the bus to start it, then poured water in the radiator and we were on our way again. With no further mishaps we arrived at the border – at 11:45 instead of 8:30!

HONDURAN NEWS

compiled by **Loren Hintz**
(Olanchito, 1980-82.)

RPCV Peggy Goebel (Yoro, 73-75) was recognized for her work at Oct. fire evacuation center at Santa Rosa's Veterans Memorial Building. "Literally, we opened up and we had nothing," Goebel said. "It was chaos. People were there with no shoes. They were there in their jammies." Many were acutely ill. "They didn't have their medicines. They didn't have their supplies," Goebel said. "People were in a state of shock. People were in tears." There was no script, no plan, and no known model for what to do to provide the needed medical care. Goebel believes a debt of gratitude is owed the many medical professionals and others who recognized need in a crisis and at a scale they'd never before witnessed, and acted. <http://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/78634-30-181/sonoma-stories-a-nurse-a?ref=most&artslide=1&sba=AAS>

Frank Almaguer noted that the White House did the incredible and made an excellent personnel decision: **Jody Olsen to be PC Director**. This one really stands out as a superb choice. She has done everything, from PCV to Deputy Director of the Agency in over 40 years in and out of the PC. **RPCV Richard Oulahan (Costa Norte 69-72)** collection of interviews, documents and photographs from many decades working in Latin America is now available on the Haverford College website <http://ds.haverford.edu/oulahan> The collection also includes books on agrarian reform, labor, history, culture and more plus the personal library of Salvadoran Dr. Jose Maria Mendez, Jr. with books and papers covering Salvadoran writers, politics, agrarian reform, Salvadoran Civil War, and more. He has also written a wonderful article entitled

"LEADERSHIP: REAL LEADERSHIP: MY MENTORS IN HONDURAS"

In San Pedro Sula, Honduras: Richard with



beard, wife Diana, and friends/labor leaders of the North Coast Labor Federation, FESITRANH, 1981-82.

I am sorry to report that **Cookie Rocklin Izaguirre** (PCV La Esperanza 70s and then PC Training Director at Santa Lucia for many years) died last month of a heart attack. Many have already shared fond memories of her via Facebook. **Guadalupe Galeano of Olanchito, Yoro** moved to London 8 years ago at age 16. After studying Fashion Design, she now works on Savile Row for the clothing company ASOS. **RUTA5** A 7.6 magnitude **earthquake** with a epicenter near the Swan Island 247 km north of Puerto Lempira hit early Jan. 9. It was felt in Tegucigalpa and Tsunami warnings were released. Fortunately there was no flooding and no reports of damage (INETER). The Honduran Congressman **Fredy Renan Najera Montoya** was charged Jan. 18 for importing cocaine into the US. He was also involved in the bribery/smuggling case of **Fabio Porfilio Lobo** son former President Porfilio Lobo Sosa.

RPCV HONDURAS REUNION UPDATE
Phyllis Bloch Shelton (San Juan Pueblo, 1986-88)

Here are further details for the July 6-9, 2018 reunion. The next big RPCV Honduras Reunion will be held in Portland, Oregon. Phyllis has volunteered to coordinate it. **Please save the date** and check out <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=2018%20Honduras%20RPCV%20Reunion> for more details. If you have comments or questions or are interested in serving on a committee to help make this happen, please send email to: **Phyllisshelton@cs.com**
Location: 2018 RPCV Honduras Conference in Portland, Oregon
Date: July 6-9 (most activities happening on July 7-8)

Activities:

1. Country updates featuring NGOs still on the ground in country and in Central America
2. NPCA Updates by President Glenn Blumhorst
3. Committee for a Museum of the Peace Corps Experience - Update on their activities. Workshops and tips on how to preserve the stories and artifacts that we have. What have Honduras RPCVs contributed, what do we need to share?
4. RPCV Groups Helping Refugees Honduras connection - does it exist or can we do something?
5. Amigos de Honduras Grants Program Update
6. Honduran dinner and dancing, Saturday **night**
7. Special addition will be a Happy Hour hosted by Guatemala RPCVs Possible screening of Honduran video or movies.

Amigos de Honduras Membership Info

Use this form to renew membership or notify us of a change in address. Or, copy and give to a friend whom you think might like to keep in touch with Honduras and RPCVs. Other than your name, enter only the info that has changed.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Phone: _____ e-mail address _____

Peace Corps Info:

Years of service: from _____ to _____ Group # _____ Site(s) _____

Job _____

Post-Peace Corps Experiences (occupation, marriage, children, travels, interests) _____

Make check payable to Amigos de Honduras: Mail to Joan Larimore, 2334 Sunset Avenue, Enumclaw, WA 98022

2-18

Amigos de Honduras : \$15

NPCA Supporter (Basic FREE): \$50

Amigos, NPCA & another group: \$30
name of other group _____

Contribution to projects Amigos will fund in Honduras:

\$ _____

Total Amount Enclosed: _____

I would prefer to receive my newsletter in .pdf format.

the date on the mailing label is the expiration date of your membership - please renew if you're due!



Amigos de Honduras
 c/o Joan Larimore
 2334 Sunset Avenue
 Enumclaw, WA 98022