

## HONDURAS

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**RALPH N. CLOUGH**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1942-1945)**

*Ralph N. Clough was born in 1917 in Washington. He attended Lingnan University in China from 1936-1937. He graduated from the University of*

*Washington in 1939 with a B.A. He received his M.A. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1940. In 1941, he joined the Foreign Service. His postings included Toronto, Tegucigalpa, Puerto Cortes, Kunming, Peiping, Nanking, Hong Kong, London, Bern, Taipei, and Washington D.C. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Then you served in Tegucigalpa in Honduras from '42 to '45. What were you doing there?*

CLOUGH: My first job was in charge of a consular section. I did the whole range. I was the Vice Consul. I was the only consular officer. Not the only one who had a consular title, but the one in charge of the consular section. There were a couple of more senior officers, Second Secretaries and Consuls, who did other work but could supervise or fill in for me. But that was the main focus for the first year. And then my second year, an officer was assigned, a Second Secretary and Consul, and he preferred the consular work. He didn't care much for cultural relations, cultural affairs, which at that time were conducted by the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller. All of the cultural activities were conducted under his agency, and it involved such things as running a cultural institute, English language programs.

There was also an office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs in Tegucigalpa, which had its own head. And they did such things as sending a station wagon around the country with a mobile motion picture outfit that would show movies to the campesinos out in the countryside. This was during the war, and we had a big effort on to demonstrate to our allies in Honduras that...

*Q: Was Honduras in the war?*

CLOUGH: I can't recall whether they actually declared war or not, but they were very much... [HONDURAS DECLARED WAR ON JAPAN, GERMANY, AND ITALY IN DECEMBER 1941.]

*Q: They probably did, at least I know they did in the United Nations.*

CLOUGH: They cooperated very closely with us in any case, rounding up Germans. There was a newspaper that had been run by a German. A number of Germans were interned, sent off to the United States. Not very many Germans in Honduras, but there were a few. And there were always rumors about German submarines in the Caribbean, people with spotlights off the shore, and reports would come back.

We had a sizable staff at the embassy. We had an Army Attaché, we had an FBI guy, it was called something else I've forgotten, Attaché or Civil Attaché or something.

*Q: The FBI was running our counterintelligence in Latin America.*

CLOUGH: That's right. They did a lot of reporting on military and intelligence matters. We also had what passed in those days for an aid program. We had a public health doctor, who had a small staff working on public health projects.

We had an agency, I forget what it was called, but their job was mainly to find rubber trees in the jungle in Honduras, to tap the rubber. Natural rubber was in very short supply, of course, and there were several people who employed Hondurans to go out and explore the jungle and find rubber trees.

*Q: What was the political situation in Honduras?*

CLOUGH: In Honduras there was a dictator named Tiburcio Carías Andino, who had been in power for quite a long time. I think he came in about the same time as Roosevelt, about '33. He was leader of the Blue Party, the Asunas. The Colorados, the Red Party, was the opposition; they were out. It was a pretty straightforward sort of dictatorship. I remember one editorial in the government newspaper, *La Epoca*, which talked about "continuismo," the continuance in office. And the article said there were three great continuistas in the world: Carías, Roosevelt, and God-in that order.

*Q: Were we sort of relaxed with the situation there?*

CLOUGH: We were concerned about the Caribbean. Of course, the big problem was that shipping was halted in the Caribbean, for all practical purposes. The banana trade was completely eliminated, and that was the most important industry in Honduras, growing bananas. Two American companies, United Fruit Company and the Continental Fruit Company, had big plantations in Honduras. And when it became impossible to ship the bananas to the United States, the whole industry just went to pot.

*Q: Was it because of the submarines, or was it because the shipping was just being used for public purposes?*

CLOUGH: Well, both. Primarily that the shipping was drawn off for other purposes. We needed troop ships, and we needed to supply the war fronts, so there just wasn't enough shipping, and it was too risky. There were some submarines, I think, that operated occasionally in the Caribbean. In any case, it became necessary to do something to try to relieve the unemployment in Honduras, particularly in the banana regions. So it was decided to put in a PWA-type project, build a road from...

*Q: PWA being part of the New Deal, Public Works Administration.*

CLOUGH: Public Works Administration of the '30s. We allocated some money to hire people to build this road. There had been no road between the capital, Tegucigalpa, and the north coast, which was the primary agricultural area. There was a lake, Lake Yojoa, a big lake in the middle, so a road was built from San Pedro Sula, the biggest city in the north, up to the lake, and there was a ferry across the lake, and then from the end of the lake on over the mountains to Tegucigalpa. It was very rugged country, a lot of mountains, difficult road building. Eventually, they built a road around the lake, also, so you didn't have to depend on a ferry. But that was our main AID project in Honduras, to provide work for a large number of people. Very labor-intensive sort of work.

*Q: Were you sort of champing at the bit about your China business, or how did you feel?*

CLOUGH: Well, I stayed interested in China. I had the good fortune that sometime during this period the State Department sent a notice around to all the offices saying that the military had developed a series of language records, about 50 or 60 different languages, and they were using these in the program (I can't recall the acronym) that the Army ran in many universities for teaching various languages. One of the languages was Chinese, and they developed a set of records and a couple of booklets that went with them for learning spoken Chinese.

This was very attractive to me, because I hadn't had much spoken Chinese, my Chinese had been written. The spoken Chinese I learned in Guangzhou was Cantonese. I had to change my pronunciation to Mandarin in order to take second-year Chinese at the University of Washington.

Our professor of Chinese there, Knight Bickerstaff, was a historian, not a linguist. He was pressed into teaching language courses simply because they had no one else. His teaching of language was to take a sixth grade Chinese primer on the history of China, and we plowed through that, learning the characters as we went along, including some rather unusual characters that you wouldn't normally come across in conversation.

So when I saw this set of records offered to any Foreign Service post, I wrote in and asked them to supply Tegucigalpa with a set of the Chinese records, which they did, no questions asked. I found them very useful in building up some capability in spoken Chinese, because I still had the ambition to go to China.

The last two years I was in Tegucigalpa, I did this cultural relations work, running the Cultural Institute and language programs, and handing out American publications to prominent people and so on.

*Q: Speaking about that, did we have target audiences? I don't know Honduras, but I'm assuming there was basically a fairly well-to-do elite that pretty well ran things, and maybe there was some military, and then there were the peasants. Were we pointed towards the...*

CLOUGH: We were primarily pointed toward the elite, although we had this program of films that went out into the countryside and showed the films to illiterate peasants. I sometimes wondered what they thought of these war films showing tank factories in the States and so on. Not much relevance to their individual lives. They always attracted a crowd, because there was very little entertainment in the countryside.

*Q: I heard somewhere that they had cartoons about malaria control with mosquitos done by Walt Disney Studios. They'd see the mosquitos blown up to movie size and they'd say: "My God, what big mosquitos you have in your country! Ours are just little ones." You had a non-career Ambassador most of the time you were there.*

CLOUGH: That's right, John Irwin. He was an ex-newspaperman from Tennessee, a good friend of Cordell Hull, which is how he got the job.

*Q: You were a new officer looking at it. What was your impression of how he went about his business and operated?*

CLOUGH: He was a very amiable person and very well liked by the Hondurans. He had a lot of friends. He didn't speak the language, unfortunately, and he was too old to learn it. He did make an effort. Every Fourth of July, he was coached by one of the other officers on a speech that he would make when the diplomatic corps and government officials were invited to the embassy for the official occasion. And he would go through this speech rather laboriously. We were always talking about war, of course, the war was on, but we could never get him to say "la guerra." He would always say "la gwerra."

Anyway, he was a good man to work for, rather easy going. He did have a problem with his chief Military Attaché, who had the unfortunate habit of listening to everybody who came into his office and sort of reporting what was said to him verbatim, sending it off to Washington without much attempt to verify whether this was true or not. He did have a very smart Warrant Officer, who did the typing, and he would sometimes leave out whole paragraphs of stuff that he thought was too off-the-wall. The Colonel never noticed it. So the Ambassador, when he went on leave and consultation in Washington on one occasion, tried to get his Military Attaché changed, but he wasn't successful. The State Department didn't have much influence with the Defense Department in those days.

*Q: I guess this was a good place to bury people.*

CLOUGH: I suppose, I suppose. He probably wasn't a highly regarded combat officer.

**VICTOR NIEMEYER**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Tegucigalpa (1953-1955)**

*Mr. Niemeyer was born and raised in Texas and educated at the Scheiner Institute Junior College, Texas A & M, and the University of Texas. He served in the US Navy in World War II. Joining the USIS in 1958, Mr. Niemeyer served in Guatemala, Philippines and Chile as Director of specific programs, and as Public Affairs Officer in Mexico and Trinidad. Mr. Niemeyer was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 1999.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, Edinburg. It became a four-year college; now it's a part of the University of Texas system as a four-year university. So I finally found myself entering the class on July the 13<sup>th</sup> in Washington for training for the Binational Center Program, learning about English teaching, learning how to conduct cultural programs, learning how to, in Edward R. Murrow's words - and he wasn't the director yet, but they came to symbolize the whole operation - "Telling America's story to the world." And then finishing there, I went to New Orleans, where my wife

and my two children had driven over from Austin, and we took off for, of all places, Tegucigalpa, Honduras - that was my first post.

*Q: Did you fly there or take a ship?*

NIEMEYER: We flew, yes, flew Pan American Airlines to San Salvador and then over to Honduras. Well, I arrived in Honduras in sunny Tegucigalpa on August the 1<sup>st</sup> of 1953, and that was the day USIA went into existence. Sunny Tegucigalpa, but it was raining, and we were met at the airport by Jim Webb, one of the well-known Latin Americanists of the Agency, who had been CAO, and at that time was the PAO in Honduras. He just had one assistant, a very nice young lady named Pat Spaulding. Just the two of them ran the office, and Jim was very dedicated to the Binational Center Program. He and his wife, Margot, taught square dancing. He would help me to arrange cultural programs. He was a great help, and I guess that over the years he was probably the best-known American in Tegucigalpa. He lived just a few blocks from the embassy. You could walk from his home to the embassy, and he could not go down the street without meeting people to wish him well.

*Q: Did you make a new program there, or did you move into somebody else's program?*

NIEMEYER: I moved into a well-established binational center. It had been founded in 1938 under the glorious name of the Instituto Hondureño de Cultura Interamericana, or the Honduran Institute of Inter-American Culture, responsible to a board of directors, some American, some Hondurans, a very friendly group. I got along well with them. I relieved a man named Frank D'Amico, and I don't know where he went, but I think a few years later he got out of the program, and the last I heard of him he was teaching at the University of California at Chico, I think. At any rate, when he left, and just a few days later, there I was, not knowing hardly what to do, a real neophyte, but in a friendly town and with a binational center staff that was very limited in number. There weren't more than two people, three people, I think - the librarian, a sort of administrative assistant, and the cleaning girl. And there I was figuring out, now what do I do? But I had Jim Webb's help, and continued the programs that were going on. I had a chance to start some new programs. I found a young Britisher who could teach art, so we offered art lessons. To build up our enrollment at the binational center, I had about 200 posters printed with an attractive little boy and girl with books in their hands, and under the title, "*¿Quiere Usted aprender inglés?* If it's so" - this was all in Spanish - "then register at the Binational Center." It gave the address and so forth. Well, that was in the spring of '54, and it turned out to be a real go-getter as far as young people are concerned, because we just about doubled our enrollment to something like 400 at the first semester. We were on not a semester but a quarterly basis: four quarters a year with classes. You finished one course, and if you did well, you graduated to the next higher. The staff were mostly Honduran teachers, a few Americans, but it was real interesting work, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I got a chance to know the country, too. And I remember when I got there the coffee in Honduras had a sort of a bitter flavor to it. Well, I didn't know what caused that, but one day a member of my board of directors took me in his Land Rover out into the countryside, and we stopped at a little coffee finca, a small operation, but as you know, the preparation of the coffee bean is a very complicated process. You wash it, then you dry it, you wash it again, you lay it out in the sun for a while, you wash it again, it seems. And here they had a little concrete floor. It couldn't have been more than about 15 feet by 15 feet,

with all these coffee beans out there, and there scratching around in those coffee beans were three or four chickens. Well, I knew right away where that bitter flavor came from in the coffee. It didn't stop me from drinking it, but -

Q: *Well, you boiled it at least.*

NIEMEYER: At least it answered my question, anyway.

One of the memorable events of 1954 was the Supreme Court decision which outlawed segregation in the public schools of our country, and I will never forget that when that made the paper in Tegucigalpa, the next day, when I was on my way to the post office from the binational center, which was just a few blocks away, just a number of people whom I knew, whom I'd met, would stop and congratulate me on that. They were so pleased that the United States had outlawed segregation in its public schools. And it made me feel very awkwardly humble. I was so pleased myself that this had occurred, but I couldn't help but think, Here is our country, the great democracy that it is, and it had not provided equal schooling to the African Americans, that is, the Negroes, of our country. It was supposed to be "separate but equal" but it was separate but not equal, as we all knew. And it had an influence on me. I thought, whatever I can do and say to promote better understanding by helping people to get to know how we developed that segregation, I would do so, and also to express our great pleasure that at last it had officially ended.

Well, Honduras was a great post. I loved it. My wife did, too. We had a number of friends. Our children went to the American-type school there. They were just youngsters then. We arrived there in '53. One was four, and the other was six.

Q: *Was that Steve?*

NIEMEYER: No, this was Vic III and his sister, Ruth. So we were there for not quite two years. In '55 I was offered the directorship of the binational center in Lima. Well, in Texas, it would be like going from Floresville to San Antonio, you now, or something like that.

**Elinor Constable  
Spouse of Foreign Service Officer  
Tegucigalpa (1961-1964)**

*Ambassador Elinor Constable was born in California in 1934. Constable graduated from Wellesley in 1950 and joined the Foreign Service in 1955. Constable met her husband, Peter Constable while in the foreign service and resigned to care for her family. During her break from the Foreign Service, Constable traveled overseas to Spain, Honduras, Pakistan and helped organize the domestic Peace Corps. Constable rejoined in 1974 and returned to the Economics Bureau serving as an office director and later a deputy assistant*



*secretary. Constable also served in Pakistan in A.I.D and Kenya as ambassador. Ambassador Constable was interviewed in 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

CONSTABLE: Yes. We wanted to be part of that. But a cable came out saying families with very small children need not apply. And we had a one year old, and a three year old. There were exceptions to that, places like Nairobi, but we had no interest in going to Nairobi, or Abidjan. We wanted to go to a hardship post. We talked about it and decided that, all right, if we couldn't do Africa that some place in South America might be interesting, because by then we were both fluent in Spanish. I had lived in Argentina as a child. So Peter put down preference number one, South America. Preference number two, South America. I think the first preference may have been a country, and the second preference was any other country in South America. And then [the third preference, Central America, and we were assigned to Tegucigalpa, Honduras] very early.

This was pre-Nicaragua, pre-Contras, pre- any attention being paid to Central America times. If your aim was to go to a post where there were some interesting policy questions being thrashed out, where you could make a difference, you didn't chose Central America. It was a backwater. Most of the countries, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, were run by dictators, actually Honduras was an exception then, but wasn't a place anyone wanted to go. So I cried for two days, being the good, dutiful Foreign Service wife. "How could you do such a thing?" Peter hadn't told me he had put down Central America. And he said, "Well, you have to put a third choice." Well, I resigned myself to it, and reminded myself that I had hated Vigo, and learned to love it, and by God, I would make the best of Tegucigalpa. It turned out to be our favorite post of our entire Foreign Service career. Certainly mine, even though I was a dependent spouse.

We arrived in 1961, and it's probably the only Foreign Service post where we believed we were American diplomats out to save the world. In retrospect, there were a lot of problems with that vision. But at the time it seemed right. I threw myself into the process of putting down the support system. I enjoyed that part of being a Foreign Service wife, finding a house, waiting for your furniture, sleeping on cots. You remember in those days you carried your own furniture around with you, you didn't have furnished houses. Figuring out what to do about schooling. You didn't have American schools. Figuring out how to cope with the local medical situation. There weren't embassy clinics, and there weren't nurses. You were really on your own, and it was a challenge, and for me fun. I had no desire to work, that was out of the question. But I did want a role for myself that was something other than social and traditional. I had my antennae out to identify how I could do this. I made my calls--I was always good about that.

I called on the DCM's wife who greeted me at the door barefoot with some crocheting in one hand. I liked her right away. I thought I can ask this woman how I get out of the confining official environment, and get to know Honduras. She said, "There's a theater group that has a lot of Hondurans in it that might be fun." "Great, I'll join that." And that was my life in Tegucigalpa. It was an amateur theater group, but it was much more than that. There were some Americans in it, and a lot of Hondurans. In the beginning it was a dilettantish kind of an affair, with little cute plays, mostly in English. I directed plays and became President, Peter acted. By the time we left, two and a half years later, I had turned it into an organization. We actually built a theater right in the middle of Tegucigalpa. The president's wife laid the cornerstone. We were doing six to eight

plays a year, most of them in Spanish. A lot of people in the group didn't even speak English. It was amazing, and it was one of the most exciting things I've ever done.

But in the meantime, this being 1961 to 1964, I had to deal with expectations that existed for Foreign Service wives. I never met a male spouse until the '80s, never met a male spouse in the '60s and '70s. I'm sure there must have been somebody out there.

*Q: There might have been but I never did either.*

CONSTABLE: I don't want to belabor this because I'm sure its been described at length in a number of other oral histories, but basically you were a mirror image of your husband. The ambassador's wife was in charge of the women. The DCM's wife reported to the ambassador's wife, and on down the chain of command, or up or down the chain of command. And there were very clear expectations about what junior officers' wives, which is what I was, would do. My view of all of this was that I really wanted to be involved in the community. I think it's nuts to live somewhere without being deeply engaged. But unless you paid my salary you could tell me what I couldn't do. But you could not tell me what I had to do. Nobody could tell me that, and I drew that line the very first day I arrived in Honduras.

A few weeks into our tour, the political counselor's wife, and the economic counselor's wife, who in those days were high-powered women for a junior officer's wife, came to call on me. I thought that was really nice. One of the two women became a good friend. They said, "Congratulations." "Congratulations for what?" "Well, you've just been elected as chairwoman of the tea committee of the Voluntary Dames of Tegucigalpa." "What!" They repeated it, and laughed, and said, "Don't worry, it just means you have to arrange tea for 60 women once a month." I was speechless. I mean I was genuinely shocked. And I said, "You can't be serious." "Oh, yes, but don't worry about it." And then I got mad. Our phone wasn't hooked up, it always took a couple of months to get a phone when you went to one of these places. I said, "All right. I want the name and phone number of the woman who runs this club, and I want to use your phone." They started getting nervous. And I said, "Are you going to let me call her?" It took a while but the upshot was we went to Ruth Amott's house, I dialed this woman's number...I'll never forget, her name was Iris Ulargui. "Hi, this is Elinor Constable." "Oh, Elinor (I think this may have been in Spanish because I was pretty fluent by then). I said, "I not only will not serve as chairman of your tea committee. I will not join your organization." And actually I used some language I don't want to repeat here, and I hung up on her. I thought these two women were going to have strokes right on the spot. They said, "Elinor, you can't do that." I said, "I just did." "But the ambassador's wife recommended you." "Well, she should have asked me first. And don't you ever give my name to somebody without my permission, ever. Got that?"

I went home, I told Peter what I'd done. And he was conflicted, to say the least. Intellectually, he agreed with me. But another part of it was, Oh my God, what has she done? I stuck to my guns, and I simply scared them to death. The ambassador's wife did not know what to do with me. And I found my own role.

Peter and I traveled over every inch of Honduras. Shirtsleeve diplomacy, with me alongside him speaking the language fluently. I taught English at the university as the second language. I did

not believe that a Foreign Service wife should earn money in a foreign country. How's that for an old fashioned attitude. And I was paid rather well.

I told one of my colleagues I was going to take a pay cut. He said, "Elinor, shut up. If you go in and get the salary cut, we'll all have our salaries cut." "Oh, sorry, I didn't think about..." "Okay, so I'll take the salary." I decided to donate it all to charity. The question was which charity? I hope Mrs. Burrows, wherever she is won't be mad at me, she doesn't know this story.

Peter and I talked, "All right, how do we do this? Maybe this is an opportunity...Peter said, "You know, the ambassador's wife's favorite charity is a literacy program run by Catholic priests in rural Honduras, using shortwave radios to teach people how to read and write." A fabulous program. So Peter and I came up with the idea of giving my salary to that program.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

CONSTABLE: Chuck Burrows. His wife was Lucy Burrows. I went to see her and said, "Look, I've got a couple thousand dollars," which in 1963 was a chunk of dough. "I love teaching, and I would do it for free, but I don't want to jeopardize other teachers' salaries, so I plan to give away the money. But it occurs to me that you might like to make the donation on behalf of the American Womens' Association. I don't want anybody to know it comes from me." I thought she would slide off her chair, of course, she agreed. The next thing I know Mrs. Burrows has sent a photographer to take a picture of me teaching. To put this in context, teaching was not an acceptable activity. It didn't count. Charitable work counted, giving parties counted.

*Q: We're talking about within the American consulate, diplomatic consulate.*

CONSTABLE: Right. From then on I didn't have a problem with Mrs. Burrows and I was free to do whatever I wanted. I ran the theater, I ran a lending library, and I taught at the university. Peter and I had a marvelous time. When we left Honduras there were editorials in the paper lamenting our departure.

*Q: Can you give me a feel, I like to capture these things. Your impression of Honduran society from your perspective, and how the place was run?*

CONSTABLE: It was run by a very small elite. El Salvador was famous as the country run by nine families. The only difference between El Salvador and Honduras was that there were a few more families in Honduras, but it was basically the same structure. Honduras was technically a democracy but the elites ran the country with an elected president, a former pediatrician, Villeda Morales. He couldn't succeed himself, and in the fall of 1963 his party nominated a fellow named Rodas Alvarado to replace him. Rodas was somewhat anti-American and too liberal for our taste. The Defense Department and the CIA were especially uncomfortable about Rodas.

Peter's view, and the embassy's, was that the important thing was to have a free and fair election. It would have been the first time in the history of Honduras that a democratically elected president had been succeeded in an election. So this was rather exciting. Now, the details are not

entirely clear. The Honduran army received a clear signal that certain elements of the U.S. government would look the other way if the army took over.

In October of 1963 Colonel Oswaldo Lopez staged a coup, and remained in power for a number of years. We were in our living room when we heard a hell of a lot of noise. I recall Lopez had timed this to coincide with a local celebration involving fireworks. We lived on the edge of town, but not too far away, and Peter said, "That's small artillery fire. Oh, my God, I better go see what's going on." What does he do? Does he go to a telephone? Does he hunker down? No. He gets in his car, drives downtown to see what's going on. It was rather bloody, and a little nasty. The political counselor at the time was not really engaged, and didn't speak the language. The DCM, a man named Clinton Knox depended very heavily on Peter. At the time of the coup Clint tried to get hold of the political counselor, but he was at home listening to the Well Tempered Clavichord following the score. I think this is a lovely image--gunfire, all hell breaking loose, and Bach. Clint Knox's reaction was let him listen. "Get me Peter Constable." So Peter was up to his eyeballs [managing the evacuation of some American] dealing with the crisis.

We had an interesting time in Honduras. We had friends and acquaintances who were not part of the elite. We traveled widely and I found I adored teaching. I had a bunch of very obstreperous students at the University of Honduras where I had agreed to teach English as a second language. The students didn't always take the class very seriously. One day they locked me out of the classroom. When I found the key I gave them an instant quiz, and gave them all an F. When they complained, I said, "Don't lock me out of the classroom again." "We promise, we promise." So I tore up the quiz. They would cheat a lot. They'd put the smart guy in the middle, and then the guys on either side would copy, and that copy went on down to the end of the row. So one day I gave the student in the middle an F, the ones next to him B's, and the ones at the end got A's. That really got them because they couldn't complain. But it curbed the cheating. They were a wild bunch.

*Q: When all these things of students in those areas of being just automatically at the far left until they get out and get a job, then they move over to wherever they're going to be. Was that true there?*

CONSTABLE: It might have been, but we didn't get too deeply into politics. The Honduran students weren't as organized or as unruly as students you read about. As I say, I was very rough on them.

We lived about three miles out of town on an unpaved road. One day I was in the house and there was a knock on the door, it was six of my students. "Teacher, may we come in? We have brought something to you." It was a picture of John F. Kennedy that one of the students had drawn just after the assassination, quite good actually. Underneath about a dozen of the students had signed it, "for our professor Elinor Constable." I still have it. I was so touched. They thought Kennedy was a hero.

*Q: You left there when?*

CONSTABLE: We were due out the summer of '63 but didn't actually come back to the States until March of '64. Peter was assigned to personnel, which he had agreed to do for a friend of his provided it was for one year and then he could go on and do other things. I had decided by then that I was going back to work. That was when I realized that yes, I did want to be a professional. We were sorry to leave Honduras...to us it was the Alliance for Progress, it was shirt-sleeve diplomacy, it was a wonderful feeling at the time.

*Q: Was the Peace Corps there?*

CONSTABLE: No, not yet. By the way, one other quick note on Tegucigalpa. The officer that Peter replaced was Larry Eagleburger who at the time was thin as a rail. I've forgotten where Larry went on to after that.

*Q: I know where Larry went. He went to INR and we were both in Cuban affairs, and then we both took Serbian together for a year, and then off to Belgrade where we served together.*

*Could you give me a little feel about the relationship between our military attachés, our CIA component, and our State Department component. Obviously you weren't engaged, and these things aren't all done sub rosa. What was the mood there at that time?*

CONSTABLE: This may not be entirely accurate, but this is the way I recall it. There were fundamental differences of opinion about what U.S. policy should be towards Honduras, especially in the context of the 1963 election. The agency and the Defense Department viewed Rodas as a communist sympathizer, and believed that the U.S. should not support him. But the official policy, which was agreed to in Washington, was that as long as this was a free and fair election, however uncomfortable we might be about the outcome, we would not interfere. The agency and DOD sabotaged that policy by clearly communicating to the military in Honduras that there were those in the embassy and in Washington who didn't really agree with it. We were absolutely furious.

*Q: You had, of course, a very hard charging CIA and of course particularly in Central America, you had the Arbenz overthrow which was orchestrated by our Ambassador Peurifoy and with the CIA and everything else in the late '50s.*

CONSTABLE: I do remember at the time discussion of specific communications by specific people at specific times. It was not just a hunch or impression, it was very concrete. The issue really illustrated a broader and more fundamental theme, the purposes and the effectiveness of U.S. policy in the area, the notion that we can influence events, or build a set of institutions that aren't there, or create an economic framework which isn't fully supported by local conditions, or local leadership. Right after the coup we suspended all aid, and recalled our ambassador, but we didn't take the final step to break off relations. But we did everything else, and the ambassador left. We went to see him off at the airport...I hope there is a photograph of this somewhere...and all waved little American flags as he got on the plane. There was something so pathetic about that gesture. I have been in some demonstrations in my life--Vietnam, pro-choice rallies. But each time I have done so with a sense of desperation. I had nothing else I could do. I can't change

policy. I can't make a real impression, so by God I'm going to demonstrate. And I think that our waving this little American flag was like that.

**PETER D. CONSTABLE**  
**Political Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1961-1964)**

*Ambassador Peter D. Constable was born in New York State in 1932 and received his bachelor's degree from Hamilton college. He earned his graduate degree from the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in 1957. After joining the Foreign Service, he served in Vigo, Tegucigalpa, and Lahore. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 17, 1990.*

*Q: Then in Tegucigalpa as a Political Officer, was this a different experience?*

CONSTABLE: Oh, indeed it was. It was a particularly interesting time in Honduras. It was the Alliance for Progress period, rather intense US interest in Latin America.

An elected government was coming to the close of its term. It was the first elected government that Honduras had had in donkey years or maybe ever, I can't quite remember now. And we were very hopeful that there could be a peaceful transition to a second elected government and begin to establish some roots for democratic institutions in Honduras.

In the event, that did not happen, and there was a military coup in late '63. One of a series of coups in Latin America that put the finish to the political side of the Alliance for Progress and our hope that we could somehow foster democratic institutions in Latin America over the short term. That's something we've only come back to in recent years. For about 20 years, that was just a...

*Q: How did you react, or the embassy react, during the coup period?*

CONSTABLE: We did all the things that we could think to do to try to encourage this transition via another democratic election. We made it very clear to everyone that that's what we wanted to see happen in Honduras.

It became evident in the months prior to the elections that there was a coup fever abroad. One of the political parties, the conservative party, was encouraging the military to undertake a coup. The ruling party itself was somewhat split over the question of succession. And the man who won the party nomination was not universally liked, even in his own party. So there was a tremendous amount of factionalism, which provided a base for a coup, because the political fabric was so sundered there.

We did what we could through our representations to the parties, to the military, to the friends of the military who would drop in to the embassy and say, "Gee, doesn't the United States want to see a coup here?".

Part of the background to all this was what was going on in Cuba and Fidel Castro's efforts to export his own revolution through Central America and Latin America, generally. And that provided for the US government a certain degree of pause.

It is possible that we were not as forceful as we should have been in batting down any suggestions of coups, although all the representations that the Ambassador made that I was involved in it were really quite, quite strong.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador, Chuck Burrows?*

CONSTABLE: Yes, he's now dead. Through the department we got the OAS to send an election observer team down to Honduras to verify that the election procedures were all in order, that the registration process was a clean one, that the balloting procedures set up by the government were adequate.

What we had hoped was that team would stay in Honduras through the elections and, as an international presence, certify that the elections had been honest and try to pull away a potential rationale for the military to make a coup.

That may, in fact, have speeded up the timetable for a coup, because the military moved just before the elections were held so that there could be no question of their overthrowing someone who was popularly elected.

*Q: I realize that you were a relatively junior officer at the time, but did you have a feeling then that either the CIA or the military was not really fully on board with this policy, because, again, we were looking at Cuba. Cuba was a major preoccupation.*

CONSTABLE: I have no reason to believe that any element in the US government was actively supporting a coup. There were, as you note, varying degrees of enthusiasm for the democratic process. In certain parts of the government the primary concern was resistance or opposition to Cuba and to Fidel. And that, obviously, colored certain views.

After the coup, some of these views came out in a clearer way. The Administration's reaction to the coup was to recall the Ambassador, suspend economic and military assistance. There were a number of voices on the country team who were outspokenly opposed to that and thought we should simply get on with the job of dealing with the man who was a committed anti-Communist.

*Q: How did you feel about the Foreign Service by this time after having two posts? Sounds like you'd been in an exciting place.*

CONSTABLE: Yes, I liked it a lot. I liked it a lot. I was really enjoying myself, particularly this second post, Honduras, and it was an ideal job for a junior officer. It was a small embassy, a small political section. I had a boss whose Spanish (he was a Wristonee) was not very good, so I really got the Wristonee section in many ways.

**JAMES F. MACK**  
**Peace Corps**  
**Siguatopeque, Honduras (1963-1965)**

*Mr. Mack was born in Connecticut and raised in New York State. After graduating from Cornell University, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Honduras. In 1966 he joined the State Department and was sent to Vietnam in the CORDS program. Mr. Mack's other overseas service was primarily in Latin American where he served as Political Officer and Deputy Chief of Mission at a number of posts before being named US Ambassador to Guyana. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004.*

*Q: It was about 1962 or so?*

MACK: Yes, in September, 1962 when I came back to the US. I forgot one thing. While I was living in this little Honduran mountain village, we were visited by the labor attaché of the US embassy in Tegucigalpa. He had been a labor organizer for the AFL-CIO. He was one of many labor union activists brought into the Foreign Service at the start of the Cold War to support the democratic labor movement overseas in their battles with the Communist labor movement supported by the Soviet Union. In any event, he came up and talked to us about what he did. And that really turned me on, particularly to the Foreign Service although I had previously planned to take the test. But that really excited me. I took the written test before the start of my senior year.

I took the orals in Washington in late May of 1963, the week before I graduated. Frankly, I never expected to pass the written exam, much less the orals. So here I was. I hadn't yet received my college diploma, I was 21, and I had a big decision to make.

I had been accepted in the Peace Corps and but had this chance to go into the Foreign Service.

I should back track a bit here to tell you something else. I am quite hard of hearing, always have been. In fact I wear two hearing aids today. I did not when I was a student although if the technology had existed at the time, I should have.

Like many university students facing the military draft in those days, I elected to go into ROTC, the Reserve Officers Training Program, offered at Cornell. This is a four year program, that includes summer boot camp before the junior and senior year. Upon graduation, students are commissioned as second lieutenants and do 2 years active duty. I completed the first two years of the program. At that point, before entering the "advanced" program, that is after the first two years, cadets are subjected to a major physical exam. I flunked the hearing test royally. So my



post college plans of doing two years as junior officer in Army intelligence went up in smoke. So I had to hustle for something else to do.

And the result was that I took the Foreign Service Test and, in my senior year, also applied to Peace Corps. The Peace Corps had already accepted me before I took my Foreign Service orals in late May. So after I was told I had passed the orals, I asked one of the examiners what I should do. He told me I was a young guy; hadn't even graduated from college yet; that while I could come into the Foreign Service, I really should go into the Peace Corps first. The Foreign Service, he said, would hold the commission for me until I completed my Peace Corps Service. He said that when I got out, I would be older, more mature, speak really good Spanish, and be much more useful to the Foreign Service. That made sense to me so I said, "fine"! It turned out to be great advice and that is what I did.

*Q: I must say that one of the things that often hurts kids starting out is a lack of maturity. There is no point in having to go through maturation process after you enter the Foreign Service. Do you recall any of the questions that were asked of you in the oral-exam?*

MACK: I remember one, but I don't remember the answer I gave. The question was if you were stranded on a desert island in the South Pacific somewhere and you could have only three books, which three would you choose -- things like that. I can't recall the other questions. There were questions basically that would make you think a little bit or catch you off guard or make you sweat -- to see how you responded. The oral exam was a nerve-wracking experience. Here I am a twenty-one old kid and I am answering questions from fairly senior people in the Nation's Capital. I was pretty nervous, tingling the whole time.

*Q: Well tell me, when you were at Cornell did the idea of public service come up. Did you get caught up in the Kennedy Phenomena?*

MACK: Oh well, let me tell you what actual happened. Yes, there was a lot of that. I applied to the Peace Corps because that was one of Kennedy's big initiatives. And, like most people in the Foreign Service, I do believe in national service; and I do believe in giving back. Obviously, I had a very privileged background. I had an excellent education and I had two wonderful parents who loved me and took care of me and encouraged and supported me all the time. And I felt I owed something to my society. When I was not able to go into the military and Kennedy came along and talked about the Peace Corps, I was very moved. The Peace Corps had only been around a year or so when I applied. The Peace Corps started in 1961. Some of the first returned volunteers were involved in our training when I joined in August 1963 when I joined. So it was a pretty exciting time. So the answer was absolutely, yes. Kennedy had a major impact. So like all other Americans including yourself probably, you know exactly where you were when he was assassinated.

*Q: Oh yeah!*

MACK: I was in a little town in northern New Mexico in a Peace Corps training program when I found out. So we were all doubly motivated to carry on. So guess where they sent me? Honduras!!! I had been hoping they would send me somewhere else. I wanted to go to a Spanish

speaking country obviously because I spoke some Spanish, but a different one. But the great powers in the Peace Corps must have looked at my resume thought I should go back to Honduras. However, I did not go back to the little town where I had lived the previous summer. I was assigned a town located a hundred miles away. I had an absolutely fabulous two years in the Peace Corps.

*Q: Just to get a feel for the Peace Corps of that time, it was really very new. Did you have the feeling that you were on the cutting edge?*

MACK: Oh Yeah! The first volunteers (nurses and public health people) to serve in Honduras had only arrived one year before and still had one year to go in their tour. My group was sent to work in what they called “Community Development”. Understand that we are talking about a Cornell political science major from suburban New York working in Community Development. I also worked in agriculture.

*Q: One of the major Agricultural Schools of the United States.*

MACK: Cornell yes, but I did not study at the ag school. I had no experience in agriculture at all. But with the help of a North Carolina-trained UN/FAO ag engineer from Bolivia assigned to Honduras named Hector Lizarraga, and, of course, the campesinos I worked with, I was able to learn the things I needed to know. One of my projects was to introduce improved varieties of corn and beans, plus chemical fertilizer, in the little villages around the town I lived in. My town, a municipal center, had only 6,000 people at the time, no paved roads, no banks, and electricity only two hours a night. I also worked in a literacy program and set up a Savings and Loan Co-operative for School Teachers. I was really busy. And I loved it. It was the happiest, most satisfying two years of my young life up to that point. As a matter of fact, I stayed on a little longer than I was supposed to because I felt I had to complete some projects. I was well received by the Hondurans and I have nothing but good memories.

*Q: This would have been the first time they had been up against a Community Development type person.*

MACK: Right!

*Q: So how does one arrive in almost a piping voice and say, “Here I am”?*

MACK: Yes, “Here I am.” Exactly! Basically that was it. The Deputy Director of the Peace Corps dropped me off at a boarding house in Siguatepeque after a 5 hour jeep ride over a winding dusty “highway” that looked like photos of the Burma Road during World War II. Siguatepeque had a delightful climate, cool. It was 3,600 above sea level, set in a valley surrounded by pine forested mountains.

The boarding house, which was my first home in Siguatepeque, was run by a formidable woman. Doña Margarita Raucher was her name. She was Honduran, married to a German whom I think had been raised in Guatemala.. In addition to running the boarding house, she was a community organizer, and the real power in the family. For example, she had organized a youth group which

had a basketball team. And not only that, with Doña Margarita's encouragement, the team was in the process of improving a vacant dirt lot that served as our basketball court, putting up the backboards and stringing light bulbs around the court for illumination, and I mean regular light bulbs, not floodlights. But hey! Everybody was very excited about this. That was when I showed up. At that time, Hondurans assumed that all "Gringos" were a great basketball players. Well, I was a normal American kid, in good physical shape who knew how to play basketball; but that did not make me a great basketball player. But given what I was competing against, I was considered a solid member of the team. So basically my introduction to my Peace Corps community was as a member of the los Pinares basketball team playing against their arch rivals from a town called Comayagua 30 miles away. We lost but played a good game and everyone was very excited. All of a sudden everyone in town knew who Jim Mack was. That introduced me to the community and expanded my contacts in town very quickly.

The rural villages around Siguatepeque were a totally different issue. However, it turned out that the priest in Siguatepeque, Father Antonio Juarez, one of the relatively few Honduran-born priests in the entire country, had studied in Vermont and Montreal. He was a very bright guy, fluent in French and English. He was also a recovering alcoholic. He told me that his return to Honduras after years of seminary in North America had been a shock. He had been assigned to Siguatepeque where he had almost no intellectual peers, and started drinking. He told me that he had just about killed himself drinking, but several years before I arrived had become sober and started a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. Father Juarez became my best friend. We even went on trips around Honduras together in his jeep. He was a wonderful guy. A great friend. He took upon himself to instruct me in local Spanish slang and local history and so I really learned a lot from him. Interestingly, I also was befriended by a US evangelical missionary couple living in Siguatepeque, Ralph and Mary Keep, who happened to be very good friends of Padre Juarez.

*Q: What religious background you come out of?*

MACK: I came out of a Presbyterian background.

But the point you asked me is how I gained access to the rural communities in the mountains around Siguatepeque. Well, Padre Juarez also served 45 little villages in the mountains that surrounded the town. Get this – of the total of 25,000 people living in his parish, only 6,000 lived in town. The rest were scattered around the mountains, and I am talking about serious mountains. His job was basically to hit the patron saint (feast ) day of each of the 45 villages. That is about all he could do. He could not say mass out there regularly. There were too many villages. He had another priest working with him, but serving 25,000 people was quite a daunting task, really impossible.

But, he knew everybody because every little village had a parish representative, a lay person who would come in and visit with Padre Juarez regularly, participate in his catechism class and that sort of thing. So Padre was the one who opened the door for me to all these people, to tell them that "this guy Mack was okay, and this is what he wants to do in your village. When he comes to visit, show him around and work with him." So all of a sudden, thanks to Padre Juarez, the doors opened all over the mountains.

Here is a funny story. Once I ventured beyond the mountainous boundaries of Padre Juarez's extended Parish to a very remote village, almost completely indigenous, a very difficult 6 hours walk away by trail. I had gone to find out if the people would be interested in my setting up a radio (literacy) school as part of a program run by the Catholic Church over its radio station, called "Radio Catolica". The idea was that we would select a literate person in a village who would serve as the tutor to the illiterate students, following instructions from the radio announcer. For example, the announcer would instruct the tutor to draw the letter "o" on the blackboard and the tutor would do so, helping the others to copy it. I had set up this program in a number of villages within Padre Juarez' Parish with his support.

Well, I thought my exploratory visit had been successful since I was well received, and in fact spent the night in a house in the village. So on my next visit, I took along my Peace Corps partner, Mary Wazeter, a Wellesley graduate from Dobbs Ferry, NY and a herself Catholic, to actually bring in the required materials, train up the tutor and start the program. Anyway, to get there I had to lug on my back a blackboard plus a big old fashioned battery-powered radio 15 miles over the mountains.

Unfortunately, I had not "cleared" the program with the priests of the distant parish to which the village belonged. Big mistake!! Unbeknownst to me, the villagers had traveled to priests of their parish, American Dominicans as it turned out, to ask if they should cooperate with the "gringos". Something must have gotten lost in the translation, but the Dominican suspected that I was a protestant missionary, and instructed the villagers not to cooperate.

After spending the night with the same friendly family which has hosted me on my previous visit, Mary Wazeter and I awoke to a house surrounded by 200 very unfriendly-looking Indians who escorted us en masse out of the village. Only months later did we realize what had happened after a chance encounter with the American priests in the town they lived in. We all had a good laugh, and they sent word back to the village that we were ok – so we finally set up the literacy school.

But in Father Juarez's extended parish, I had basically a free pass and as a result I was able to carry out both my literacy and corn and bean projects. Regarding the latter, what I would do, with the help of the local *campesino*, was plant my improved corn and bean seed using different combinations and amounts of chemical fertilizer, which the UN supplied. We also planted the local corn and bean seed with and without fertilizer as a comparison. At the end of the growing season we would weigh the results and see who had produced more. .

As I said, I was taught to do this by a Bolivian Agricultural Engineer named Hector Lizarraga, a North Carolina State grad, who was working for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the UN. My ag project was not very complicated. But Lizarraga needed people to help him who had strong legs and liked to hike in the mountains which I did and still do, and was willing to go out on the countryside and make contact with the farmers. I put experimental plots in, dozens of them, all over the countryside. And the door was opened for me by my good friend, Padre Antonio Juarez, the local priest.. I followed up with the literacy program that I described to you. We did this for two years.

*Q: Did your improved corn and beans prove better than the local corn and beans, which are indigenous to Central America? Were the results a lot better?*

MACK: Well actually they were. The first year my corn was astoundingly better. We planted my corn and theirs in identical sized plots next to each other. My corn grew tall and strong and the ears were heavy with corn kernels. We weighed both types. It was marvelously successful. Our corn produced triple the local variety. At the end of the year, I remember I was on top of a mountain with one family, indigenous, very nice people, very warm people, humble, dirt floor poor people. Poorer you couldn't get. But these were really good people. If you took their kids and raised them in the U.S. they would be very successful people. That is one thing I found out. In any event, The guys name was "Don" Domingo. In Central America every adult male has the honorific "Don" before his given name. As I said my corn produced at least triple what his did, growing right next to his. I was all excited and said to Don Domingo. "Do you know what that means? Even deducting the cost of fertilizer and improved seed, by planting my corn you would end up with double the income from the same amount of land." . He looked at me and said, "yes that is true but you know, if I planted your corn and fertilizer on just half the area, I could produce as much corn as I did before and work only half as much." That day I learned a very good cultural lesson; that while we "gringos" think that producing more with the same effort is best, Honduran farmers at the time were not at that time terribly interested in producing more, but the same with less effort. Remember, they planted corn, one seed at a time, with a wooden stick with a metal tip. They did not plow. And they weeded by hand with a hoe. No Round Up. People had been farming this way for a thousand years. That is how primitive it was. One reason they did not think in terms of increasing production was they thought they had enough to live on. They ate chicken from time to time, and occasionally eggs, but what they ate all the time was corn tortillas and beans, which they grew for themselves. There was not much to buy. Remember cheap transistor radios were only beginning to appear at that time. There were no roads near their homes, only steep trails, so a bicycle or a motorcycle was useless. There was no electricity so electrical devices would have been useless. There was only a main road from the Capital to the coast, which was unpaved. It was not going to do a whole lot of good for someone who lived an hour and an half hike up the mountain. So these people really felt they did not have much to buy. That has all changed now. When the small transistor radio came in, as opposed to the larger battery-powered radio, that brought about a revolutionary change in Central America.

I had wanted to go to grad school after the Peace Corps and write a thesis on the "Impact of the Introduction of Transistor Radios on Cultural Patterns of Rural Farmers in Central Honduras." I applied to the University of Texas Latin American Studies Program, but was rejected. I guess in 1965 I had a lot of competition from people trying to avoid the draft. In fact, I noted that some of volunteers who came to replace us in 1965 had joined up to avoid going to Vietnam. That was not the motivation of our group at all back in 1963.

*Q: Was there also a question of who was going to supply the fertilizer, who was going to supply the seed? Because in a way this made the farmers more dependent on somebody else?*

MACK: Absolutely. Fertilizer was only used primarily by larger farmers of which there were not many. But most people in that part of the country were small farmers, "campesinos" My expectation was that over-time that the private sector would respond to this need and simply

begin to sell fertilizer to small farmers. That is exactly what has happened. Keep in mind that where I was living there were no vast expansive flatlands you can run a tractor over. The terrain was very mountainous, and often the soil very acidic that had to be adjusted with lime to be productive, although citrus grew well. And if you are going to spend all that money to adjust your soil you probably should very higher value product than corn and beans, such as vegetables. That is what farmers are doing in Siguatepeque today.

*Q: What about land ownership? What were you observing sort of the social – political social guide?*

MACK: This was a very interesting situation. Some of the farmers in certain parts of the area “owned” their little piece of land. I don’t mean they had a formal title, but everybody knew who “owned” what land. However, without a formal title, it was impossible to get a loan.

However, there was one huge tract of land that was owned by a large absentee landowner, who did not reside in my municipality. He resided in a municipality (like a county) at a much lower altitude over the mountain and so his overseers accessed it from another direction. Actually it was near where the American priests lived who thought I was an evangelical missionary. It was a huge tract of land by Honduran mountain standards, probably a square mile of land. It actually was the inside of an ancient crater. Some of the campesino farmers I worked with rented this land, which was flat and quite good. I felt very strongly that these guys ought to be able to buy the land. They wanted to buy the land. I remember going down to this other municipality, which was quite a haul, several hours by bus. I walked there once. Took me two days.

Anyway, I went to see this the lawyer for the owner and I asked him if he would be willing to sell. There were about 600 farmers working the land there, or some large number like that up there and, like I said, the land was actually quite good. He was totally unwilling to sell. I was most disappointed. I was very upset. But there was really nothing I could do about it. I guess my social activist side began to show its head there because I just felt that these people really ought to be able to buy the land they were working.

It is very clear to me when people own their own land they invest in improving the land. They plant high value, permanent crops. Citrus would have grown very well there. Coffee would have grown very well there. Those are crops in those days fetched quite good prices. Coffee in particular could be transported out easily by mule. So, I thought the people could significantly improve their lives by owning the land they worked rather than planting corns and beans, which is what they were doing. That was my take on it. But my efforts did not succeed. That was one of my failures.

*Q: Were your priests involved in liberation theology, would they have gotten involved in social activism?*

MACK: Padre Juarez was not a revolutionary, but he certainly believed in social justice. He had come from very humble origins. His father was a carpenter and he was very dark-skinned, of mixed raced and clearly had a sense of wanting people on the bottom to have a chance to move

up. But he was not a practitioner of liberation theology. I happened to get quite involved in that issue in El Salvador after I had joined the Foreign Service.

*Q: We will pick that up later.*

MACK: At the time liberation theology did not loom very large in my thinking. Ironically, I did once meet a priest friend of Padre Juarez who was an American. His name was Father Carney. His parish was in United Fruit's the banana producing area near the Caribbean coast of Honduras. Years later I learned that Father Carney had joined a Honduran Marxist Leninist Guerrilla group. Apparently, he had become radicalized, had gone to Nicaragua, I think in the early 80s, then under control of the Sandinistas and trained there with a group of Honduran revolutionaries. He reentered Honduras with this group across the mountains. The area is difficult and he was no kid at that point. He must have been in his fifties by then. And apparently, as I understand it, he just couldn't keep up with his comrades as they were being tracked by the Honduran army. He had a bad leg, and at one point he just told them he could not continue and so they left him. He probably died there. Later it was alleged they the Honduran Army had captured and tortured him to death but I do not believe that was the case. He probably died of exposure and dehydration. That was very rough country.

But at the time that I met him Father Carry. He just seemed to be a normal priest. Happened to be an American, a friendly guy. I had no impression at all that he was radicalized. When I went back to Central America in the early 80s as a Foreign Service officer, I did have substantial contacts with Spanish Jesuit liberation theology priests in El Salvador, several of whom were latter murdered by the members of the Salvadoran army. .

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Central Government, its effectiveness and what it was like and all?*

MACK: Sure! Honduras was and remains one of the three poorest countries in the Americas. Back in the 60's, the vast majority of the population lived in rural areas. With the exception of San Pedro Sula in the north coast and the capital, Tegucigalpa, Honduras was a mostly collection of small towns and villages. The road network was very, very, very limited. Only on the coast and particularly where the foreign-owned banana plantations were located was the infrastructure any good with paved roads, electricity and that sort of thing. But the mountain interior was very, very, backwards. Except for a few roads, things moved on people's backs and on the backs of horses and burros. So we are talking about a very primitive social-economic life style which probably hadn't changed a whole lot, for hundreds of years.

All the problems with corruption and inefficiency and lack of education permeated Honduras at that time. You had underpaid, under trained officials, who along with teachers were often paid months late. In fact, the reason one of my projects was to set up a savings and loan cooperative for the teachers was precisely because they were forced to obtain loans from local merchants while they waited for their late pay checks to arrive. The merchants charged 10% interest for each month they check had not arrived. Our cooperative charged 1% a month.

But, there were islands of development in places such San Pedro Sula, which is the largest city in the country and it is near the north coast. But, where I was, we are talking about very basic

places. And at that time, Honduras was not terribly over-populated. It only had 2 million people in an area the size of New York State. Today it has over 7 million, over triple the population in forty years. Think about that? And that is in spite of out migration. But now they have terrific environmental problems. They have chopped down most of their beautiful pine forests. There has been mass rural to urban migration of people not prepared to live successfully in an urban environment, and tremendous social dislocation. The family structure was never very strong in Honduras. Illegitimacy must have been 80 percent. When most lived in rural areas this was not such a big problem. But in urban areas social controls have broken down.

When I was there in the Peace Corps, the President was a army colonel named Lopez Arellano who had staged a coup against the left of center president elect just before our Peace Corps group arrived. In fact, for a while during our training, we thought the Peace Corps might even cancel our assignments in protest. But we were eventually sent. There were elections while I was there, and they were not terribly free. In those days, there were two major political parties, and interestingly enough, the rural people were split almost down almost right down the middle in their party loyalties. So I worked with campesinos who supported both sides. The party in power, and on whose ticket Col Lopez ran, was the so called, the "Nationalist" Party, which was the conservative Party. On election day the parties would rent trucks to bring their rural voters to the polls in Siguatepeque. The Army stopped truckloads of farmers who were coming to vote for the other party opposition party and took away their "cedulas", their national ID cards, so they could not vote. How do I know this? Because I worked with these guys. After they were taken down from the trucks and had their cards seized or destroyed, they came to see me to complain. I had been working projects with people from both sides. Both groups were poor. The farmers simply voted for the party their fathers had voted for. They asked me if I could do something about it the coercion and fraud. Of course, I couldn't do anything about it other than commiserate with them. But, it certainly bothered me greatly. I was really outraged that this kind of thing happened. But! That was the nature of the society in which I was operating.

*Q: Honduras, did it have rule by the "14 families" and that sort of thing?*

MACK: Not to the degree that El Salvador had the famous fourteen families. No. Because it was a more diffuse society. It was a more traditional society with a lot of poor people living all over the mountainside in little communities farming small plots of land. There may have been richer or smaller farmers but no much of the huge "terrateniente" (huge landowners of a type) you would see in El Salvador at that time.

*Q: These were all basically people of Indian origin?*

MACK: In Honduras virtually all people are Spanish speaking. Most are *mestizos*, people of mixed European/Indian ancestry, but a great number are of largely Indian ancestry. The Indian cultural influence remained very strong in many ways, in the food, for example, as well as in many of the beliefs, customs and physical gestures. Many of the words for many basic things like cooking implements, certain foods, tools, building materials, the corn planting cycles were of Indian origin.

*Q: What were some of the Indian origins? Were they part of the Maya?*



MACK: Some of them were peripheral Maya people. But most of Honduras lay outside Maya Empire. However, there is a major Mayan center site near the Guatemalan border in a place called Copan. Even in my town of Siguatepeque, people occasionally found Mayan-style pottery, although not as sophisticated as that found in the Maya heartland. In fact, I have some in my house. Those particular pieces were discovered when a bulldozer that was leveling dirt street in town unearthed it. It was chipped by the bulldozer. And somebody said "oh look at that". I heard about it, went to see the person and offered to buy it.. I bought a couple of pieces and chards and have been carrying them with me ever since. Obviously locked up because they are pretty fragile.

*Q: How about the Peace Corps itself? Did the Peace Corps seem to have problems with its volunteers in that area? Not just your area but in all Honduras? Again it was early days. I am just wondering.*

MACK: No. As I said, the first two groups served in Honduras before the Vietnam war was an issue. Those volunteers were idealistic, largely motivated by desire to serve and by patriotism. That changed somewhat as the Vietnam war heated up and the Peace Corps began to attract some guys who, as I said, were seeking to avoid military service. That is why so many people went to grad School to get a deferment. But when I was there, that was not the case at all.

*Q: Did they warn you not to write uncomplimentary postcards? You arrived shortly after they had the problem, where was it in Ghana?*

MACK: Chile or Ghana, uncomplimentary about the local government? It has been so long that it is hard for me separate what I heard about other countries from my case. I certainly don't remember any incidents like that involving the thirty-some odd people in my Peace Corps group. I should note that when I was in Honduras, there were maybe forty or fifty volunteers in the whole country. Later the Honduras program became huge, with four or five hundred volunteers. It seemed every town had one. I was the first ever volunteer in my town. Then after about a year I was joined by a young woman (I mentioned above), who had trained in my group, but had been sent somewhere else until she had medical problem.

*Q: You left in about 1965.*

MACK: I left in December of '65.

*Q: And then what happened?*

MACK: Well, what happened a month later was that I joined the Foreign Service. Six months before at the end of my tour with the Peace Corps I received a telegram, an old fashion Morse code telegram. That is how people communicated in Honduras, via telegrams send to the telegraph office. The phones were the crank type, almost impossible to hear, especially for me.

Of course the telegraph operator in Siguatepeque knew everything that was going on. I received a telegram that said I had been accepted into the Foreign Service to start in the class in January of 1966, and my starting salary would be \$7,200. And by the way, I had been brought in

at a higher level because they had given me credit for the Peace Corps. Well, within a half a day the whole town knew this, and that I was going to be making \$7,200 a year. That was a huge amount of money for Siguatepeque. I was very embarrassed because my Peace Corps salary I think was \$75 a month, which is what a high school teacher made and quite adequate for my simple life style. I actually saved \$25 a month of that. One reason was I that I almost never drank beer. If you drank beer you went through you pay pretty fast. But I didn't and I was able to rent my little two-room house and eat, buy clothes and shoes and do everything else I needed to do on \$50 a month. My rent was \$16 a month.

So, I was embarrassed that people in Siguatepeque knew I was would be making so much money in the Foreign Service.

Then all of a sudden, "gee", Mack was going to have a salary of \$7200. Well anyway I left Honduras in December 1965, spent Christmas with my family in Rye and then sometime in January I went down to Washington and joined the Foreign Service A-100 course for new FSOs. I should tell you a funny story. One day I was driving to FSI which then located was located in Arlington Towers in Rosslyn. Basically it was a garage at that complex turned into classrooms. I don't know if you remember.

**PERRY W. LINDER**  
**General Services Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1964-1965)**

*Perry W. Linder was born and raised in California. He attended San Jose State College and the University of California at Berkeley. He entered the Foreign Service in 1957 and held several positions in Germany, Jamaica, Honduras, France, Benin, Belgium, Jordan, Greece and Spain. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1996.*

*Q: Okay, what was your next Foreign Service assignment?*

LINDER: I went to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. When I left Jamaica I first came to FSI for three months language training,...

*Q: Spanish?*

LINDER: Spanish. And then went to Honduras, where I was General Services Officer.

*Q: So that's your first administrative assignment.*

LINDER: That's right. I got to Honduras just after there would been a coup, the military had taken over the government. The police had been disbanded and they had the military on the street corners directing traffic. I never felt very comfortable in Tegucigalpa. I found it a very depressing country, although there were people there that liked it, but the government at the time

was not one you could admire, and anybody you met there, people of influence, didn't have the interest of the country in mind. There was a large Indian population which were really pitiful people, at least as observed in Tegucigalpa. They lived in very poor circumstances. It was a depressing country. I used to have to go a couple of times by jitney to the Pacific Coast. There would be passengers with pistol belts. You really felt like it was the wild west. The Sheriffs in these little towns were men of tremendous importance and influence, overbearing importance among the Indians.

*Q: There was a real sense of control of society by the...*

LINDER: Yes.

*Q: Were you married at that time? Was your wife with you? No?*

LINDER: No. I intended to get married, and at that time you had to submit an application...

*Q: To marry a foreign national.*

LINDER: That's right, you not only had to make application, you had to submit your resignation. We had gone ahead and planned our wedding in Jamaica, and like many things in Jamaica, it was a big affair with lots of people to be invited. We were actually married in December 1964, and so when I left Honduras to go to the wedding I still didn't have the approval. The embassy in Jamaica assisted me. I explained that the wedding was about to take place and the Department finally said Okay, but they took away my security clearance. I went ahead and got married, and afterward Judy and I went back to Honduras. Shortly after my security clearance was reinstated. And at that time when you married a foreign national your assignment was cut and you went back to Washington. The idea being to provide your spouse the opportunity for orientation in the US and the opportunity to become a citizen. So, we left Honduras in March '65; we drove back to the United States--it was quite a drive. Probably a couple of years after that you couldn't do it because of the problems in El Salvador and in Guatemala, but at that time, we were able to do that. We took about a month. We spent 10 days in El Salvador and then went on to Guatemala, Chichicastenango and Lake Catalan. We crossed into Mexico at Tapachula and spent a week to 10 days at Oaxaca, and then on to Mexico City.

*Q: That was your honeymoon trip, sort of. So you probably weren't totally unhappy that you didn't serve a full tour in Tegucigalpa.*

LINDER: I was quite happy to leave Honduras. The job, General Services Officer was interesting, but I didn't have the best guidance from a supervisor at that time.

*Q: Okay. Security, I suppose, for the embassy was not a major issue at that time? Were you also acting as Security Officer, or did somebody else do that?*

LINDER: No, there was a Security Officer there. I did do consular work while I was there; I filled in when the consular officer went on home leave, or was absent.

*Q: And was there opposition, you say there was a coup in the government; was there any opposition to that expressed, that it was not a civil war or a rebel group, or to the extent that people were unhappy they were sort of quietly expressed, I suppose.*

LINDER: There was no civil war, but there was tension. You would hear shots in the night and disturbances but while I was there, there was no uprising or anything like that. As I recall, they did have elections either while I was there or shortly after I left, and that provided some stability. I can't even remember at this point who won the elections. I think the military group in power won the elections.

**TIMOTHY DEAL**  
**Rotational Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1965-1967)**

*Timothy Deal was born in Missouri and educated at the University of California at Berkeley. Entering the Foreign Service in 1965, he has served in a variety of foreign posts in Honduras, Poland, the Czech Republic and England. Mr. Deal also worked in the National Security Council for several years. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2004.*

*Q: And what language training did you have?*

DEAL: Spanish, because in the A-100 course I was assigned to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The reason I chose Latin America (or at least a Spanish-speaking post) was because, at that time the Department did not send first-tour officers to the Communist world, which was my area of interest, especially Eastern Europe. I also had some doubts about my language ability and had taken some Spanish in college so I thought that would be the easier course.

*Q: And you received a proficiency level 3/3 when you finished that?*

DEAL: No, not at the time. I received my 3/3 proficiency during my first year in Honduras, actually a few months after my arrival.

*Q: And in Honduras and Tegucigalpa, I see that you were in the central complement rotation; did you do mainly consular work?*

DEAL: I started off with a four-month assignment in the Consular Section. The program was designed to give entering officers some experience in and exposure to all the major sections of the Embassy. After my tour in the Consular Section, I moved over to AID [United States Agency for International Development], working for the program director for a four-month period. I'm not sure whose idea that was, but it was an interesting excursion since I could see up close what AID did. I learned quite a bit about the development aspects of their programs and the economic work associated with them. That experience helped me when I moved into the Embassy's Economic Section.

After the tour in AID, I went to the Administrative Section where I was acting Personnel Officer for about three months. During that time, the Department announced that it was ending the central complement program and first-tour officers would be moving into regular positions. I subsequently received notice that I was being assigned to a consular position in Merida, Mexico. That would have been in 1967.

*Q: That would have been a direct transfer?*

DEAL: Yes, but there was a vacancy in the Economic Section....

*Q: In Tegucigalpa?*

DEAL: In Tegucigalpa. And that seemed to me a more interesting possibility. Jill was pregnant at that time so the assignment for both personal and professional reasons seemed a good choice. I moved into the Economic Section after completion of my administrative tour.

*Q: When you entered the Service in 1965, were you given a career "cone" at entry?*

DEAL: I don't recall if we were given a cone. If anything, I would have wanted to be a political officer. That was my academic background and interest. I don't know if there was such a program then.

*Q: I don't remember what year that started.*

DEAL: I don't either.

*Q: Because you certainly were an Economic Officer later on, but we can talk about that as we go ahead. So you finished out your tour in Tegucigalpa in the Economic Section?*

DEAL: Yes, I did.

*Q: You were there about a year?*

DEAL: It was probably about 15 months in the Economic Section. The Department added a few months to my original two-year tour of duty.

*Q: And it was a two-man section, you said?*

DEAL: Yes.

*Q: And you did commercial work, as well as economics?*

DEAL: I did some commercial work because there was only one officer in the Commercial Attaché's office, so I filled in for him on a number of occasions. Also, because the Consular Section had only one officer, I did consular work while the Consul was gone (and he was gone a

lot). So I shuttled back and forth between the Economic and Commercial Sections and the Consulate.

*Q: Sounds like a pretty good first assignment in the sense that you had the chance to do several different things, have some responsibility (being “acting” this and that); is that how you would feel?*

DEAL: I thought so. I must say the embassy was very good to me in the sense that I was their first central complement officer, so they had devised an interesting program of rotation. Because of my assignment to a permanent position in the Economic Section, I did not rotate to the Political Section. Still, I saw how a mid-sized embassy in that part of the world functioned, and I believe I gained a lot from the experience.

*Q: Were there other junior officers at post or were you the only one?*

DEAL: No, there was one who followed me, an officer named Ray Pardon with whom I became close friends.

*Q: Followed you in the sense that you were still there?*

DEAL: Yes, he was assigned to post as a central complement officer, but he too was caught up in the program change, and he spent most of his tour in the Political Section.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?*

DEAL: Joseph John Jova was the Ambassador the whole time I was there. Jean Wilkowski was Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM).

*Q: What did you do in the Economic Section?*

DEAL: I did basic economic reporting. In addition, we helped with the economic analysis of AID program documents since they did not have their own economists. In terms of economic reporting, I did unearth a scandal involving illegal exports of coffee. At that time, the U.S. was a party to the International Coffee Agreement. Honduran producers were engaged in illegal trafficking of coffee contrary to the agreement, which we discovered and which was confirmed by other posts in the region.

*Q: I worked for Jean Wilkowski a little later in Rome in the early '70's (not too much later) and I seem to recall her describing vividly a soccer war between Honduras and what, El Salvador?*

DEAL: Yes, that was after my time.

*Q: After your time.*

DEAL: But it did tell you something about the nature of politics in that region, namely, that you could go to war over a soccer match. Of course, the root cause of that war stemmed from the

traditional animosity between Honduras and El Salvador, with the Hondurans strongly resentful of the illegal migration of Salvadorians into Western Honduras.

*Q: Anything else that you would want to talk about in connection with your first assignment in Honduras?*

DEAL: One of the more amusing things I recall – at least in retrospect – concerned officer efficiency reports. You may remember that at that time you received two efficiency reports, one you saw at post and another that was available for viewing only in Washington. The latter was, for all practical purposes, the “real report.” In any event, during an inspection of the Embassy, one of the inspectors showed me excerpts of a reviewing statement made by DCM Wilkowski regarding my wife Jill. Of course, in later years you were not permitted to say anything about the actions or activities of other family members. In her report Wilkowski said that my wife had the annoying habit of raising “substantive issues”, e.g. Vietnam, with officers at cocktail parties, which was hardly surprising for a Berkeley graduate. She thought Jill might be less intense “once she had a few babies.” The inspector noted in his report that “Mr. Deal was uncharacteristically negative” about the comments made by Wilkowski.

*Q: You wondered which officer she annoyed, maybe Jean?*

DEAL: I have no idea.

*Q: Well, that’s kind of a strange comment, I would think (even then).*

DEAL: Yes, it was.

This might be a good point to say a few words about our personal life in Tegucigalpa. On arriving at post, we moved in for several weeks into the incredibly seedy Hotel Savoy, an institution right out of a Graham Greene novel. We then moved to a house in the city which was adequate, but virtually unlivable because of the constant barking of dogs all night and the rather sickening spectacle of army ants marching non-stop through our bathroom. Eventually, we moved to a small house above Tegucigalpa, which was located in a coffee *finca*. At an altitude of about 4,500 feet, it was comfortable year round.

At the beginning of my tour, Jill taught English at the national university. A violent student strike over the grading system brought that project to an end. Jill, who was a qualified English teacher, then took a job with the American High School.

Our first son, Chris, was born in Tegucigalpa in 1967. There is a story associated with his birth worth repeating. About one week before Jill entered the Policlinica hospital to give birth to Chris, there was a bloody shootout in a local bar between the head of the Departamento de Investigación Nacional (DIN), the local equivalent of the FBI, and a member of the Cuerpo Especial de Seguridad (CES), the security police. The DIN head shot and killed the CES agent, but was wounded by gunfire. The man from DIN was taken to the Policlinica for treatment. While in the hospital, a group of CES agents broke into what they believed was the DIN man’s room and machine-gunned and stabbed the body to death. With typical Honduran efficiency,

they got the wrong man. They killed the son of a military zone commander, who was in the hospital for a minor operation. Of course, there was revenge on the CES team once they were caught. I don't know exactly how or when that particular string of violence ended.

**ROBERT E. WHITE**  
**Political Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1965-1968)**

*Ambassador Robert E. White was born on September 21, 1926 in Massachusetts. He received his BA from St. Michaels College in 1952 and his MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1954. After entering the Foreign Service in 1955, Mr. White served in numerous positions in foreign nations including Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Paraguay, and El Salvador. Mr. White was interviewed by Bill Knight on June 10, 1992.*

WHITE: Right. Two months later, I ended up in Honduras. I worked for a highly-skilled career ambassador, John Jova. Honduras at that time was not any kind of a priority in Latin America. One thing I do remember of interest...someone farsighted sent a team of foreign policy experts to judge what were the stakes in Central America? How seriously should we view insurgent movements in Central America? I remember that Tony Ross, a capable Foreign Service officer, was on that commission. Basically they came to the conclusion that except for the Panama Canal very little was really at stake in Central America. If I recollect correctly, they pointed out that there had to be social and political change in Central America; those societies had to move from one level of political development to another and that violence might accompany these changes but that this internal friction was not anything that the United States should get too excited about. I personally agreed with that assessment so I guess that's why I recall it. Of course, 15 years later, we were acting as though our world was coming apart because a U.S.-supported dictator in Nicaragua had fallen.

I served in Honduras from 1965 to 1968.

*Q: Because Abrams wanted him to do something on the basis of oral instruction and John said no, you've got to put it in writing. And Abrams took this as indication of disloyalty to the policy and yanked him out.*

WHITE: Exactly. John thought that he was ambassador to Honduras and Elliott Abrams insisted he was ambassador to the Contras Congress--irreconcilable jobs. I would recommend that really, just my closing thought: if you want to have a professional Foreign Service, you are really going to have to shape up and stand behind Foreign Service officers when they get put in the position that John or Frank McNeil were put in for doing their jobs. Elliott Abrams was running a conspiracy. He was violating the laws of the country and where was the Foreign Service Association? Where were the people that were supposed to protect people who were not doing anything other than complying with the ethics of the profession. Stating what the facts were.



Reporting. Or refusing to take Elliott Abrams' bizarre interpretations of U.S. foreign policy over the telephone. It is just outrageous that Ferch should have been put in that position. The Foreign Service Association and others were totally silent as far as I could tell on this issue.

**JOSEPH JOHN JOVA**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1965-1969)**

*Ambassador Joseph J. Jova was born in New York in 1916. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947. In addition to serving in Chile, Ambassador Jova served in Iraq, Morocco, Portugal, and was ambassador to Honduras, the Organization of American States, and Mexico. Ambassador Jova was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.*

*Q: How did that appointment as ambassador come about? This is always the big step when you're first appointed ambassador.*

JOVA: I was told, "There'll be other opportunities." One can't help but wonder because not for nothing they have that old saying, "Opportunity seldom knocks twice." But you can just hope for the best. Circumstances change, and certainly if I had been there much longer with Dungan, I might have been completely unsaleable, who knows.

I had gone with the Air Attaché on this boondoggle, if you will, to the southern most regions of Chile and Argentina. We spent a day or night in some of these sheep ranches, and then we were in Punta del Arenas, which is right by the Straits of Magellan, and we were at dinner with the Naval Commander of the region who was an admiral. And while we were at dinner the aide interrupted, and said, "We have the embassy in Santiago calling Mr. Jova." Sure enough, the embassy in Santiago was on the phone and the duty officer said, "We have this cable that just arrived from the Department which says "The President is thinking seriously of naming you as ambassador to Honduras, but before proceeding with this determination wishes to know if you would accept such a nomination, if indeed it is offered." So that was a great thrill. I went back to the table, and the admiral at once said, "Break out the champagne." So we had a champagne toast at this good news. That's how I learned, but it was rather dramatic.

We went back to Santiago a couple of days later. Sure enough, I read it, and I said, "Reply affirmatively." It takes a little while, but it was eventually announced. I remember that the Chileans were such snobs in some ways and think Santiago is heaven, and it is in many ways. The reaction was, "Poor Jova." I think even the newspapers, "What has he done to be assigned to Honduras?" I explained, "Yes, but you have to start somewhere." It was a wonderful thing, it was my first embassy.

*Q: What was the year?*

JOVA: This was the summer of 1965.

*Q: So this was the Johnson administration. Who was the head of ARA? What was the atmosphere of ARA when you got back there, because this has always been such a volatile place. Sometimes its rather placid, and other times its got some personalities that have very strong ideas about our policy there, and I was just wondering how you found it at that time. Was Tom Mann there at the time?*

JOVA: I believe he was. Tom Mann, Lincoln Gordon...

*Q: And Bob Woodward at one point, just for a short period.*

JOVA: Oh, he was already in Spain.

*Q: He had been yanked out, and he was only in ARA for a few months.*

JOVA: Chile was only a few weeks, and then in ARA for a year or so. It wasn't very long, and then he was given that very important job as ambassador to Spain.

*Q: But Mann was probably it at the time, wasn't he?*

JOVA: I have a feeling Jack Vaughn. He said, "Look, John, we don't want somebody there trying to impose Quai d'Orsay French protocol. We want somebody who will go after the people like Peace Corps, mingle with the young people." Which I think was a slam at my predecessor who was a wonderful person, and certainly knew Central America.

*Q: Vaughn was a Kennedy ilk, shirt sleeves; out with the campesinos. This was very much a Kennedy feeling.*

JOVA: Very much, and it was a good thing to be reminded of. Certainly in a place like Honduras which was very poor at that time, and where we had a very big embassy. It was disproportionate. Now all the rich Arabs have built things that are even bigger. But it was sort of disproportionate for the state of that country. This was good advice because I also was a creature of that time. I think I mentioned the second Peace Corps went to Chile; the first one went to Nigeria, so we were all enthused with a little bit of that spirit.

*Q: What was our policy towards Honduras, or did we have one?*

JOVA: We were mad at them. We had one, but we were a little bit mad at them because they had a coup, and they had a military government. As a matter of fact, Ambassador Burrows had been withdrawn for several months in protest, and they had to live here in Washington for quite a period of time until they sent him back, rather reluctantly. I'd say the instructions were, to the extent they were instructions, "cultivate the little people, watch out for human rights, cover democracy." But at the same time, as only a government can do, talking out of both sides of their mouth, "cultivate the government because there are big investors, the United Fruit Company," which I had worked for in my youth. Plenty of land reform, as long as they don't touch any of United Fruit Company's, even United Fruit Company's properties that had been abandoned, or

that they hadn't cultivated for years. The minute the government tried to seize those, or peasants seized them that was sanctified by the government, there was a big strong reaction from Washington. That's normal.

*Q: Just a little feel, because I think its very important to try to capture times, and we're talking about the mid-1960s, and everybody thinks of Central America, the banana republics, and the United Fruit and business interests being so important, although this was probably a waning thing. Did the business interests that you talked to, having interests in Honduras, have any complaints, or requests, for you to do when you got down there?*

JOVA: I think it was more, don't rock the boat, don't be carried away by all this stuff about the little people. Mind you, it was quite perfunctory, because there weren't that many business interests in Honduras, that many important ones. So we did meet people from the United Fruit Company, and also from the Standard Fruit Company, and perhaps from Texaco which was building its refinery there. That was the only refinery in the country, one of the few in Central America. But it wasn't a big deal, not like later on when I was named ambassador to Mexico. You're always given little tasks.

First of all, the ambassador from Honduras is very nice, and in Washington still, said, "I can't give you a party the way I'd like to because my wife and I are going to Disneyland." I remember people criticized that. After all, they don't change American ambassadors that often, and the Honduran ambassador in Washington had a golden opportunity, but he said, "Instead of that we're going to take you out for dinner."

When we arrived there, we were met of course by all the embassy people, the attachés, the Chargé, and the chief of protocol representing the Honduran government. The chief of protocol had an official Honduran government car. We got into that, they stepped on the starter, and the damn thing wouldn't start. It went on and on. I said, "This is really like a movie." I told him, "The embassy will take care of us for sure." We got into the next embassy car with the DCM. It was also lunch time, mid-day, some people were literally, with the big hats, taking siestas. And the chief of protocol, with a certain amount of pride, half joking, but half pridefully also said, "This is our traffic light." There was only one traffic light. The Peace Corps devised a system of having lights all over town, and a couple traffic lights. We saw the presidential palace which was deserted, and went up the hill to the great big beautiful embassy that we have there, and we offered a glass of champagne for the chief of protocol.

*Q: I wonder if you could give me your impression...you said it was a big embassy, disproportionate really to the country. Could you talk a little about the size of the embassy, and its operation as you saw it while you were there?*

JOVA: People think of these places as little tiny places, but the very fact does require more people. In other words, we had a very large A.I.D. mission which grew even larger after that. We had a large Peace Corps office. We had agricultural attachés, and we had a reasonable size embassy staff, a standard size, three or four people in the political section, the same in the economic section. The other agency had a few people, small because that had been de-

emphasized, the undercover operations, and perhaps it was regretted later. No, it was a good size in personnel. The chancery, good size, a handsome building, a little bit impractical.

I found that the ambassador in Honduras really had a big managerial job because of the relative size, but you had a little bit of everything. At the same time you had the dregs, or the administrative corps helping you to run the thing. But we had a good DCM.

*Q: Who was your DCM?*

JOVA: John Fisher, very nice, and his wife Dorothy was very helpful, and two of his children were more or less the same age as my two older sons. They were into horses; we were into horses too. Here they had a little riding club composed mostly of embassy people, but also a few other Americans, and some Hondurans, and some foreign businessmen also. You could finish work, get in the car, and be at the stables in five minutes.

Of course, no guards, everything is messed up because when I visited Tegucigalpa recently, they have armed guards with you everywhere. In those days, nothing like that. The situation changed and like the successor, they had to have guards. By the time he came the terrorism business started getting closer. One of the early kidnappings was next door in Guatemala.

*Q: How did you deal in the embassy with all of these disparate groups? Some countries are dominated by one or the other. Did you find that in Honduras or was it sort of straightforward?*

JOVA: No. Certainly in Portugal, to jump back in time, the military mission was a big problem for the Ambassador, I know that. And not only the MAAG mission director but his wife who was like a steamroller and ambitious. I remember that was a big problem to our then chief of mission, Ambassador Bonbright, and I sympathized.

In Chile we had trouble with AID. I know the ambassador was instrumental in changing one, and we got another who turned out to be even worse as far as relationships with the embassy.

In Tegucigalpa, AID was a problem. And believe it or not, CIA. The AID program was very important to a place like that, and the AID mission group was composed of almost as many people as the embassy itself, maybe more. Sometimes the problems were just misunderstandings, and personalities. The first director was really good-hearted, and the problems were less intentional. The second one we had was very cold blooded, and very ambitious, and very strong on his rights, and difficult to make him see what our overall policy was. At one time after the Salvadorans had termed what everybody hoped would be a free election, not for president at that moment, but deputies and mayors, into in effect another coup. It banned the labor leaders who had been out of the country, from returning. We said, "All right. We're just going without saying it. Let's not be so crass as to say we're holding up aid because of this, because in a little place like Salvador you get a Papandreou like reaction. We're a free country. Look at Haiti right now, but they'll draw their own conclusions. Let's just slow down the thing."

And, of course, we had two people there, one was Bob White, political counselor, or first secretary, as bright as could be and a good friend, but also over energetic. He took it upon

himself to spell it out to the Prime Minister, in other words the man who ran the government for the general. "Yes, that's why you're not getting the aid." Why say that? And the AID director and his people, some of his people, when two emissaries came to give more money away...I said, "Fine, but we're not doing it right now. We'll receive them, they'll come to see me, or I'll take them out to lunch, but I don't want them to go to see the president or the minister right now. Later perhaps." Well, they couldn't see that. Washington could, but not the AID director.

*Q: How did you deal with something like that? Did they try to go their own way?*

JOVA: No, we won that one, but everything was a battle. And I think I just let it be known. This guy was too big for Tegucigalpa, but he wasn't really contributing to a harmonious working country team relationship. They moved him to Ecuador. Well, there he got in trouble with the ambassador, and he finally left AID and went to work in Nigeria as a consultant. I've seen him since then and he said, "One thing I've learned in this world..." still disagreeable but at least he was frank about that, "is no use fighting with your ambassador." But then it caught up with him in Ecuador as he didn't come with a clean bill of health. In other words when the ambassador there, Findley Burns, complained that he wasn't getting the cooperation needed, they knew it wasn't just a whim because he already had a bad record in Honduras.

The other trouble was with CIA, the station chief. And I want to tell that story because not often does this happen. This was more with the person, rather than with the organization. I had had traditionally rather good relationships and in Chile we fought the battle together on the campaign to promote the election of president Frei. Only once did I have trouble there as you don't know everything they're doing. But this station chief was also a Latin American, and a Latin Hispanic background. We were friends and collaborated a lot, and I knew more than usual. I'll put it that way. But his boss came with the head of Latin American Affairs, or even higher in the home office, and they brought him to me.

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*Q: Back to Honduras. How did you deal with the government of Honduras? In the first place could you describe, as you saw it, the political situation and any changes that happened. You were there from when to when?*

JOVA: '65 to '69, four years. Well, we dealt with it like any other government, and had relationships with the various ministries, certainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In effect, you had to do some of things with others, and you had to keep them happy, certainly with the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Finance. We had a lot to do with them because of the AID programs, and because they had a very smart well prepared Minister of Economy. But the real power at that time was, of course, the president a general, Oswaldo Lopez Arrellano, who was an Air Force general who had been trained in the United States; who was little; not very impressive; seemingly kind of dumb in many ways; but smart as could be as far as politics, and had built up a little Honduran air force to be the best in Latin America. His army was rather small, but the air force was much better than in Guatemala or in Salvador. With a handful of planes, they were well trained and they were well kept up. That was his great big pride.

Wherever I've been, in all those countries, we've had lots of access to the local White House, the presidential house. Certainly in Chile that was the case. In Portugal, it wasn't. Salazar was rather remote.

*Q: The Foreign Minister.*

JOVA: The Foreign Minister, or the appropriate opposite. But certainly in Chile one could go see the president quite readily, either the ambassador or the Chargé, and certainly the Foreign Minister or any other minister. In Honduras I could see the president whenever I liked, and certainly Zuniga the same way. And that was true also in Mexico. Now I understand from others who have served in Brazil, for instance, that to see the president was a big, big thing for the ambassador. It was much more second hand, and our relations were good. Only after that election that was so criticized, and the labor leaders were exiled, that our relations were somewhat soured. He practically told me that he was taking our conversations into the news against me. And as a matter of fact they did ask that I be removed.

Its true, their ambassador here or their ambassador to the United Nations...I don't remember, but they spoke with Dean Rusk who very nicely defended me. I don't mean he acted very strangely, but he very nicely defended me. "If they insisted, of course, the United States would do it. They had confidence in their ambassador, their ambassador was acting under orders, instructions, and their insistence that I be removed would certainly harm relations with the United States very quickly." So nothing else was ever heard about it. The Hondurans never said that to me. I heard that from Washington, and after that they even apologized.

*Q: Here you had this election which went sour, and you had these labor leaders who were exiled. What was the mechanics? Did you on your own, or in consultation with Washington, decide that we were going to make our unhappiness known, and then how did you go about making your unhappiness known?*

JOVA: Certainly not by making overt declaration to the press, or the radio, or anything of that sort.

*Q: But the aid business.*

JOVA: I said, "Look, it's hurting the image of Honduras. It's hurting Honduras' position in the United States. It's hurting Honduras' position in the civil field, and the human rights field. They weren't invented by Carter. They existed before." And they let them in, true also for Jesuits. They had been jailed. I finally got them out, and went to the airport. I remember I picked them up and brought them to the residence. He was an activist Jesuit, Father Guadalupe. He was an American citizen, and I brought him to the residence to clean up, spend the night, gave him new clothes, and made it clear that he was under our protection and then he went back. He got in trouble again because he was a very outspoken, agitator is the wrong word to use, but on the other hand he was worth helping.

*Q: As you were making your unhappiness known, were the United Fruit or American business interests, or people in Congress, saying, "Cool it." When you have labor agitators who are*

*opposed to American interests, which is also high profile and an easy target, the American interests are not very happy about seeing these guys running around. How did you handle that?*

JOVA: I converted the manager of Standard Fruit Company, to have a social conscience, and to start looking at those things with a new view.

*Q: How did you convert him?*

JOVA: Well, just talk when I'd give him lunch, or stay in the house, or I'd go down and stay with him also. And little by little he started seeing things from a 1967 point of view, rather than a 1905 view. He was young. He lost his job, but we're still friends. But lots of times they had unprecedented labor peace, and usually the relations, unless they were too narrow-minded, they could see the advantage to them of working together, and doing good things. They had to stand on their own rights, they couldn't give everything away. United Fruit Company were more wily perhaps, and I wasn't so close to them. The very fact that I had worked for United Fruit Company as a child, a kid right after college, maybe that had something to do with it. They were never fully comfortable with me, except towards the end.

*Q: Obviously our relations with Cuba, if you want to call them that, were abysmal. Did this have any impact on Honduras? Or was Honduras just not interested in Cuba?*

JOVA: Oh, sure, it was interested in Cuba. Mind you, the Cuban radio could be heard very distinctly. They were generally helpful on Cuba. They were also helpful on the Dominican Republic.

*Q: I was going to ask. The Dominican Republic crisis happened?*

JOVA: It happened just before I left Chile, and yes, Honduras sent troops, a small number but they had a presence there. I remember talking the general into sending some Honduran entertainers over for their troops, but also to perform for all the other troops. That made everything more visible, and that worked out well. They were anti-communist, quite strongly, so that was helpful. They also had some Cuban business people that had established themselves there. They were in other ways influencing the government. At the same time mind you, like all the little Latin American countries, you can't ask them to renege on their Latins. And even if they were unsympathetic to the Castro government, at the same time there was also *simpatico*, a good fellowship feeling towards a fellow Latin country. I've noticed that over and over again in the OAS, for instance, when there were meetings, and I've also headed American delegations to UN meetings in Latin America. There would have to be much more confraternization, if you want to call it that, between the Latin American delegations, and the Cuban delegation than one would think appropriate.

*Q: From time to time did you say, if something would happen and we would be castigated for this or that, that you would tell the embassy and the State Department to cool it? This is ritual yankee bashing, and you've got to accept some of this and allow them to do it here as long as you're getting cooperation there, or something like that.*

JOVA: Yes, in various circumstances, and in various countries, to try to make them see things in perspective. Sometimes we get terribly excited about something that the UN representative would say, or the OAS. Well, some of that is particularly true of Mexico.

*Q: We use that too particularly in reference to communism. We sometimes go overboard.*

JOVA: The instructions sometimes give a very narrow point of view, particularly the Republican White House, but also in the State Department. Somebody is always thinking of the United Nations point of view on something. On China for instance, they would send you over and over again each year the "evergreen" that's what the Honduran Foreign Minister used to call them. The evergreens, those problems that don't go away, they're always present. On our position on China, we demanded and expected Honduras to do this or that, or Chile, or Mexico.

*Q: This is on the problem of the recognition of Communist China on which we spent several decades of tremendous political capital, and then we turned around and didn't tell anybody and recognized them, basically.*

JOVA: Recognized them, and also for what? We toyed with the idea of simultaneous recognition of Taiwan also. Now the Latins, rebelled at that. There could be only one or the other. Maybe we could have trade, etc. Of course, we solved it in a very Machiavellian way ourselves. This was when I was at the OAS.

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*Q: John, we were just talking off microphone, and you were saying something that occurred to you about Honduras and our conversation that we might include before we move to the OAS.*

JOVA: Of course, in those days when I was in Honduras, Somoza's son--as a matter of fact we had two of the sons during that period--Paco was sort of the civilized one. For a while he was more or less an elected president, and then Junior, his younger brother that was a military person as president there. I do remember this, whenever there was a little trouble or something in Honduras, the first thing the Department said, "Oh, let's speak to Paco Somoza, and have him call up the president of Honduras. Let's see if he won't put a little pressure, or beat a little sense in him." I just give that as a little example of how much the Department would depend on him to do our work in Central America, or wherever perhaps.

*Q: Was there any disquiet? Or how was his regime viewed by you, by the Foreign Service establishment that was working down there?*

JOVA: He was a dictator. The family monopolized power. Almost any new business that was started; they had a big stake in it; the air line; the shipping company. But I must say, in those days crossing the border into Nicaragua with all of its defects and that sort of thing, it was so much more advanced than Honduras. Maybe it was a big Somoza thing. A lot of people benefitted from it, and actually the people were considerably more advanced than the Hondurans were; highways, you name it. The Sandinista movement wasn't even formalized yet. Sure, they had a little bit of trouble from time to time but it wasn't serious. But I saw it as a dictatorship, and



with unpleasant aspects. It did advance the country, and in general probably the well being was probably better. And the human rights violations were not so glaring, I don't believe. I never served there, I can't pass judgement. This is sort of off the hat, just from visiting there to stay with my colleague Aaron Brown, who was the ambassador, Salvador the same way. Sure it was run by the 14 families who were very, very important, but to go from Tegucigalpa to El Salvador you always felt that you were going for a little visit to Paris. On the other hand, the poor were very poor. And the story they would tell you was that in Honduras they were able to have a labor movement. They had a much more advanced labor movement as we mentioned earlier, partly at the expense of the fruit companies. I mean the American labor movement with the encouragement of our government did a great deal to encourage the growth of the labor movement. But in Honduras if you lost a job, you could find another one, or you could raise a little crop or something back in your family plot. In Salvador if you lost your job, that was it. It was so overpopulated, and the job market was tight. It was a growing economy and relatively industrialized compared to Honduras. But to lose a job was a very much more grievous thing in Salvador.

**CHARLES H. THOMAS**  
**Peace Corps Director**  
**Tegucigalpa (1966-1967)**

*Charles Thomas was born in New York in 1934. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University and then served in the US Navy from 1956-1959. His career included positions in Mexico, Bolivia, Honduras. Ambassador Thomas was interviewed by Thomas Stern in the beginning of June (year unknown).*

*Q: And what did you find when you got to Honduras?*

THOMAS: Well we had a large program there. It was about 130 to 150 people and it was a very varied program. It had architects. We had...

*Q: Architects?*

THOMAS: Yes. We had a small group of architects. We had nurses. We had community developers and we had agricultural people. So it was a lot of variety. It was an interesting program.

*Q: And were there any surprises? Had you read up at all on the program before you left?*

THOMAS: I knew because we'd traveled around a lot in Latin American and we'd seen the Peace Corps in action. So I pretty much knew what we saw.

*Q: But the Honduras program specifically now.*

THOMAS: I knew what they were doing because I knew what the numbers were. There was no real surprises there.

*Q: Tell me a little bit about how effective you thought the programs were.*

THOMAS: Well it depends what you mean by effective. If you are talking about effective as a way to foster international understanding and educate a lot of Americans in a certain area of relationships with other countries or if you are talking about development. There are a lot of different goals for the Peace Corps. I think in terms of development it may have been a pretty small impact. In terms of its impact on Americans, it was a big impact.

*Q: Why was that?*

THOMAS: This was sort of mostly at the micro level. Obviously it couldn't do that much. I didn't see...

*Q: ...that much in a given period of time.*

THOMAS: Yes. And it's really hard to measure. You can do certain things, that the results that don't appear particularly in Peace Corps programs for 20 or 30 years. One is the personal relationships that are developed. One are the examples that the volunteers set for people, especially in the education area, and certain kinds of health programs, agricultural programs. You may be teaching say raising pigs as we did in Honduras. The impact of that could take the time between a kid learns it until he's an adult. So it's not... I wouldn't expect to see concrete measurable results.

*Q: What about some of the volunteers who were there while you were there? Did you ever run across them again?*

THOMAS: Um hum.

*Q: And whatever happened to them after that?*

THOMAS: Well, for example one volunteer who was there working on construction programs, he'd been an engineer. He is working for Boeing Aircraft Company right now. Another has gotten into politics. We had a lot of nurses who just continued on in their profession. We had some older ladies who were in their 60s and 70s and they are all dead now. So...

*Q: So you really had a mixed representation of age groups.*

THOMAS: Yes. Very wide. We had some people under 20 up to 70.

*Q: Really? I didn't realize that. And as the general composition you came to view this as a positive experience?*

THOMAS: I think it was a positive experience for the volunteers. It very clearly was. It was a positive experience for the host nation as well.

Q: *How about for the United States?*

THOMAS: I think it was. For a small amount of money we got a lot out of it.

Q: *These volunteers had an impact on their localities where they were working?*

THOMAS: Yes. I think so.

Q: *Even on a personal basis?*

THOMAS: Yes.

Q: *What was the job essentially as director? What did he oversee primarily?*

THOMAS: Sort of general supervision to make sure people were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

Q: *So you traveled around the country a lot?*

THOMAS: Continually yes. And dealing with problems. Health problems or personal problems, discipline problems. And then you had program development working with the host nation figuring out what they would like us to do and talking to the local community and seeing what they wanted to do and seeing if we could negotiate something with Washington to produce those volunteers.

Q: *Weren't there that many volunteers who were in the program?*

THOMAS: It ranged depending upon the cycle. I think we averaged around 130.

Q: *What percentage were personnel problems?*

THOMAS: Very low.

Q: *Very low percentage.*

THOMAS: They did a lot of rather draconian weeding out in the initial selection process. During the course of training they weeded out a lot of people too.

Q: *Was Vietnam an issue at all among the volunteers in Honduras?*

THOMAS: Yes it was.

Q: *How did that play out?*

THOMAS: It was an issue. I can only remember one concrete instance. That was we had a program for many flags in which all countries were to contribute in some way to helping out in Vietnam. We were twisting the arms of Central American countries to make donations. We would provide an aircraft to fly the stuff over. Volunteers saw that this was to say the least artificial and they reacted against it. They were a little unhappy about it but there were no demonstrations.

*Q: Did you have to talk to them about policy?*

THOMAS: We talked a lot about it. But this was before the real peace movement began.

*Q: Still a bit early.*

THOMAS: Yes. The volunteers were becoming disenchanted with what we were doing and seeing it as artificial.

*Q: What we were doing for Vietnam?*

THOMAS: Not so much in Vietnam but its impact say in Central America where you were trying to line up allies through arm twisting and they were aware of that.

*Q: Were the volunteers at all helpful in providing information to the embassy about political or cultural events in Honduras?*

THOMAS: There was a prohibition against doing that which we enforced and there was to be no intelligence gathering. That would be disastrous for the Peace Corps if we became an adjunct to the CIA. There was a great temptation to do that. Not that it could have provided a lot. In those days the CIA was scarfing everything it could and there was some possible assistance the Peace Corps could provide but it would have been disastrous for the Peace Corps to do it.

*Q: Were you ever accused of being a CIA tool?*

THOMAS: I don't remember that although I know in some countries they were.

*Q: But not in Honduras.*

THOMAS: I don't recall anybody saying that in Honduras. No.

*Q: Were the Honduras officials quite open with you? They wanted the Peace Corps and they were...*

THOMAS: Well I mean they were relatively open. The extent to which they wanted the Peace Corps is hard to say because their views were diluted by their desire to maintain friendly relations with the U.S. and to continue military and economic assistance programs. For some of them, okay, those crazy Americans want to send in volunteers, okay, let them. If it makes them

happy that's fine. There was also among others the hope that it would actually contribute to development and others. They would have additional people to assist them with different programs.

Q: *But there were skeptics?*

THOMAS: Yes. Sure.

Q: *Reflecting what?*

THOMAS: Reflecting people who were against American policy and resented the American presence, chronic leftists who saw this as an aspect of imperialism. But they weren't particularly vocal. On the other hand at that point Honduras was being run by a right wing, basically a junta.

Q: *So there wasn't much debate about the program at all? And the officials were responsive to you and your needs?*

THOMAS: Yes. Pretty responsive.

Q: *Essentially. Were there areas which they wanted to get into where you couldn't provide assistance?*

THOMAS: I can't remember. I'm sure there were but I just don't remember a concrete case.

Q: *I want to go back to the question of independence from the rest of the U.S. government. How did that play out with the embassy?*

THOMAS: It was no problem with the embassy.

Q: *The embassy obviously respected the need for the Peace Corps.*

THOMAS: The Ambassador was supportive and positive.

Q: *About the program?*

THOMAS: And didn't try to interfere in any way basically. He was helpful, was very friendly to the volunteers, would have receptions for them occasionally. But didn't interfere at all. Nobody did. The political counselor was the same way. The DCM was the same way. At that time you have to remember it's the early days of the Peace Corps. It had a lot of support in the United States and there wouldn't have been a great deal of tolerance I think, for an embassy that really tried to detract from the independence of the Peace Corps.

Q: *Although in other places there were efforts to do so? Tell me in your travels through Honduras, were people welcoming of the Peace Corps?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: It was accepted by the population?*

THOMAS: It was accepted. I think the population probably had higher expectations than were justified by what the Peace Corps could do. There was always the possibility that maybe the Peace Corps would bring with it money and aid and stuff like that. So there were mixed feelings. The people in Honduras were basically pro American. Most of them would have immigrated to the United States if they'd had the chance.

*Q: And the volunteers made a good impression I assume?*

THOMAS: Yes

*Q: With the local population.*

THOMAS: Some stayed.

*Q: Some stayed? Tell me do you recall did you learn any lessons about management of an operation?*

THOMAS: You learn the basic lessons about delegation. The thing I learned about the Peace Corps is that there was a real maternalistic tendency on the part of the Peace Corps staff.

*Q: Washington staff?*

THOMAS: And overseas staff to sort of micromanage things. These volunteers were almost by definition responsible, intelligent adults who were really quite capable of essentially running the program themselves. They really needed less staff direction than the Peace Corps was accustomed to. They really wanted to run everything. For example, the staff set the allowances for the Peace Corps. The volunteers were given a living allowance. By the time I got to Honduras I said, "Why don't we just let the volunteers set their own allowance?"

That worked very well. The underlying assumption was if you let them set their own allowance, they're going to overpay themselves. Well actually they did just the opposite. We had a volunteer in Uruguay. He sort of got forgotten by the system and we had raised allowances to accord with inflation at one point, or the volunteers had actually. But he sort of dropped out. It turned out that he didn't complain. We finally found out this guy was getting \$27.00 a month at that point and never said a word.

*Q: Really?*

THOMAS: Yes.

*Q: Let me understand this. Did you set your own allowances? Did each country set its own allowances or was it set by Washington?*

THOMAS: No each country did.

Q: *Each country set its own allowances.*

THOMAS: Yes.

Q: *I see. Are you suggesting you were overstaffed at headquarters in Honduras, in particular Tegucigalpa?*

THOMAS: We weren't particularly overstaffed. We didn't have that many people.

Q: *What I'm saying is you would have centralized the operation there?*

THOMAS: A lot of things-decisions-could have been made by the volunteers themselves and it would have been better to do it that way. A lot of it was programming and the administrative stuff and things like allowances.

**JEAN MARIE WILKOWSKI**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tegucigalpa (1966-1969)**

*Ambassador Jean Wilkowski entered the Foreign Service in 1944. Her career included assignments in Trinidad, Colombia, Italy, France, Chile, Switzerland, Honduras, and an ambassadorship to Zambia. Ambassador Wilkowski was interviewed by Willis Armstrong in 1989.*

WILKOWSKI: There was Dean Hinton and all of these administrative counselors from embassies throughout Europe. It was a humbling but fascinating experience. I was to have gone there with another woman FSO, but it turned out I was the only woman in the group. My mother, who had been my dependent for nearly 12 years, had just died, and I was very fragile emotionally.

At any rate, it didn't take the sensitivity process long to unravel me. The so-called hot seat would tear people to pieces. One of the participants in all frankness wanted to know, "What makes you think that you can be a DCM?"

And my answer to that was, "I'm not sure I can until I try. I did not apply for the job. I've been assigned there, and in the Foreign Service you go and do the best you can with the assignment you have. So I'm going to Honduras, and I'm going to do just that." [Laughter] This reply made the fellow who asked very angry.

So, at lunch that day, I said to the sensitivity trainer, "What kind of a question is that to the only woman in the class? Do you know why? It's because there isn't another person in this room--all

men--who has been assigned as a DCM, and that's nothing but sentimental jealousy. They want to put me down."

He said, "Why didn't you say that? That's what you're supposed to say in a training session like this. It's called leveling and openness."

And I said, "Well, that's not how we're trained to behave in the Foreign Service." One has to use discretion and diplomacy." Now, since I have retired from the Foreign Service, I have become one of the most outspoken women you know. And people say to me, "You were in the diplomatic service?" And I say, "yes."

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WILKOWSKI: I was assigned to Paris to work for Sid Jacques in COCOM, and by the time I got there somebody in the Embassy had jumped in and taken my job, and I was given what he had left. And, you know, I still don't feel very kindly towards that person. But that's the way it is.

Well, back to Honduras. Yes, I went there, notwithstanding the fact that some of my colleagues at Garmisch at the sensitivity course thought that I was totally unqualified! or just too zealous to be honest. Ambassador John Jova was chief of mission and a man of great sensitivity, and we got along just well. I learned something from him that I had never felt before, certainly not with Sydney Mellow, that is, Jova valued a woman's opinions, and insights. Back to our earlier statement that men and women each have something distinctive to contribute.

Now Roz Ridgway, former Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, doesn't like to make these distinctions. In fact, she detests the label "woman ambassador." I hesitate to try to analyze that but I did feel that in Honduras I became really conscious of the fact that my intuitions and instincts were useful in problem solving. At least John Jova made me feel so.

Q: *Jova is a very civilized guy, indeed.*

WILKOWSKI: Very sensitive, very cultured, man.

Q: *Yes, very civilized.*

WILKOWSKI: So he made me feel more competent than I had ever felt, and made to feel so. I think I became more competent.

Q: *Of course.*

WILKOWSKI: And things worked out well. We had the famous BALPA (personnel reduction) exercise where we had to rip through the Embassy and cut out about a third to a half of our complement. We had a big AID and military mission there, also a large Peace Corps of over 300.

Q: *You're saying that aid to Honduras alienates the Contras? [Laughter]*



WILKOWSKI: Not quite. But we had a very difficult AID mission director who thought he was chief of mission, and was a thorn in the side of the Ambassador all the time. I was part buffer, part intermediary. Honduras was a good experience in overall management and program direction, also handling a lot of people with diverse missions and assignments: AID, military, Peace Corps, USIA, and many visiting firemen.

There was the Nelson Rockefeller mission. I was the control officer for that. It was pretty exciting. You remember Rockefeller was shot in Honduras--the first stop on his trip to Latin America. That called for coordination and involvement of the entire mission and wives! Also we had the famous soccer war between Honduras and El Salvador. John Jova had left post for a new assignment. I was chargé. The Hondurans ungraciously contended Jova knew the war was coming and, left before. That was July 14. It lasted 10 days. The experience of being in charge of a mission of over 300 was my really big break. I was in charge in Honduras for about four months before the new Ambassador Hewson Ryan, came in.

The Salvadorans drove 18 miles across the border into Honduras and shelled the border area heavily with artillery fire. They also flew C-40s over and bombed Tegucigalpa. Electricity and communications were cut and, of course, the airport was intermittently closed. It was like being under siege and there were some casualties in the American community. The biggest human problem involved the 52,000 Salvadoran squatters in Honduras.

The Honduran Government rounded them up at gunpoint and threw them in the soccer stadiums in San Pedro Sula in the north and Tegucigalpa in the central highlands. The Salvadorans so incarcerated were left without provision for their care--limited water, sanitation, no blankets, food, shelter, no medicine.

Meanwhile, the Honduran Government from the President through the Prime Minister was after the U.S. to supply defensive arms and ammunition.

The Embassy was faced with two policy issues: (1) to become involved in the humanitarian emergency, not only the incarcerated Salvadorans but thousands of Hondurans displaced from their homes in the war zone on the border and also without basic human needs; (2) to respond positively or negatively to the arms request.

The Embassy's recommendation on (2) was negative; indeed a policy of "even-handedness" between El Salvador and Honduras was almost immediately set in Washington. On (1) we recommended basic assistance and promptly levied a significant request on U.S. Army HQ in Panama. We flew in 10 plane loads of assistance. We encountered problems with the President's wife (!) who wanted help to go only to the Hondurans. We ignored her pleas and much of the help went to the Salvadorans who were in the majority.

We also called in and assisted observers from the OAS. We were very busy. It was a time for rapid decisions, sound decisions, and judgments. We were attacked many times by demonstrators, and I had to give clear and careful instructions to the Marine Guard Detachment.

*Q: It was the soccer war with El Salvador, wasn't it?*

WILKOWSKI: That's right. There had been...

*Q: The Salvadorans outnumber the Hondurans by about four to one.*

WILKOWSKI: Yes, they have a real population problem. The whole trouble started when squatters from El Salvador moved in on the Hondurans around San Pedro Sula, taking over untilled lands. It was a case of land occupation. They just didn't have enough space in Salvador for their population. This created tensions which flared up at soccer games between the two countries. Pressures built up until the Salvadoran army just decided to move into Honduras.

*Q: They've still got the same problems, so why shoot each other?*

WILKOWSKI: It's not easy to tell them. There was a little dust-up in Tegucigalpa when the Salvadorans came over to play football, minor pushing and shoving there. But when the Hondurans went to Salvador, that's when the thing really hit the fan and popular sentiment got out of hand. There was terrible fighting after that football game. A lot of Hondurans were stopped on their return, spat upon, and worse, bags of-- believe it or not--bags of urine were thrown at them. I can't imagine people collecting this for such an occasion, but they did.

*Q: That's what the students did at the Democratic convention, you know.*

WILKOWSKI: Really? I didn't know that.

There was another problem which involved differing points of view and interpretation of the events between Embassy Managua and Embassy Tegucigalpa. We had our own "mini-war" as Managua reported far too sympathetically to the Salvadoran military, even assuming some of their arrogant, over-bearing manners.

The Ambassador there was so hard-nosed he had the gall to send his own political officer over to Tegucigalpa. What else with a woman DCM in charge. We managed to clip his wings, set him straight and send him back. After all, Honduras was invaded and bombed because of tempers over a football game and resentment over land squatters. A real cause for war?

When the radio reported post-game actions, the people of Honduras reacted by simply attacking these Salvadoran squatters up in the north- central part of the country. They shot and harassed them. There was a funny little story about one of the American bishops in Honduras, a Dominican, who was approached by a Salvadoran Madam of a house of prostitution and her little bevy of girls, asking for protection. They were all Salvadorans, of course--squatters of a different sort.

*Q: What did he do, start a nunnery? [Laughter]*

WILKOWSKI: No, he didn't start a nunnery. But he kept the Madam overnight at his place, which, for appearances was bad. But he was giving her sanctuary. He got her on the plane the next day. He told the story to us at the Embassy, and it was hysterical

It was a very exciting time with the many policy issues and tensions. There were over 56,000 Salvadorans who were simply herded into the two stadiums. There was a real human problem there, human suffering. Before recommending assistance I asked the President of Honduras if he had any objections to such assistance. "No. If you want to send relief, fine."

Then we had Peace Corps people straying across the lines, who eventually had to be bailed out of a Salvadoran jail--this despite my strict orders to keep out of the war zone. In another instance a bomb dropped from a C-47 landed in the house of a Peace Corps volunteer. He called me and said, "You're in charge. What are you going to do? A bomb just came through my roof and narrowly missed my baby's crib."

I said, "The baby alive there?"

"Yes."

"Did it explode?"

"No."

I said, "Count yourself lucky." [Laughter]

Q: *So what's new?*

WILKOWSKI: The President and Prime Minister kept calling me at all hours of the night, pleading for the Americans to send arms. And they couldn't understand our policy of even-handedness, because they said, "We're under attack. You're supposed to be our friends."

Well, after all of this, I guess, Washington decided that maybe I could handle something, so that's when I was told an ambassadorship was in the wings. I was sent to Rome to wait. And then I got my post in Africa.

**JOHN L. DEORNELLAS**  
**Labor Attaché**  
**Tegucigalpa (1966-1970)**

*John L. DeOrnellas was born in Alabama in 1921. He received his bachelor's degree from Spring Hill College. His career included positions in Mexico, Paraguay, Ceylon, Honduras, and Dominican Republic. Mr. DeOrnellas was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 2002.*

DEORNELLAS: So it's the Fall of '65 by now. They decided to postpone the selection out for 90 days, while they consider letting us become history, at least, of having been once FSS. You had a different arrangement. And, as I said, I was 45 years old, so I wasn't old enough to get a

pension, I'm not sure I even had enough time in, but of course I didn't count the military time in WWII. In any event, and I had a wife and children, and all that. So I decided to accept the idea of "reversion" to Foreign Service Staff and stay on the payroll. Fortunately, a very decent fellow came along, to my rescue, in a sense. Namely John Jova, J-O-V-A. He was ambassador in Honduras. And by golly, again, I was about the third or fourth person named for a job, but the people ahead of me either didn't want or somebody else didn't want them for the labor attaché job. Honduras did have a job that was labeled labor attaché, everybody agreed it was labor attaché. It was a little political work, economic [support] programs. Okay, well Jova, I'm sure, had been apprized of my history, and whatnot, in the sense that I had been up for selection out. In any event, he asked the previous ambassador, whose name eludes me, who was on Washington assignment, to interview me first. I sort of passed the interview with him, I guess. And then Jova came up to Washington on leave, for a consultation or something, and interviewed me. Right off the bat I thought, "This man is not only a gentleman, he's just a decent guy all around." We hit it off rather well. Did you ever know John Jova?

*Q: Yes, I did, I've interviewed John.*

DEORNELLAS: Well, you know, he spent some of his youth, I believe in Cuba. His parents were Spanish-speaking people from Spain, I guess. He went to Dartmouth himself, I know, but in any event, I guess he was [bilingual]. But actually, on occasion, he lapsed into Spanish when he was really spontaneous, when he was telling us some humorous thing or something. So, in a way, he might have been a little more at home in Spanish than English. I still remember he was trying to tell me at first that although Honduras was something of a banana republic, that it's not so bad, and he told me that the climate in Tegucigalpa was delicious. He didn't say it was delightful, I still remember thinking "That's interesting." He said it was delicious, and you know, Spanish, "delicioso." In any event, he said it was delicious. Actually, at that time it was a pretty decent climate, it's in the mountains, you know. So I used to spend a lot of time on the North coast with the Labor people and so on. And I was always delighted to get back to Tegucigalpa because you'd leave so much humidity and heat behind down on the coast, when you got up in the mountains of Tegucigalpa. But Jova was just a wonderful fellow, really.

*Q: Well, tell me, I think we better end it at this point, I'll pick it up next time. You were talking about Honduras, you were in Honduras from when to when?*

DEORNELLAS: It was actually four years. I was there from the summer of '66 to the summer of '70.

*Q: Dealing with the labor left wing, did you have any trouble from your headquarters back in the Labor Department? Did you have any dealings with anybody in Labor? Because Jay Lovestone was the intellectual -*

DEORNELLAS: Oh, wait a minute! I know who you're talking about. He wasn't at the Labor Department, he was with the media. No, I never had any -

*Q: He was very much of a figurehead.*

DEORNELLAS: That wasn't the problem, though. The problem really was partly CIA and partly just State Department. Look, one of my theories, a quickie, is that - I've used this colorful phrase, excuse me - it seems to me the Foreign Service Officer Corps was largely the group of people that were around during McCarthy's time. They were kind of, in a sense, emasculated. They got to be so afraid of stepping out of line that they couldn't let anybody get to the right of them, so to speak. Some of them were very kind of "old school" folks, anyway, general. I know the man you're talking about. He was Meany's right hand guy on International. I only met him years later, I did meet him once, but it was years later, and he was one of these ex-Communist guys that couldn't see any particular value. The time he spoke with me he was all concerned about Marxist influence in the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted to talk to me about the threat in that regard. No, I didn't really have any problems with the Labor Department. I don't think they quite understood what I was up against until fortunately, some guys came out there to take part in an exhibition, it was something a little bit like a World's Fair, that Ceylon was attempting. They kind of saw what I was up against in the embassy when they were there, and they proved to be quite helpful, they lobbied in my favor, actually, and that's one reason I got the job in Honduras. The main labor movement in Honduras was very close to the American labor movement, but it happened that Mr. Jova was not involved. He was much more interested in Europe and somewhat Asia, I guess. He wasn't particularly interested in Latin America. In any event - I mean, not intensely and he wasn't particularly concerned about that job. But in any event, the Labor Department really kind of hoped that we'd stay on and some of those guys were quite good. I've known people [over there] that were great. And I never had any knock-down and drag-out with the man in Ceylon. I'm a little bit embarrassed that he gave us a wonderful farewell party and I felt sorry for my wife for what was going on. So I accepted going there, the wives knew one another. And I'm sure there were some people that were invited to that party that, I assume after seeing us there, that I had really been working for the CIA all the time. I knew some people had suspected it, in fact I got word at one point that somebody in the CIA was spreading the word that I was working for them. That is one conversation that I had with the station chief. I went back and I said, "Look, you've got to cut that out. You've got money to keep people working with you. All I've got working for me is the supposed personality and a little bit of Scotch now and then. I'm out of business completely if these people think I'm working for you." Well, I don't know if they ever called off the dogs, but in any event, we didn't have that bad a personal relationship, but he just sincerely thought anybody that was close to Marxists is just mistaken. In the old days, Catholic Church, I guess, if you're friendly with Protestants, you must be a subversive influence. Almost that kind of thing. When I was leaving, he offered to try and get me a job in the agency, at the time it looked like I was out of business. I said, well, "Jake, I appreciate the [offer], but I don't think I'm interested." In any event, that's interesting you bring that up, I had forgotten about that guy. I did meet him some years later but he wasn't in the picture at that time.

*Q: I like to put at the end of these things where we left off so we can pick it up. We'll pick this up when you're back in 1966 to '70 in Honduras and John Jova has sponsored you to go to the U.S. Ambassador there.*

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*Today is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, 2002. Well, okay, in 1969, you were off to Honduras?*

DEORNELLAS: Well, it was '66 when I came to Honduras in the first place. The labor movement in Honduras, from the standpoint of the United States particularly, was more significant than most anybody would realize. It had been sort created with the collaboration of the AFL back in the '50s and they stayed on rather close terms with the AFL's Latin American guy who did work under Lovestone, but I don't think Lovestone was that concerned about Latin America at that time. So they had the job work title Labor Attaché and the embassy was willing to, so to speak, accept that title unlike the folks in Ceylon, Sri Lanka now, Colombo. They had had a great guy there for a while who had been in effect trying to replace a fellow named Jack O'Grady. Fortunately, about a year had gone by between Jack's departure and my arrival because two or three people had made in my point of view the mistake of turning down the assignment, actually, and the Labor Department wouldn't, since this wasn't considered a specialized job, the Labor Department wouldn't take just any young FSO that they might want to send there. In any event, the movement was a significant part of the social and economic picture in Honduras. The things weren't very active politically there, there was in effect a military dictatorship or a much more benign dictatorship than what was going on in Paraguay in my day. There just wasn't much political activity but the government and the labor movement were kind of a reasonably cooperative way. So the main intention that I did get involved in there was the question of land reform. The labor movement was, as I say, considered very respectable by American standards and I think they deserved that name, and I believe the government may have had considerable trust in it. But the landowners, the landholders and so forth in Honduras, were leery of any agrarian reform, so to speak. And they were accusing a Jesuit of being a Communist and generally trying to oppose it as best they could. Well, I will admit this partly because of the attitude of the labor movement, I sort of embraced it a bit and I studied up on the background and found that unlike the stories being told, the agrarian reform law, which had been passed under a previous administration in Honduras, was not drafted by Communists, as they said, but some people said, and all that, so it didn't look that threatening to me.

Fortunately, Ambassador Jova, one of his great points, he was open-minded and he wasn't entirely comfortable, I guess, maybe with the standing, as it were, between the landholders and the labor movement, but he was willing to consider the facts. The facts were tending to be basically something that I tried to get over in the Embassy and the Aid Mission, that a lot of the land had not really been titled properly in Honduras and, as far as I know, in other countries. A lot of it had been kind of open as a commons, and the *campesinos* had been farming some of this stuff since - there were no written records to the contrary, as it were. Then, as roads got built and the country began to develop, a bunch of clever guys with money, *comerciantes*, as they used to call them there, business people, were buying up land that in some cases had never been properly titled at all, and they just took the trouble to take title to it, and they would very commonly evict the *campesinos* and put fences around it. If they used it at all, they used it for grazing, even though Honduras was very short of cultivable land. So of course, when the *campesinos* tried to go back on, they'd break the fences and they'd need to talk about breaking up fences and going on private property. I kept trying to get the, at least historical, truth of that across and I'm glad to say that I think ultimately that was pretty well appreciated. At Ambassador Jova's direction, I was very close to the Aid Mission there.

The English were funding a program through the AIFLD, American Institute for Free Labor Development, which was tied in with the AFL and I oversaw that contract, and I also sat on the small loans committee that, on behalf of the Ambassador, would do things like that. So it was a rather satisfactory assignment, I felt, all around. The relations, as I said, with Ambassador Jova were really wonderful and the relations with other people in the Embassy in general were quite good. I was in the Political section, and the two chiefs of the Political section were younger than I and maybe a little uncomfortable about that angle. In any event, they were very impressive people and I enjoyed working with them. And I generally enjoyed working with the rest of the setups in Honduras. I was not promoted there because I found out after I'd been recommended for a promotion and passed over, that in effect, I guess, by switching from FSO there to [FSS], I'd been sort of blocked off from any promotion. In any event, I didn't get a promotion out of it, but I got very good reports and so forth and a pretty fair amount of appreciation.

*Q: Well, you were there from '66 to when?*

DEORNELLAS: To 1970. I was there four years.

*Q: Well, tell me, what was the government, you say it was a military government. Were you able to operate with them or work with them?*

DEORNELLAS: Let me tell you one quick story to illustrate the situation. The titular head of the government was also the head of the Air Force, that had been his career. Honduras had a fairly respectable Air Force, small but fairly good quality, partly thanks to collaboration with the U.S. Air Force, it was Army/Air Force when I was in it. In any event, he was a bit of a drunk and a lecher and all that, and the government was really, I think, run by civilians behind him, as it were. But nevertheless, this man had come from a rather humble rural background and he had more appreciation of the reality of the less fortunate people in the country than the *comerciantes* and whatnot.

As a matter of fact, I had a memorable experience with him. I went in his private plane, actually, at invitation, to the dedication of a worker's bank, it was sort of like a cooperative, but under the agrarian reform law in Honduras, labor unions could run these things and they were a little bit different than co-ops – I don't know that the distinction is that important, but in any event, this was not exactly a co-op, and it was under the labor code rather than under the anti-co-op law. In any event, we went over there, into rather bad weather, and the President started drinking fairly early in the day, for general purposes, I guess, and by the time we were coming back in the afternoon, he was quite liquored up. But he asked me to come sit by him and he proceeded to tell me that this was a union of the banana workers, not the major union banana workers, but one of the banana workers' unions, for an American investment company. In any event, he had been around Honduras when the unions organized against, as it were, the American investor banana companies, and he had thought they had a good case and he was glad that the Honduran government had not been violently opposed to unionization and so forth. And he said of course the workers had to struggle to get recognition from the union, from the company. And he said, in effect, he told me he knew about my interest in agrarian reform and that he also believed in the agrarian reform thing and he said, "But they're going to have to struggle for it," he said. "The

government can't just hand it to them on a plate," something like that, and he said, "But I'm going to let them struggle, I am not going to use the Army to oppose these people."

The man was so drunk at the time, I really didn't know whether to believe him or not, for that reason in particular. But it turned out, during the rest of his regime, which was still going on when I left in '70, that's what he had done. The investors in the land sometimes hired gunmen to kill *campesinos* and so forth separately, but to the best of my knowledge, no Army people were ever authorized to do that. As a matter of fact, he created something called the Institute of Agrarian Reform with a Honduran who had been up here with the OAS [Organization of American States] and some little progress was being made around the time that I left. There was this little general setback in the country when they had this small war with El Salvador, which was – this meeting we referred to as "The Soccer War." They had been a riot at a soccer game in El Salvador between the two countries, but that wasn't the real cause of the war. The real cause of the war was somewhat related to the agrarian situation, and more particularly and broadly related to the labor situation in general. Salvadorans were coming in in large numbers over the border, illegally in effect, they claimed that under the Central American common market all those were supposed to [be able to move more freely]. In any event, they were not only taking jobs, they were settling land, Salvadorans were buying land. Again, we're running into the very tight arable land [situation] in Honduras, and this was resented at various levels of the society and the government wasn't happy about it, so there was a little bit of a crackdown on the Salvadoran behavior out in the rural areas. The Salvadoran government alleged that there was violence being inflicted on its citizens and so forth.

That was their excuse for staging what they thought was going to be like the Israeli attack on Egypt in '67, namely a sunset bombing attack that would wipe out the other people's Air Force. Actually, they had such a lousy Air Force that it was simply ridiculous. They didn't do anything to the Honduran Air Force and they didn't do anything, fortunately, to the city of Tegucigalpa. So as it turned out, although their ground forces were much better mechanized and so forth than anything the Hondurans had, and it was kind of a surprise attack - at least the timing was certainly, the tactical angle was very surprising. After a few days, they gave up on any air work, and the OAS arranged a truce and the thing sort of blew over. But it disrupted things in general, the major connections between Tegucigalpa and the rest of the world, Taca Airways, as a Salvadoran-flagged airline (although American invested), couldn't fly into Tegucigalpa during the rest of our time there. And there had been a lot of commerce between the two countries and that was badly disrupted for a while.

In any event, the war didn't do that much damage, but it tended to be held against us. There was a tendency of the Hondurans to feel that we had been on the Salvadoran side and I'm afraid that some things that had happened in Washington may have given them some basis for that. There were times that we tried to persuade Washington to be more neutral about it, as it were, but we had lousy phone connections, and I was never on the phone, I wasn't high-ranking enough for that. We had during this time, by the way, a female *chargé* who had come there as DCM, Jova had left. She had a economic commercial background, and a very dedicated woman, but she was kind of ill at ease with the whole political scene and somewhat ill at ease with the Latin American scene and very conspicuous, as it were, being a female head of mission, back in, this was '69 we're talking about. '68, rather, '68. So it had its drawbacks in terms of its attitude



towards the United States. By and large, I thought it was a useful posting and a good posting, really.

*Q: What were you getting with this? How did you find the American fruit company?*

DEORNELLAS: Well, the big one was United Fruit, known in Honduras as the Tela Railroad Company. They would trade at a port on the north coast, at a little village called Tela, T-E-L-A. That was the biggest of the two. The other one, where the workers' bank had been inaugurated, was from the Standard Fruit outfit, based in New Orleans, which had been sold, at that time to a conglomerate that is now, I think, marketing all their stuff under the Dole brand, actually.

*Q: There's so much talk about how United Fruit ran Central America and that's where these places became known as banana republics. Did you see the heavy or fine hand of United Fruit?*

DEORNELLAS: I would say that both the fruit companies were behaving themselves very well, the way I felt about it. The agrarian reform movement was not tangling with them directly, they weren't trying to take over any land the fruit companies were using. Partly because the fruit company workers were organized by these unions that had sponsored agrarian reform and there was a lot of respect, I think, mutual respect between the management and the union leaders, workers and whatnot, in Honduras.

There's one particular union leader in [Honduras] that worked at the United Fruit workers named Oscar Gale, G-A-L-E, and whose grandfather had been an American citizen, I think. He originally came from Wales, but I think he had been in the United States for a while. He'd gone to Honduras as a mining engineer. But in any event, Gale didn't speak English, he wasn't really "Americanized" in that sense, but he had a lot of respect for the United States. He had excellent relations with the AFL and with the Embassy. He had developed a considerable respect as a patriotic Honduran, he served on some sort of a joint labor management government board on economic policy in his country, and that sort of thing. Very unpretentious man, he lived in one of the houses that the Indians had created with some collaboration with AID, a housing development, there were a couple of them, at least. He lived in one of the regular houses on the layout. I think his feelings about life were pretty good at that point, he had had a very rough childhood and he had started working a very humble way for the fruit company. I think he had become somewhat demoralized and had become an alcoholic. Fortunately, he had married a very good woman, and he had given up alcohol. He had awful cirrhosis of the liver. Periodically, the company, I think, used to pay for him to go up to New Orleans to the Oxford Clinic to try to do things about that. Actually, he didn't die of that, he survived my time there by a couple of years and was killed in a traffic accident, a highway accident. He didn't drive, himself.

*Q: Was the AFL-CIO keeping an eye on things to make sure the unions were thriving? I mean, did you...*

DEORNELLAS: Well, they certainly expected me to be cooperative with the unions, which I didn't mind being at all, it seemed quite appropriate under the circumstances. I had terrible with my - I'm trying to think of the name of the man that troubled Latin America at the time. It was a

Scottish name, actually, but he was not a Scot, he was of Scottish descent, apparently, but at any rate.

*Q: Well, if it comes, we should fill it in. What about the landowners? You know, I never served in Latin America, but one hears about, particularly in places like Central America, where they were twenty families that ran everything. Often, and particularly in those days, they would embrace and almost suborn the embassy, just by overentertaining and being the one kind of folk and all that. Did you see any of that?*

DEORNELLAS: I would say that was not true, really, in Honduras. Honduras was not dominated by any one or small group of well-to-do families. I gather El Salvador was. But Honduras was not, really. The main problem on the agrarian reform thing was not with people who had been big landowners, for you know, time immemorial or whatnot. The main problem was that the land had been open for cultivation, not really possessed in a legal or control sense, was being taken over by city types who had some money to spend and were taking advantage of the roads that AID and whatnot was coming to build. I mentioned the evicting of the people from the common, so to speak, I think a little bit like the enclosures of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. At least the fair-minded consul we had and I used to get together and talk about those things as a matter of fact. In any event, no I think the – frankly, I thought everybody was doing a pretty good job down there at the time.

As it happened, when they did stage a general strike, about a protest to increase the sales taxes, my wife was badly injured, a hip break. She had to be evacuated to the canal zone hospital. Ambassador Jova told me to go ahead and accompany her down there. The AFL, they brought in a guy from El Salvador that was a little more experienced than the man in Honduras and the situation eased off without real violence. They did deport one of the major leaders of one union, not Gale, and they also deported the Jesuit priest, James Carney, who used to do business admittedly under the name Father Guadalupe. That's what an awful lot of people who were upset thought it was a very [proper] thing for him to do. His pitch was that "Carney" means niece in Spanish, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the Jesuits in Honduras were not using their last names, they were using their first names, and there was already one of them there who was named James when he came. But he was very close to the major unions and close to the agrarian cultural reform people, kind of thing, and I got to know him well enough to where I guess you'd have to say by many people's standards, he was a bit of a radical, all right, but he certainly [were not] taking orders from Moscow or Beijing, or anyplace like that. He was still in good standing with the Jesuits and he was working hard as a rural [priest]. I mean, he didn't wait for people to come into church in the city, he got out in a jeep or on horseback and ran out looking for people to console or sympathize with. He was deported during that time, and Ambassador, by golly, got together in my absence - I mean, I didn't claim up to it - with the new Papal Nuncio, he covered Nicaragua and Honduras. By golly, they went to the government and got them to let Father Guadalupe come back in.

Now, they didn't let the labor leader come back in until I got back and made some special persuasive pitches to the government about how, essentially, the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know. They knew the man wasn't really a devil anyway, but I mean, I just tried to get the point over to them that maybe he was a little militant by their standards and

maybe made a few “demagogic” speeches now and then, but essentially he was a relatively harmless guy compared to the real - there were one or two real Communists down there, pretty nasty people. Fortunately, they didn’t have much influence.

*Q: Did Cuba have any influence? Were there Cubans there?*

DEORNELLAS: At the time I was there, they really didn’t. AIFLD, that I could detect, had sent in before I got there, while O’Grady was there, an expatriate from Cuba who had been active in the labor movement in Cuba under Batista, and he was very persuasive with the Honduran labor unions. The labor unions had done pretty well under Batista, I gather, it was his story, and I think there was some truth in it. Whereas, under Castro, they weren’t doing that well as independent organizations. He had done a very good job in that regard and Ambassador Jova was very appreciative of him. Fortunately, that angle was pretty well taken care of.

**EDWARD M. ROWELL**  
**Desk Officer for Honduras**  
**Washington, DC (1968-1970)**

*Ambassador Edward M. Rowell was born in Oakland, California in 1931. He obtained a B.A. from Yale University. In addition to Luxembourg, Ambassador Rowell served in Recife, Curitiba, Buenos Aires, Tegucigalpa, Lisbon, La Paz, and Washington, DC. He retired in August, 1994 and was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on September 10, 1995.*

*Q: You were Honduran Desk Officer from 1962 to 1964.*

ROWELL: Right.

*Q: As you saw it, what were American interests in Honduras during this period?*

ROWELL: We hoped that, somehow or other, a democratic structure could be made to work. Honduras had a long history of coups d’état. We wanted to prevent the communists from taking over the proletariat or setting up organized labor. Principal US investment interests were with the United Fruit and Standard Fruit Companies, plus some minor mining and fishing companies. Most important was to prevent the communists from getting a foothold in Central America which would allow them to threaten the US.

What kind of a threat could that be? Well, since Cuba had gone communist and since there had been Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba, which were aimed at the United States, anything was possible. The difference between Cuba and Central America is that Central America has a land bridge to the US. That could mean more opportunities for infiltration and many more opportunities, from a base in Central America, to send more indigenous people into Mexico and destabilize Mexico. And we have a 2,000-mile long frontier with Mexico.

The programs to deal with these concerns involved a major labor program which United Fruit and Standard Fruit barely choked down. Our Labor Attaché in Tegucigalpa was working with the AFL/CIO [American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations] to organize a democratic labor structure and preempt communist efforts to take over labor.

*Q: Who was that?*

ROWELL: I don't remember the name. He was working with the American Institute for Free Labor Development [AIFLD], which had a representative in Honduras. We were encouraging the unionization of the banana workers.

*Q: Oh, boy!*

ROWELL: We had identified some leaders among the banana workers who were not communists but who wanted to take good care of the banana workers. We were supporting them and helping them to organize. We were successful. In effect, we immunized the banana workers against the communists. The free labor movement leaders took over. They set up a labor structure which did not simply rely on the government and on government pressure. They got help from AIFLD in negotiations with the banana companies. It cost the banana companies a little bit of money. There were a couple of strikes--none of them very long. In the end the fruit companies wound up with a labor structure that was far more reliable and trustworthy than they had in most of the rest of Central America.

*Q: When you arrived on the Honduran desk, what was the word in the corridors about the United Fruit and Standard Fruit Companies?*

ROWELL: The corridor gossip was that these companies ran feudal fiefdoms. The banana workers were regarded as plantation workers. They were working on land owned by the banana companies. The banana plantations were enormous. The workers bought their supplies from the company store, their housing was company provided, with rents set by the company, and they were permanently indentured workers. Their housing was a little bit better than for a subsistence farmer up in the hills. There was a little more medical treatment, there was a little more electricity and running water, but the living certainly wasn't grand.

When I first became involved in Central America, the banana companies were, of course, trying to keep their costs down. They were trying to treat their workers decently by local standards, which weren't very high. By American standards they looked awful, but by local standards it didn't look that bad. For the most part their middle and upper management wanted to be humane. For example, they built some new worker housing with a loan which they got partly from the Alliance for Progress program. The housing was designed by American architects and was inappropriate for that tropical area. Houses had ground and second floors. The workers didn't like these houses and thought that the company was treating them badly. The problem was that nobody had checked into the local culture of these people, who were used to slinging hammocks underneath grass huts built on stilts. That's where they got a breeze which cooled the air enough to sleep at night. That's where they kept the pig, the chickens, and the calf.

So the next time around we said, "Let's talk with these people about how they want to live before we build the housing." We did so, and the next set of housing went over very well. All of this wasn't because the fruit company was badly intentioned. It was that they got off on the wrong foot, using architects who didn't know the conditions that they were designing the houses for.

*Q: What things were you involved in, as desk officer?*

ROWELL: I was involved in the preparation of the usual briefing papers. There was a coup d'état in Honduras while I was on the desk. We withdrew our Ambassador. In fact, the Ambassador was still away when President Kennedy was assassinated in November, 1963. Ed Martin was still Assistant Secretary for ARA. I remember having to go to him and say, "The time has come for us to recognize this Honduran government. If we don't recognize it, then some military people may get in and cause us all kinds of problems." This was the day of President Kennedy's funeral [November 25, 1963]. I did a pro-con for and against paper with all of the reasons why to recognize the Honduran government and all of the reasons why not to do so. I concluded that there was no way to guarantee that this would work out. I did my best to present both pro's and con's. I think that it was that list which won me Ed Martin's respect more than anything else. The reason that I was in a meeting with Ed is that I gave the list to the office director. He thought it was a good list and made sure that I went with him to see Ed Martin, so that Ed would understand who had prepared the list.

Ed said, "No, that's going to have to wait." And we survived. He wasn't about to try to get to the Secretary of State Dean Rusk or the President Lyndon Johnson on this issue on that day.

So I dealt with the coup and the memoranda which needed to be prepared, indicating the various stages of the coup. I dealt with the constant tensions between the banana companies and the Honduran Government, as well as between the banana companies and the US Government over the labor development program. I dealt with the labor development program, the AFL/CIO, and the American Institute for Free Labor Development. I backed up our posts. I worked with the AID desk officer to prepare all of the program documents going to OMB [Office of Management and Budget] on budget issues. I prepared the testimony for the appropriations and authorization hearings. I also backstopped the desk officers for Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. In that part of the world at that time there was almost always a political drama or a natural disaster -- volcano, flood or hurricane -- going on somewhere.

When anybody was sick or out of the office, we were really spread thin. There was one time when I was covering five countries at once. I can tell you, it was crazy -- total madness. It was during the preparations for the AID budget hearings. Besides the coup in Honduras, a volcano went off in Costa Rica, and there was an earthquake in Guatemala.

I want to go back to the coup for a moment and talk about our Embassy's performance. As was generally the case in Latin America, we had plenty of early warning that something was brewing. Warning came from the CIA station, from our Military Attaché and our military assistance group, and from some of the people who talked regularly with the Foreign Service officers at the Embassy. I don't recall the formal pretext, but conservative land-owning elements in the country feared that the moderate democratic forces then running the country -- the Liberal Party -- would

let too many ordinary folk into the national political equation. The landowners, mostly associated with the National Party, had plenty of friends and relatives in the military. There had been many instructions from Washington to the Embassy to warn the conservatives and the military against a coup. The coup came anyway. In the aftermath our Ambassador, Charles Burrows, who was withdrawn immediately after the coup, discovered that both the CIA station chief and the Military Attaché had separately hinted to their respective Honduran contacts that they didn't have to pay attention to what the Ambassador or the State Department were saying; in the end the United States would accept a coup as a *fait accompli* and conduct business as usual with the new authorities. The CIA reassigned the station chief to the United States and I don't know what became of him. The Military Attaché was sent to a small Reserve Officer Training Corps program in Idaho and forced into retirement after about two years. Ambassador Burrows also retired not too much later. I think one reason why Ed Martin held back so long on recognizing the new government -- we waited several months -- was that he was delivering a message both to the other agencies in Washington and to would-be coup plotters throughout the hemisphere: what the US Ambassador says is what counts. Don't be misled by what some other officer in a US Embassy says if that officer is saying something different from announced US policy.

*Q: One of the things that is almost an article of faith in the academic world and elsewhere is that American economic interests, and certainly in Central America, in this case, bananas, drive our foreign policy. Here you were, right in the belly of the beast and you seem to be saying that the main issue was keeping the communists out of the area, more than anything else.*

ROWELL: In effect, that consideration took precedence over the interests of the banana companies. That's correct. But the interests of the banana companies came next. Yes. That was typical of the Cold War. If you had a conflict between a national economic interest and a national security interest, the security interest took precedence. In the event we had to arrange things so that the security interest didn't damage the banana companies -- and, in fact, it didn't. The banana companies ran into far fewer labor problems with the union which the AFL/CIO was able to establish in Honduras than they ran into with their unions in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. They had serious strikes in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. They never had them in Honduras.

*Q: What was your impression of the AFL/CIO representation that you dealt with? I would think that they would look on you with suspicion, as with the United Fruit Company. Did you find that?*

ROWELL: No, because AID was financing the labor program. The AFL/CIO people knew that I had to argue in favor of that financing and so had to support it. I was simply a government official responsible for getting the money that allowed them to run at Uncle Sam's expense a program that they dearly wanted to undertake. I also had a very good relationship with the Washington representative of the United Fruit Company, Jasper Baker, because I was also responsible for helping United Fruit when it had problems with the Honduran government. Frankly, the fact that we had a good relationship with the union and that the union had a lot of members who voted in the elections helped us a lot with the government, too.

*Q: What was the government situation during this period?*

ROWELL: Well, as I said, there was a coup d'état. A military officer was in charge of the government, but the government was essentially civilian, not military. The officer was from the National (conservative) Party. Basically, the Honduran government just sort of muddled through. They wanted to live their lives in reasonable comfort without too much excitement.

*Q: I take it that in Honduras, rather than a few families running things, it was more a matter of leaders who came up through the military taking over. Is that fair to say?*

ROWELL: Well, no. There were a few influential families which also provided the officers for the military. It was a very small group of families that ran things. They had done so for years and years. Even those in the opposition were from this elite group of families.

*Q: Was there any tie with Cuba? I mean, a Cuba connection which was of concern to you.*

ROWELL: There were reports, from time to time, of Cuban agents coming ashore in Honduras, trying to help the Communist Party of Honduras and trying to infiltrate the labor movement and get a communist opposition started within the labor movement. However, basically there wasn't much to it. The Honduran communists were not terribly effective. We would watch them, but they made mistakes. Frankly, Cuba wasn't making that much of an effort in Honduras.

*Q: What about Mexico? Did Mexico play much of a role that you were watching?*

ROWELL: No. Mexico pays a lot more attention to Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, to El Salvador. Most of the time it really paid very little attention to the other Central American countries.

The history of Central America is a history of abandonment. It was abandoned by the Spanish crown after the Napoleonic wars. The Central American countries got an independence that they didn't ask for. They tried to stay together as a Central American Union. They couldn't do it. Distance just made it too easy for local self-appointed Army colonels to take over. It has always been a distressed area. It had a hard time living on its own, and nobody wanted to help it live. It's doing a lot better now, but it...

*Q: Why don't we stop at this point? Is there anything else that we should talk about regarding your time as Honduran desk officer? Were there any other personalities that you dealt with worth mentioning?*

ROWELL: I guess not.

*Q: Was there any US Congressman who were "Mr. Honduras?" We had people who were "Mr. Dominican Republic." You get these peculiar circumstances when people become...*

ROWELL: Honduras in Spanish means "the depths." [Laughter] Nobody in particular went out there.

*Q: So there were no great Congressional visits?*

ROWELL: No.

*Q: I was talking to someone who had been US Ambassador to Costa Rica a little bit later. He said that the biggest state visit that they had was when a Lieutenant Governor of Mississippi had to land there and wasn't quite sure where he was.*

ROWELL: Occasionally, other things happened. There was the issue of the bay islands, which belonged to Honduras and were off the North coast of the country in the Caribbean Sea. This was a favorite watering place for snowbirds from Minnesota, including major corporate executives. They would come down in their corporate jets and visit the bay islands. Every so often one of these jets would bump into one of the mountains in Honduras, and we would have a nasty, consular problem.

One other issue was resolved while I was minding Honduran affairs. In the nineteenth century the United States claimed a pair of small islands in the Caribbean north of Honduras -- the Swan Islands. They were uninhabited when we claimed them. They had deep piles of guano, bird droppings used for fertilizer. Some people set themselves up on the island to dig out the guano and sell it. Honduras also claimed the islands on grounds that they had originally been discovered by Spain and that Honduras had inherited them when it and the rest of Central America had become independent early in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the US had put up a lighthouse, and we had a radio navigation and communications center there. By the time I arrived at the Honduran desk we had acknowledged that Honduras had a right to the islands. We still were running communication and weather facilities there, but technology had made them unnecessary and obsolete. The continued US use of the islands was one of those issues that anyone could exploit to detonate anti-US activity on the mainland. A plan to hand full responsibility back to Honduras was well advanced by the time I left the desk. A transfer ceremony was held before the end of the decade.

*Q: All right, then I'd like to put on the end of the tape that we'll pick up in 1964, when you went to Stanford University to take Latin American studies.*

ROWELL: Right. One other thing about my time on the Honduras desk. While President Kennedy was still in office, he participated in a major Inter-American conference in Costa Rica. I went to San José, Costa Rica, as part of the advance party and stayed for the whole event. It was my first experience in dealing with matters where a President is going to be involved. I discovered all of the crazy nonsense that goes on. Every detail is frantically scrubbed from policy to hot water bottles. If one person minding minor details at one event is good, three are much better. The military call it redundancy. It's intended to make sure nothing remotely distracting could intrude on the President if, heaven forbid, something (traveler's tummy?) should happen to one of the bit players minding a minor piece of logistics or whatever. Everybody is prepared to answer every question and do anything at any moment. There is frantic running around triple checking. And then you have endless hours, staying up late, watching a telephone that never rings, hoping some duty issue or another will emerge to break the fatigue and boredom. It is a very, very expensive way to do things. It needs a lot of improvement. However, San José was useful for me, in the sense that I understood the anxiety that tends to permeate all of the



President's aides, including the highest ranking ones. And their anxiety gets transferred further down to the lowest ranking people around.

**HEWSON RYAN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1969-1973)**

*Ambassador Hewson Ryan entered the USIA in 1951. His career included posts in Washington, DC, Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, and was ambassador to Honduras.*

*Ambassador Ryan was interviewed by Richard Nethercut in 1988.*

RYAN: In my case Henry Loomis was able to keep up the pressure on State, and along about June I was told that I was going to go to Malawi in Africa, so I spent some time boning up on African history and culture and background on Dr. Banda. But then, fortunately for me, things in Honduras came unstuck. The man who had been chosen to be ambassador to Honduras was found not to be acceptable to the Honduran government. Although they did not formally say this, they sent word through American companies in New York and Boston that they would prefer someone else. The Assistant Secretary was an old friend, Charles Meyer, with whom I'd been in Colombia in the early '50s when he was the manager of Sears Roebuck. He managed to prevail on the Department and I was named for Honduras.

Honduras at that time was an interesting assignment. It was certainly off the beaten track, but there had been a war with Salvador, a rather bloody short war, in July of 1969, so that when I went there in, I guess it was about September, pieces were still being put together. Feelings were very, very deep. Both Salvador and Honduras were extremely resentful of the United States. I suppose it is a tribute to the fact that we were even-handed, the fact that both countries said we had sided with their opponents. Feelings were particularly bitter in Honduras. There had been some demonstrations, they had broken a few windows in the embassy complaining about our support for the Salvadorans and rather similar happenings had taken place in El Salvador. My job was to try to calm things down and to see if some sort of peaceful resolution could be found for the Honduran-Salvadoran conflict which was mixed up with demography. The Hondurans had expelled a large number of illegal immigrants who had come--in fact, a couple hundred thousand illegal immigrants--from Salvador into Honduras. There were festering border disputes. The entire border is poorly marked and has been a subject of border incursions on both sides for close to a century.

When my confirmation hearings came up I was very fortunate in being able to arrange to have Senator Fulbright, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, ask me what were the major problems with Honduras and I mentioned the war and I also mentioned the Swan Islands. These latter are two small islands off the coast of Honduras which were discovered by Columbus apparently, but were claimed by the United States under the provisions of the Guano Act of 1846. The Guano Act was another one of those phenomena of American imperialism. The Guano Act said that any uninhabited island in which guano was found could be claimed as American territory by registering this claim with the nearest American consul. This happened in the 1850's,

I guess it was. Although there was nobody living on these two little islands, they were registered as U.S. and exploited by a couple of guano companies for a few years and then later used by the United Fruit Company where they established their first radio station. In fact, the first use of maritime radio was by United Fruit back in the very early years of this century when they controlled their banana boats from a radio station on the Swan Islands from about 1910 or '11 through the '20s. They also grew coconuts there, and did some experimental work with oranges and a few other citrus fruits, but it was not much.

And then during the time of the Bay of Pigs preparation, the CIA had established a medium-wave radio transmitter on the islands. Radio Swan was part of the plan to lead to an uprising within Cuba, and during the difficult days of the invasion--the Bay of Pigs invasion--Radio Swan was on the air 24 hours, calling on the people of Cuba to rise up, and so forth. After all of that the station was liquidated and actually the broadcasting towers were dynamited and tossed into the sea so that there wasn't anything on the islands except a couple of small U.S. installations. One was a radio beacon which operated independently, and the other was a weather station which was operated by a small team of five or six meteorologists and maintenance personnel. Then there were occasional fishermen who would come in for a few days. There were shacks and very few people, perhaps 10 or 15 people on these islands. But they were a constant source of irritation. The Hondurans, when they had nothing better to do, would demonstrate in downtown Tegucigalpa and paint the walls of our information center, or Embassy, demanding the return of their sovereign territory.

I explained this to Senator Fulbright at my hearings and he pointed his finger at me and went on the record saying, "Go down there and solve this problem." So that gave me something to do and I was fortunate during my period in Honduras. I was able to negotiate an agreement with the Honduran government whereby United States recognized the sovereignty of Honduras over these islands, and they agreed to allow us to maintain our weather station and our radio beacon there for an indefinite period. We then had a great ceremony and went out and the President of Honduras raised the Honduran flag and I had a destroyer come to provide an honor guard and saluting. This was really a very positive accomplishment, and we were able to get the Senate to ratify it rather rapidly. I think that if it had taken place a few years later during the Panama Canal discussions, or certainly today, we'd have a very, very difficult time convincing the U.S. Congress to support this action. But, anyway, that was one accomplishment in Honduras.

I also was able to, I think, bring in the AID program to support some of the very necessary social changes in Honduras. The extension of agricultural credit, the building of feeder roads, trying to make Honduras a viable economic unit was one of the factors contributing to the fact that Honduras did not have the tremendous social tensions of the other countries of Central America. Also there was a considerable amount of movement towards land reform, and the peasant groups acted more or less responsibly. The AFL-CIO had been working for many years in Honduras in the fruit areas, and the labor movement there was much more responsible than in other parts of the area of Central America.

I spent a good bit of time travelling in Honduras. There wasn't a great deal of bilateral pressure of any kind so I was able to visit something like 60 different airports, believe it or not. The airports were very often cow pastures where we had to make a pass first to run the cows off the

field and then land. But I did cover a good bit of Honduras. In that way I got to know the country very well, and a lot of the people. It was a very small country with rather friendly, simple people, very pro-American in general. Of course, always in Latin America there's the resentment of the "rich uncle" but in general the people in Honduras, I think, felt rather positively towards the United States. And despite all of the leftist propaganda about the United Fruit, the so-called "octopus", in general most people where the United Fruit operated had a rather favorable view of the company. It paid higher wages than anyone else, had better health care, and schools, and so forth. There was also a great deal of social mobility within the company. There were very few Americans, as I recall there were only two or three in Honduras. There were Hondurans at all levels: the technical level, the managerial level, as well as the fruit workers. So that it was not an unpleasant situation as far as relations with American companies went.

Otherwise, my time there was fairly uneventful. Dealing with a small country and a military government in the traditional Latin sense was somewhat different than dealing with other countries. An interesting anecdote was the fact that, as is so often the case in Latin America, family ties are extremely important in the adjudication of government positions. I remember one of my jobs very often was to go in and see the Foreign Minister and talk to him about Honduran positions at the UN on which we would seek Honduran support. But one of the problems there was that the man who held the representative's job in New York, the Ambassador to the UN, was married to some relative of the General-- the General being the Chief of State--General Lopez. This man in New York had his own ideas on certain things and he would vote sometimes totally contrary to the posture which the Foreign Ministry had assured us they had sent him instructions about. And I went in a couple of times to the Foreign Minister and he would shrug his shoulders and say, "You know, I sent him instructions but he's the General's nephew-in-law, he does what he pleases." I think this is something which the people in Washington find a little hard to understand. The fact that there are these other ties very often and the autonomy of the representatives of the government, particularly in international organizations, sometimes is based on family ties rather than on political discipline and things of that nature.

*Q: While you were in Honduras, having a background in USIA and serving in a number of Latin American posts, you had a good idea of how operations occurred in the mission. How did you find the relationship with the State Department, or possibly other elements of the U.S. government?*

RYAN: Well Honduras, in fact Latin America in general during the Nixon administration, was hardly in a position of priority. The outside observers have said that the goal of the Nixon administration in Latin America was benign neglect, to keep down the noise level and really concentrate on other areas of the world. And this was pretty obvious in my dealings with the State Department, and with the Assistant Secretary, and with the desk officers. That really nobody was following Honduras very closely is certainly a contrast with today where the micro-management from Washington, I gather, reaches unbelievable proportions. I could almost believe what it said on my visiting card about being Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, because I could do pretty much what I pleased down there and Washington would usually go along.

The Swan Islands was a good example. The Department could have cared less, or the U.S. Government, about this, and since it was my goal to try and get this scab off our relationships, I accomplished it. The same thing was true with daily business. I had very able AID directors there, both Walter Stoneman, who was there for my first year, and Ed Marasciulo for the last three years, were extremely dedicated, highly qualified AID people who understood the goals of development and, I think, built the programs, very modest in size, but very positive in accomplishment. I had a very good working relationship with both of them. The USIS program was a small one and the PAOs generally worked pretty well with the educators and the other target groups in the area. We had a rather active Binational Center in Tegucigalpa and another one in San Pedro Sula, both of which supported U.S. long-range cultural programs pretty well. We had a few visiting professors who came down and helped with the development of the universities and normal schools.

The Peace Corps was particularly active there at the time, and the change which I saw in the Peace Corps from the early days was a very dramatic and a very positive one. Most of the volunteers in Honduras, and there were about 90 to 100 of them during my period, were professionals or semi-professionals, people who worked in planning, and health education, and development in its various aspects; and the great majority of them were highly dedicated and very positive in their actions.

The military mission was very small but worked pretty closely with the Honduran military. We had no major problems. It was a very small mission. Most of the officers were instructing in the various schools of the Honduran military, or the Honduran Military Academy. We had no major operations at the time. There was still this resentment in the military forces against the United States for what they saw as our failure to [help] them against El Salvador, but that was gradually easing during my period there.

However, I should point out, that the Honduran military--and I think it is still true today--looked upon Salvador as the real threat to Honduras, and all of their thinking and long-range planning was towards somehow avenging the invasion and the initial defeat of the Honduran armed forces in the war of '69. I think we fail to realize that even today, the Honduran military are thinking about Salvador as the danger and not Nicaragua, and their resentment at the huge amount of military aid, which they see going to El Salvador, is in part a product of their fear that should Salvador succeed in putting down the uprisings--the Forabundo Marti and the other rebel groups in Salvador--that then they would turn and try to get back at Honduras. This was one of the problems which the military command in Panama failed to take into account when they tried to establish a training base for Salvadoran troops in Honduras. This really was more than the Hondurans could take. This was in 1982 and '83, and it led to the fall of General Alvarez for having agreed to this and, of course, the expulsion of the Salvadoran troops, because the Honduran troops could not countenance the idea of the training of enemy number one in their territory.

*Q: Could I pursue that a little more, having in mind the recent Arias plan where he got the Chiefs of State of the five Central American countries together to agree to something in Guatemala. During your period there as Ambassador to Honduras, did you see possibilities of a Central American sphere of cooperation? Could you comment on that?*

RYAN: This is a strange paradox. Central America was a single country just after the break with Spain, back in the 1830s and through about 1841 or '42, and this is still an ideal, a goal toward which all of the countries give at least lip service. The Honduran constitution, and I think the constitutions of all of the countries of Central America, talk about the greater fatherland. The fact that they feel a commitment to Central America, as well as to their individual nationalism. At the same time there is exacerbated nationalism which coexists with this feeling. It's often said that fratricidal or civil wars are the most bitter and this is the case which happened with Salvador and Honduras in their war. They're all related. The families inter-marry; you have to know genealogy to know anything about Central America. Everybody is related to everybody else or to everybody else's enemies and so forth. But the idea of Central American unity is always adduced--they celebrate a common independence day, the 15th of September, when all five countries always observe their day of freedom from Spain. And speeches are always made about Central American unity but the practical problems of the strong feelings of each state about its autonomy and sovereignty are still there as they were during the brief period of Central American unity. It broke up because of the jealousies and rivalries of the five countries. They have, of course, during the '50s and '60s the Central American Common Market, the integration movement was very positive. It made some very, very definite, positive impacts on the organization of the industrial base and the farming base in Central America. Some of the institutions have survived and done very well. The Central American Bank is still a major instrument of development in the area. Another instrument, the Central American Military Organization, ODECA, which was seen by Somoza as his tool, has fallen apart, or fell apart very early. An idea of reactivating it in the mid- '80s came to naught when the United States tried to bring the generals together. When they were meeting they actually had very little to accomplish. The one accomplishment of the Organization of Central American Military Organizations in the '60s, I believe, was an agreement on common insignia for the officer corps. Not exactly earth shaking.

But the ideal is there. There have been attempts to combine economic representation in Europe in a Central American organization-- one of the economic organizations. I think that in the long run there will be more and more cooperation, but it will be in terms of the European integration, very slow and probably beginning in the economic level.

*Q: Are there other aspects of your tour as Ambassador in Honduras that you consider to be particularly significant that you would like to elaborate on, or should we move to some other topic?*

RYAN: Significant, no, but anecdotal interesting might be the fact that we had a skyjacking during my tenure and it was an interesting plan. A man who had been born in one of the banana camps in Honduras and had been educated partly there, although he was an American citizen, who then went into engineering and had served in the DEW Line, and in Ascension Island and places like that, had apparently been planning for many years on skyjacking a plane and parachuting into Honduras with the ransom. He carried this out in 1971 when he skyjacked a plane out of New Orleans, got them to refuel it, and then fly over the northern coast of Honduras where he parachuted out the back of the plane with three hundred and three thousand dollars in

cash in a sack. He landed in Honduras, walked out to the road, got a bus and went into town with his little package of money.

We couldn't find him, nobody could find him for the longest time. They had FBI people down there, but then Eastern Airlines put out a call and a reward for information about his whereabouts and suddenly, four or five months later, I guess one of his relatives--I never found out exactly who was the informant--went to Miami, talked to Eastern, gave his name, and we were able to zero in on him. We had photographs of him and were putting out reward posters when one night he walked into the embassy and asked for asylum because he was afraid the Hondurans would get him. Their methods of interrogation were not exactly gentle, and he knew that if they ever got him they would get the money out of him and he might not survive. So he walked in and surrendered without the money.

I got in touch with the FBI, and Eastern, and the FBI sent some agents down. Eastern sent a special jet and we were able to spirit him out of the country. I called the General, the man who ran the country, and told him about this and he said, "You know, you just take him. We have enough people like that here." This caused some consternation and has certain parallels with certain of the problems we've had recently in Honduras in that the Hondurans, particularly the opposition parties, were upset that we had taken this man who possibly could have claimed Honduran citizenship, or whom they might have claimed as a Honduran because he'd been born on Honduran soil. But he'd been born in the days when--I think it was 1928 or '29--our laws said anyone born of American parents overseas could be registered as an American citizen at the nearest consulate. He'd been registered as an American citizen.

But anyway, there were certain things paralleling the recent kidnapping of Mate Ballesteros although this fellow went voluntarily, in fact, he asked specifically to be extradited. We didn't extradite him. We just put him on a plane and took him up to the States and he was arrested and went to jail. We eventually got the money back too. He couldn't resist talking to his cellmate who must have been a stooly, and the FBI sent down some people and they found the \$303,000 untouched in his grandmother's attic or some place like that. I had the pleasure of certifying the counting and banding of \$303,000 on my office coffee table in Honduras before we sent it back to Eastern Airlines.

But the other thing about Honduras at the time was the neglect of the United States. When Honduras, in 1971, had its first, honest, open elections for president in about fifteen years, a civilian was elected and there was really a minimum of coercion, fraud, or anything of that nature. It was an open election, agreed to by all participants that the election had been fair. I tried to get Washington to send down to the inauguration an appropriate official as a representative of the White House, or a representative from the Congress--we tried hard to get a Congressman or Senator. We were unable to find anyone in authority in the U.S. Government who would even bother to come to Honduras to celebrate this and to participate. Only the Assistant Secretary, Charles Meyer, came down representing the United States Government. This, I think, exemplifies the lack of attention at the time which was general to the Central American area. Our own military, at the time were quite anxious to diminish the size of the missions there. The CIA was closing out stations, and I think by 1973 had decided they were only going to have two or

three stations in Central America because they didn't feel that there was anything of importance there. Their budgetary constraints were such that they couldn't afford to keep operations going.

And I think some of our problems there today are reflected in this, this neglect of Central America at that time. We had a great deal of difficulty in getting any attention to Central America in the Washington bureaucracy. It was fine for me in a personal way in that nobody bothered me, and I could run my own show working together with the AID people, both in Honduras and the regional AID people out of Guatemala. I think we made a lot of small but significant advances in helping Honduras to confront its situation as the poorest country on the continental land mass of the Americas.

**MARY A. RYAN**  
**Personnel Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa 1970-1971**

*Mary A. Ryan was born in New York in 1940. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from St. John's University. Her career in the Foreign Service include positions in Italy, Honduras, Mexico, Ivory Coast, Sudan, and an ambassadorship to Swaziland. She was also a member of the Kuwaiti Task Force during the Gulf War. Ambassador Ryan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in March 2003.*

RYAN: I was there from '70 to '71. I was the personnel officer. It was not a happy assignment for me. I worked for a very old-time admin kind of person. I mean, it could have been a clash of generations as well as opposition to me as a woman. I don't know what it was. I was young, and he was not young, and he was a budget-in-the-back-pocket kind of admin guy. And I wanted to do things differently and all of that.

The service rescued me. I wrote to my counselor, who was Janet Hall-Diggs. Janet Hall she was then, and then she was Janet Hall-Diggs, now she's back to Janet Hall. She'd married Congressman Diggs, you know. And she was great. She got me out of there in practically no time. I didn't have to curtail or anything. I just got a cable one day telling me I was transferred to Monterrey.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about Honduras. What was Honduras like?*

RYAN: Honduras then, which was 1970, was before all of the terrible things that happened in Central America. It was a very dusty, very sleepy town for a capital city. There was almost nothing to do for young people, and so what we did was entertain each other in our homes. We were all friends. It was very nice that way. USIS, AID, all of us were very compatible. But it was after the Soccer War, after Jean Wilkowski, who had been the DCM [deputy chief of mission], had left. But they were still talking about that.

And it had sort of settled back into nothing, with a tremendous amount of drinking among the Honduran men, at least that I remember. You would see them in the city, in the capital, in the streets, drinking and falling down and passing out. There was nothing to do for them, and no hope. Very poor. And I thought very boring.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

RYAN: Hewson Ryan. And Bob Davis was the DCM. He was fabulous. He was a wonderful DCM, wonderful. The ambassador was sort of removed, and I was very junior, but the DCM was very nice and very good. The admin counselor and I, we didn't get along. I thought he was an idiot. Poor man.

*Q: You were doing personnel?*

RYAN: Yes.

*Q: Was this sort of a normal rotation thing?*

RYAN: Yes, it was the way they coned us then. By the second assignment they sent you to what they thought you were best at. And it was sort of stereotypical thinking then, of course, personnel being a woman's field. And it was very clerical. It wasn't what I always thought personnel work should be, which was much more interest in people and their careers and how they were getting ahead, and all of that kind of thing. It was just, you know, forms, and I didn't like it at all.

**ROBERT S. STEVEN**  
**Officer in Charge, El Salvador and Honduras Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1970-1971)**

*Mr. Steven was born in Massachusetts and raised there and in Rhode Island. He graduated from Brown University and served in the US Army before entering the Foreign Service in 1957. Mr. Steven became a specialist Latin America, where he served in Mexico, Chile and Argentina. He also served in Burma, Vietnam and Japan and had several senior assignments at the State Department in Washington.*

STEVEN: Well, then they had an assignment for me, and that was to be the OIC of El Salvador and Honduras Affairs here in the Department. I'll give you this when we finish; it may be useful.

*Q: I'll just make little notes.*

STEVEN: It may be helpful if you want.

*Q: You did that from '70 to...?*



STEVEN: I went down there in '70 and had only an 18-month tour there, until '71, July of '71, and I had the desk, the combined El Salvador/Honduras desk at the time, which was an older arrangement which had become extremely difficult because that was just after they had their war.

*Q: The Soccer War.*

STEVEN: The so-called Soccer War. The relationships between the two countries were so bad that when I went for my familiarization visit, I went to El Salvador, then had to go over to Guatemala and from Guatemala over to Honduras because I couldn't go directly. Dealing with the two embassies, it became a fascinating experience. It's sad it's gotten the title and the image of the Soccer War. It was much more serious. There were longstanding questions there. One of the major problems was a demographic one: Salvadorans flooding over into Honduras and taking up land in Honduras and the Hondurans trying to stop that. That was one of the basic causes of war right there. It was a difficult job trying to get anybody in Washington in the Department to take it at all seriously. Everyone had the same reaction: oh, it's crazy in Central America, banana republics having a war over a soccer game or something. It was like saying as soon as they assassinated the Archduke in Sarajevo in 1914 that that was just a minor thing. It set it off and was a catalyst for a lot of trouble. The interesting experiment there was with AID. The Latin American Bureau has always been used for experiments. Planning and programming and budgeting exercises, other things generally seemed to be tried there, partly, I think, because they feel that if it doesn't work it won't be quite as disastrous as it would in Europe or something, and the Bureau has generally had a reputation as being more willing to experiment with things. It experimented with the idea of making the State and AID desk officers sit together and share the jobs. In theory and in my case with the fellow I worked with in practice, we substituted for each other. I did AID work and he did State work, and we signed off on each other's telegrams. When I was on leave, he ran the desk, and vice versa. It was a very, very interesting experiment, and I found it a very, very good one, because we very closely integrated the work, but mainly for bureaucratic reasons it didn't continue and eventually it was discontinued a couple of years after I left. It was an idea the Department tried and an interesting one.

*Q: Later, particularly when all hell heated up in Nicaragua and you had a full-scale war in El Salvador, this became a huge concentration of American resources, but at the time, I take it...*

STEVEN: At the time it was on a sidebar and not particularly important to us.

*Q: Had the war stopped by the time you got there?*

STEVEN: Yes, there was no fighting. There was no cross-border traffic.

*Q: Were we trying to do anything, or was this just their problem?*

STEVEN: Ultimately we tried to encourage them to settle things in practical terms.

*Q: Hadn't OAS stepped in or done something?*

STEVEN: They had made lots of loud noises to try to stop it. I think myself and what I know of the war, the main reason it stopped when it did is that the Salvadorans, who had by far the larger population, basically felt that they were able to damage Honduras enough to force the Hondurans to back off - not that they were going to invade Honduras or something but basically that they would dominate them. The Hondurans did something very interesting, or had done something very interesting, which is similar to what the Israelis did. The Hondurans recognized that, in those conditions with the bad terrain, air power was going to be an issue, and the Salvadorans had done what most of those countries had, they bought a collection of half a dozen different types of airplanes to shuttle their generals around and a few things like this. The Hondurans concentrated very much upon one fighter they happened to buy, the navy, Corsair, which was a very able aircraft, and there were plenty of them around after World War II, and even at that late period they were buying them. So they had a substantial number of them in their squadron of these Corsair fighters, and their pilots to get the training did what the Israelis did. They were airline pilots largely, who trained as reservists, and when they mobilized and put them into the cockpit, you had very experienced airline pilots flying these planes who knew what they were doing. They spent a lot of money on maintenance and upkeep and armament, so they had a really effective, modern air force. When the Salvadorans tried to fight them, they were massacred literally. The Hondurans went through them like a hot knife through butter. One of the better pictures is of two Salvadoran aircraft finishing a mission and having just barely escaped with their lives and possibly having some damage, landing at that same airfield at the same time from opposite ends of the same runway. Once the Hondurans effectively had complete control of the air, had a few missions over and, I guess, shot up a few airport towers and things, the Salvadorans were quite willing to back off. Interesting.

*Q: What were your major concerns or efforts while you were on this desk?*

STEVEN: Economic assistance probably was a lot of it. That's why I worked so closely with the AID man. We had economic assistance programs there at the time trying to be helpful. Minor problems I forget. There's always a few, protection and welfare of an American citizen perhaps who'd been arrested or things of that nature. One of the nastier incidents we had was the Salvadoran Vice Consul in San Francisco, as I recall, who was found standing on a sidewalk one evening late firing his revolver at the windows of an apartment building above where his girlfriend lived. The police took a dim view of this and were able to safely disarm him - he was thoroughly drunk - and hauled him off, where he got sober enough to announce his diplomatic status, and I remember having to deal with all that. The sad thing is we had at the moment the Salvadoran Foreign Minister in town on an official visit, and he had intervened because the Salvadoran Vice Consul was the son of a very prominent politician in Salvador. Getting him out of jail, because they had been able to hold him - you can hold somebody if he presents a threat to the public - getting him out and getting him back to Salvador, and the main problem was he demanded his revolver be returned before he left, which they didn't do. It was this type of problem, not big, serious things at that time. It was only later when the Nicaraguans and so on got much more involved when these things happened...

*Q: I take it at this point there was no guerilla movement or rebel movement up on the hills?*

STEVEN: In Honduras and Salvador there always are, but they weren't significant. There were always elements of *banditos* that I recall in El Salvador. They had some trouble in the countryside, but the feeling was probably, even though it was under a political banner, it was more just the usual *banditos* taking advantage of a situation. There was nothing that serious. There was no threat to the stability of either government at that time, except each other.

*Q: At that time I take it there was not a very sizable immigrant community of either country in the United States.*

STEVEN: No, the big floods of immigration hadn't started yet. There was some coming in, it was always a concern, but it hadn't reached the horizon of public awareness or become a serious problem at the time.

**RICHARD L. STOCKMAN**  
**Communicator**  
**Tegucigalpa (1970-1971)**

*Richard Stockman was born in 1940 in Kansas City, Missouri. He went to seminary at Cape Girardeau in Missouri, and was then drafted into the U.S. Army in 1963, where he spent most of his tour in Germany. Mr. Stockman entered the Foreign Service in 1966 as a communications specialist. He served in Brazil, Honduras, Singapore, Togo, Switzerland, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Mr. Stockman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.*

*Q: And then you finally broke out of the Department and got yourself off to Tegucigalpa, Honduras from 1970-71.*

STOCKMAN: That was the supreme irony again of this whole personnel policy, security policy, etc. Specialists like communicators are a supply and demand commodity. You can't run an embassy very effectively without them. You impose penalties on them but suddenly you realize you are short handing yourself. It was a Catch 22, this five-year waiting period for a foreign spouse was quickly reduced to two years and I was hurried into the field. In fact, I was even asked to take an African assignment, little did they realize that the left hand had said stay here and the right hand had said we want you in Africa. So it was not a very well thought out policy and I think they dropped it. The intent was sincerely good in that they did want the foreign spouses to become orientated to US living. It was good for them to have an introduction, after all they were to be representatives of the United States government in some fashion. In many cases many of these wives had come from wealthy, influential families and certainly could make a great contribution quickly. I think the policy overall was basically good. Certainly it would be scrutinized very carefully for foreign spouses behind the iron curtain. In fact, I think it was prohibited and with good reason. There are pros and cons but around four or five years after I was married they dropped many of those conditions. In fact, I don't believe foreign spouses have

to become US citizens today. Personally I think that is wrong, I think they should be American citizens.

*Q: What was the situation in Honduras in 1970-71?*

STOCKMAN: The situation was honestly very depressing. We had turned down an assignment in Panama. Our motivation, quite frankly at the time was that we thought we could recover somewhat financially after a tour in Washington, by taking a hardship posting. The local scene there was abject poverty that one found literally on your doorstep. It was the classic example of a banana republic, so to speak, raped, robbed and pillaged by US industry and left in that condition. What the US industry did not take, the local military did. So there was virtually nothing left except a bankrupt country in debt to US banks up to their necks. It was virtually impossible to change anything in terms of constructive US policy that would improve the situation. Greediness and corruption, starting with the President's own wife there who would take funds out of charity organizations for her own purposes, was rampant.

There was one interesting incident that happened while we were there which shows you how things can happen with an intended design. You recall those hijackings of airplanes in the US at the time?

*Q: Yes.*

STOCKMAN: They were internal operations, mostly for money and these guys would jump out of the back of these 727s. One of those originated in the States and several weeks later it turned out that he was Honduran by nationality. He eventually turned himself into the US Embassy in the middle of the night, after months and weeks of searching for him. He turned himself in only because he was scared to death that the local people would catch him. He had distributed the money, he claimed, as he made his way down to Honduras, to poor people. Well the local military, of course, were just anxious to get their hands on him for obvious reasons, they wanted the money. So he walked in after weeks and months of attempts to identify him. He looked nothing like the sketches the FBI had. We took him back on a Defense Attaché plane.

We were going to make a round robin tour of all the countries, we were allowed to do that occasionally with them. We could visit every country except El Salvador because of the soccer war between those two countries.

There were horror stories of the campesinos massacring people out in the countryside for whatever reasons, political, revenge. There were outright murders in the city at night. There were selected bombings of US offices while we were there. It was a little turbulent and it was a little scary from time to time.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?*

STOCKMAN: I think the Ambassador was Hewson Ryan, from USIA.

*Q: What was the atmosphere of the Embassy as far as you were concerned?*

STOCKMAN: Not atypical of Central American embassies. It was a huge US AID operation more than anything else. I quite frankly have utterly no respect for that organization. It is a very harsh criticism, but it is a bureaucracy in its own right that in my opinion accomplished very, very little constructive. There is a lot of propaganda, a lot of smoke blowing, but you don't see results. Never did in any of the countries where I served.

**RALPH E. BECKER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1976-1977)**

*Born and raised in New York, Ambassador Becker was educated at City College, New York, New York University and St. John's University Law School. He served with the US Army in World War II. By profession a trial lawyer, the Ambassador and his wife were major contributors to cultural organizations and projects in Washington, DC and elsewhere. A life long Republican, Ambassador Becker campaigned for the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower and was appointed Ambassador to Honduras, where he served from 1976 to 1977. Ambassador Becker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.*

*Q: What was, from your perspective, when you arrived in Honduras what was the political situation in Honduras at that time?*

BECKER: I think that I had some background on Honduras. In order to give you a broader idea about the country and its people, in light of the question that you asked. But I will answer that question. I found there was freedom speech -- freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, respect for human rights with one exception to my knowledge -- notwithstanding a military government. At the time that I served as ambassador -- as I look back, it's kind of a little transition because ... The military had control of the government before that time. They had relieved General Lopez Arellano over bribery accusations -- United Fruit was involved -- and economic problems it cost him his government. He was succeeded by another person under whom I had a close and warm relationship, named General Melgar.

*Q: This is Juan Alberto Melgar?*

BECKER: Yes. And his wife was a professor. He and I established a wonderful friendship, an excellent working relationship.

*Q: He was a general, a military man?*

BECKER: Yes, he was. He was elected by the Consejo Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas that's the Council of Armed Forces. A body of 20 to 25 key commanders of the Armed Forces. They relieved Lopez as Chief of the Armed Force because of charges of bribery by United Fruit, and other charges that Lopez took over the government in 1963. By the way, this Council is still in

existence. There was a change of government in 1982. I think we should tie that in because it's very important. There were insinuations that the influence of Lopez even continued. There were others involved with him but I only recall the bottom line. It ran in excess of \$1 million. I've heard of other allegations, bribes. The mine, for example. I can't vouch for the facts, but what they tell you is they would paint the gold blocks silver and export them in as gold. That mine very recently -- which goes back to the Spaniards was recently bought by some American investors. I was told that by a representative of our own country. Mrs. Mae Sue Talley, who is head of the Caribbean Affairs or Caribbean Institute -- a government position -- she told me about it. Her job is privatization of government companies and she helped them in Honduras and Guatemala.

But regarding Honduras, let me give you a picture from 1976.

*Q: I'd like your perspective of how you saw the situation when you went out there, at that time.*

BECKER: First of all, the Republic of Honduras is the geographical heart of Central America. It's very important to emphasize it, in light of all the problems we have now. As I tried to show you on the map how it's surrounded by other countries that are in trouble or visa versa. Honduras borders Guatemala. El Salvador, Nicaragua, with coastlines on both the Pacific and the Caribbean. As I recall, we have a 325 mile coastline on the Atlantic, and about 75 miles on the Pacific. I could show you that on the map. But for that purpose, it gives you an idea. The Pacific coastline consists of 90 miles -- the Gulf of Fonseca. So, what you're dealing with here is that -- the Caribbean side is 400 miles. So the country's 3 1/3 million citizens live in 43,277 square miles, mountain and tropical paradise, roughly the size of Pennsylvania. About 90 percent of the Honduran population is mestizo a mixture of Spanish, Indian and black. There are small minorities of Caucasians, middle eastern and Blacks.

*Q: By the way, you are reading from a document which you'd prepared in July of 1977.*

BECKER: That is right, that is correct. It was printed in the Congressional Record. What happened was, I did this -- and it's very helpful right now. When you called about the oral history of Honduras, it was hard to remember many of these things I did. But anyway... Before we went to the capitol of Honduras, I never knew where Tegucigalpa was. The name was completely foreign to me. It traces its heritage to 1578, when the Spaniards founded a gold and silver mining settlement. That same gold mine that I talked to you about a second ago, on and off has been in existence.

Tegucigalpa has an elevation of 3,500 feet above sea level, and our residence was high away overlooking the city of Tegucigalpa. Ann will tell you more of what she did in converting the embassy residence. The fast developing area in San Pedro Sula is the industrial and commercial center of the booming North Coast area. Now, you have to understand...

*Q: Well, this is on tape. Mr. Ambassador, I think maybe we might save some of these for the researcher, they can sort of do their own -- you know -- how things are. But how did you view our interests in Honduras at the time?*

BECKER: I'll explain that too. You asked me about the political situation. Okay, sure, be glad to. What I want to explain to you is, and appreciate your indulgence, is that to understand -- of course, whether the researcher does or not -- to understand the territory, the people, the problems, economic, social, and otherwise, is what I was faced with and what I did during that time. So when you realize that 90 percent of the children under five years of age suffer from malnutrition -- and there hasn't been much change since that time -- and 40 percent of the population suffers from malnutrition. Illiteracy is another major problem. Two-thirds of the adults and a tremendous percentage of children don't enroll in schools and less than half never make the second grade. The per capita income, at that time was \$40 or less. It's a little bit higher now. But you must realize that the Campesinos -- which is the peasants --

*Q: So it was a very, very poor country.*

BECKER: Very poor, and it still is, particularly when you realize ... I just wanted to flash back... At this time it's compounded, not only by our own military being there, but there are 100,000 refugees. First they poured in from El Salvador, and now from Nicaragua.

*Q: El Salvador, from the Soccer War 1969 and in Nicaragua, from the civil war that's going on there.*

BECKER: That's correct! I'm in communication with people in Honduras now, friends of mine, particularly one -- Jacob Goldstein, who was a great reporter and narrator, probably the best there is in Latin America, equivalent to our best in the United States. He's now living here in the United States. He was with the embassy of Honduras and now he's on his own, representing the press of T.V. and radio. Jacob helped me out tremendously in advice, and counsel. He and his family are very good friends. I'll tell you more about personnel, where they helped me out with knowledge I didn't have before arriving in Honduras. I had to absorb it right away.

It's not only poor, but it's so limited because the country's economy is mainly agricultural. They have cattle there for export. Now there are industrial and commercial activities on North Coast.

One story you're not going to find in any research: The Mafia. In the North Coast there is "the mafia". Not what you think like in this country. They are business syndicates, okay, Israelis and Palestinians, Lebanese, Arabs. Briefly, they are very successful and happy -- 100% Hondurans. There are also intermarriages. Ann and I attended a wedding of Jaimem Rosenblum. She was a beautiful dark Palestinian. He later became a power in the government. In the North Coast, which for many years the Puerto Cortes, Tela and La Ceiba were the ports used by the Banana companies. Puerto Cortes is the shipping and commercial center managed by a government authority. It is the largest container port in Central America. That was changed in Agrarian Reform, and this is where unfortunately my predecessor got involved -- Agrarian reform -- a local problem. Officials criticized him, and the press as well when I arrived in Honduras -- October 29th -- in an editorial "the mission of a diplomat" pointed out that I was not a substitute for Philip Sanchez. The basic criticisms made, as I recall affected the foreign policy of the United States. What they did -- they kind of alerted me that Latin America is not requesting charity. It only wants independence with economic and trade exports, etc. The editor said this is a real mission, to understand the reasons that bring countries and governments together, or apart,

and to find social justice through international economic justice. The editor went on and gave me quite a notice in the editorial of my duties as a diplomat.

*Q: I see. So Ambassador Sanchez had been requested to leave because he had been critical...*

BECKER: No, no. He did a good job. He was transferred on the merits. He was given another assignment to Columbia. It was in Columbia that he got himself involved.

*Q: Oh, I see.*

BECKER: No, he did an excellent job. Of course, they had that incredible tragedy and devastation of the hurricane. Fifi, 1974. He and his wife worked hard -- they used the residence to help people, orphans and families. He went in literally with his boots on. It was in Columbia ...

*Q: I see.*

BECKER: You were asking about 1976. On the North Coast there's another port called Puerto Castilia on the Bay of Trujillo. Today it's a tremendous air and naval base for the United States and Honduras. It's three times larger than the Puerto Cortez. When we were there, there were slaughter houses which polluted the water and full of sharks. But they were beginning to change, I'll show you some of the contributions I made in connection with some of those problems. Social, economic including illiteracy problems.

Basically, you're dealing with a rural country. Where US AID is critical, our AID director Frank Kimball, was terrific.

*Q: He was the head of AID?*

BECKER: AID, yes. I met with him immediately, the day I arrived actually -- and two days later I was out in a field (I'll get to that in a second). It was the decision made by the government of Honduras with AID assistance to take a broad, national initiative to confront malnutrition which cannot be over emphasized. A national planning and coordinating body was established. A plan together with and supported by the wife of the Chief of State who I brought into this project. This project to support nutrition by the United States was enthusiastically received.

So on November 2, 1976 -- you must understand this was only weeks after I arrived...

*Q: Yes, I understand, you'd just ...*

BECKER: Also, I signed, with the Minister of Finance, a far reaching nutrition loan of \$3.5 million, which along with complimentary grant assistance of \$750,000 provided funds to support Honduran programs, including nutrition education, rural potable water, supply and sanitation, a form of wells and latrines, pilot activities to introduce new and more nutritious foods, and a nutrition-status vigilance system to identify and monitor malnutrition by areas and groups, and national nutrition planning. If implemented, it will serve 300,000 people.



Let me explain something. In one of the communities where potable water is so necessary, in dire need, there's another level above the Campesinos called Patronadas. They're like a parent-teacher association. They will do the work and you give them the money. As an example, they'd have to go for miles, or kilometers to get water. They would tap a spring, under the direction of Don Bridwell who I should mention more about.

Don is a big six footer. He came to me with 20 years experience in Honduras, starting with Brown-Root, a large construction company and then from there he was under contract to AID. They call him "Big Don." A wonderful representative of the United States. The Campesinos and Patronadas loved him. We became fast friends and was of tremendous help to me. He lives in Grand Junction, Colorado.

As I was saying they would tap a spring from the mountainside and with water through a one-inch pipeline, they built a holding tank with three walls around, with stones, and bring the water down to this holding tank. Then they would bring a one-inch pipeline under the road to the communes. That's how this particular community got its water. This saved them miles.

*Q: How did you find the staffing of the embassy when you got there?*

BECKER: Well, you see, you're digressing still, but that's okay.

*Q: Okay, we'll move back to the political situation.*

BECKER: Also, back to the economic situation. Banana Industry social, so forth. I want to go back to that. So if you'd just make a notation I'd appreciate it.

Can I go back, just for a minute?

*Q: Sure.*

BECKER: Fifi was in 1974.

*Q: This is the hurricane?*

BECKER: Hurricane, yes. It struck northern Honduras, leaving in its wake widespread devastation and human suffering. Now, national agricultural development programs were particularly hard hit. On November 2, 1976, I signed, with the Minister of Finance Porferio Zavales, a \$9.5 million Rural reconstruction (#II) Loan Agreement to continue support and recovery from the effects of the hurricane and enable the government to attain momentum of its development programs.

The loan contained three elements: two were focused on the needs of the agriculture and especially farmer groups. \$5,000,000 in loans funds were directed to credit for small farmer groups who were severely affected by the hurricane. Just imagine this is a small amount of money. In order to provide access to credit -- other services and markets -- \$2.5 million loan

funds were provided to put in access roads, and to enable a year round vehicular access up to 125 small farm communities -- especially those in the hurricane zone area.

The third element was \$2,000,000 of a loan, which I signed as ambassador, to support Rural Primary Education, which was really very, very critical. Especially the government program of Central/Satellite Schools. I was there when they inaugurated the first school, which stresses greater relevancy and thus improved learning for rural children and Teachers Training. This was one major measure to attack -- illiteracy.

Now, I want to tell you -- Ann talked about it -- she was involved in education and child welfare, too. That's why I say a wife is very important.

*Q: Oh yes, I understand this.*

BECKER: Just a further indication, for the record, of my commitment to education improvement was the symbolic inauguration of schools constructed under the project supported by the first reconstruction loan. I was the guest of honor at the formal inauguration ceremonies in El Carrizal on May 10, 1977. Though I worked with them from May, it lasted until November.

Now, I'll continue on with some of the important things that I did to help the Campesinos improve the quality of lives -- let's put it that way. Two days after my arrival, I presented a check of \$2,500 to the Mayor of the town of Ojojana, to be used for the construction of an all-weather foot trail from Ojojana to San Jose, Dijacaro, and Santa Cruz. This trail enabled the people to increase the amount of food and cottage industry goods they could market, to increase commerce in general, and to increase their access to schools, health care, and other public services.

Let me tell you about the trail blazers -- that's what it was called. I'll show you pictures too. I rode the donkey on the trail, but Ann road the horse with Don Bridwell, Ernesto Uribe (USIA) and others. It was an old Spanish trail, but it was critical for people to use, especially the Campesinos and Patronadas. And so this was rebuilt during my time. I inaugurated it and helped them, and it became very important. It was a big celebration because for hundreds of years they didn't have such a trail. The trail restorations increased in a number of other areas.

I told you about Frank Kimball. Frank Kimball today heads up the largest AID operation in the world. It's in Cairo. The man who followed him, John Robertson, another very capable officer -- different type of person. But I always want to indicate as I go along that I became friends with these individuals who still are my friends today.

*Q: Well, that's commendable.*

BECKER: But John Robertson served after that -- he was just brought down to Costa Rica on a contract with AID to do a privatization of the government owned industries or businesses. He'll finish it in a couple of months. Confident he will do a super job. We have been in communication with him. Also we are in communication with Don Bridwell.

*Q: Again, concentrating on the time in Honduras, besides the AID functions, how did you find the staffing of the embassy? Considering your Deputy Chief of Mission, your political, your economic officers, how much support or lack of support, expertise did they supply?*

BECKER: I still want to answer your question, but there's some unanswered questions I want to get back to. We'll do that in a second.

*Q: Okay.*

BECKER: First of all, I should tell you that the Peace Corps did one of the most wonderful jobs in the world, as far as I am concerned. Frank Almaguer was the head of the Peace Corps at that time. I would develop a close relationship with them. Frank was always in attendance at staff meetings, but met with him and the Peace Corp regularly. There are 200 from the ages of 21-70. Honduras even asked for more members of the Peace Corps. That's how much they liked them. They developed goodwill, did all kinds of things. I remember an elderly couple doing skilled work. I would look into their activities. Honduras has the largest pine forests in Latin America -- besides mahogany and other woods within Forestry, a very big project. These forests are under a semiautonomous Honduran corporation -- Cohedifor -- it grew from zero to \$50 million.

When I arrived, unfortunately, Carl Bartch the number two man -- and I don't want to say anything against him -- unfortunately had a drinking problem. I was faced with that problem and I wanted to ignore it because -- not only because of compassion, I didn't want to get involved in filing any complaint which was recommended to me by other members of the embassy staff.

The Inspector General came down from -- and I think someone may have said something to him about Carl Bartch. Bartch has a good record; he's retired now. But they tell me the story that he went to Panama when his wife was ill. That's when they found out they could help him with his alcoholism. That was a blessing in disguise, because then I had to do his work. A secretary, to me, is always very important. All my life a secretary has been very critical to my works. I had the right to select my own secretary. So I was inquiring around and the name came up -- someone in Nicaragua -- she would love to be in Honduras. I said, "what's her record?"

"Well, you can talk to the ambassador, Theberge."

So he told me about Virginia, and he said. "Very competent."

*Q: Her name is Virginia --?*

BECKER: I have her name. I said to Ambassador Theberge, you know, qualifications, experience? "Oh, she's great." He gave her a tremendous send off.

I said, "that's fine." When she came I found out that she had some property in Honduras. She was finishing her tour of duty and was going to retire in Honduras. She was lazy and wasn't helpful at all. Had her own ways, her own habits, and it was very difficult. What happened was when I saw Ambassador Theberge on a visit to Nicaragua. I said, "How come you gave this gal such a complementary qualification, experience, so forth?"

He told me, bald-faced, he tried to get rid of her. I called him every name in the world. I don't mind telling you that episode because it turned out she just couldn't do the work and be loyal. If I didn't have the support of George Knight, the number three man -- who ran our operations and management and so forth -- I'd have been in tough shape.

*Q: He was the administrative officer?*

BECKER: Yes he was. He was great. He's absolutely the best administrator I know. I wanted him to become an ambassador. We became close, intimate friends. He's in Bangkok now, finishing a tour of duty. He runs the biggest computerization staff in the world -- I mean Southeast Asia. Everything in Southeast Asia, but basically the staff. He told me the number of people--runs in the thousand. But now with the budget cuts, he's so unhappy with it, because he can't carry out many of his duties. He had a heart attack on top of that. He has a home in Virginia and will be back here in a few months. But that's to give you an example in answer to your question about the embassy staff. Here we became friends, Ann and I, with the Knights. He's a minister counselor. For ten years we've been close friends. When they came here they would visit with us, as they did just a few months ago, or my brother-in-law, or friends visiting Thailand, and he would entertain them and so forth. But Colleen and George are close friends of ours. He was absolutely outstanding in his knowledge, ability to do things with little money.

Now, I'll continue about the staff. After a short while, I found out the problems I had administrative wise. With George Knight's help, I was able to get some secretarial support, clerical support. Also, I had the use of the AID small plane, which I used in my travels when necessary in Honduras. I had a military group, called the MilGroup. They come under the jurisdiction of our military in Panama.

*Q: Yes, the southern command, Army Southern Command.*

BECKER: That's right. And they are great officers there. I can't speak too highly of our military and our men. I'm in touch with, say, Bob Powell. He's in Virginia now. He was in Clemson University formerly a military school, where I've lectured at the Strom Thurmond Institute. It was just a funny thing that we crossed paths again at Clemson. I talked with him just two days ago. I wanted to bone up on a couple of questions you may ask me. Anyway, there was Crow, and Lieutenant Colonel Norrod. There was Major Basset. And I think we had about eight or ten officers in the military group. They came in originally to train the Hondurans. I remember one Colonel Rex Miller, was an absolutely fabulous fisherman. We had a famous Bass lake--Lake Yojoa. He was the only guy who could catch a fish. I went one day with him and he caught twenty-seven bass. I don't recall how many fish I caught. Nobody else could get this number. He's got some angle, I don't know what the hell it's all about, but anyway he's just the greatest fisherman I ever saw -- besides, being a top officer.

Rex got a little upset one time because he was training the helicopter pilots, and he wanted to have a graduation ceremony -- notwithstanding what the Hondurans wanted to do -- delay it -- a problem with a helicopter graduation. He trained them. I can give you the figures about what we

had in helicopters -- I think there were about four. He won out and we attended the graduation ceremony.

Then under Bob Powell two very interesting things happened. In the Puerto Cortez, they had a very big coral reef they wanted to break up for a number of years which hampered navigation. It was very important because they had the biggest container ship setup in Latin America at the Puerto Cortez. So what happened is, that they had to train frogmen; so they brought frogmen from Panama and Bob was in charge of that operation. He didn't know whether the Hondurans would be able to handle the elements under the water. They were never trained before. As they had no navy. When I was there they started the first navy. I inaugurated the first two patrol boats -- or one patrol boat -- something like that. They used it really for just around the ... they did have one boat up in Gulf Fonseca in the Pacific and they had one patrol boat in the Caribbean. Anyway, I went there for the explosion. Now, when I say explosion, they had to break this big 600 x 200 foot coral reef. Bob said the Hondurans were great. They did better than anticipated; they were strong and ... In other words, if the training didn't come out right, you'd have to use American frogmen from Panama. He didn't have to.

Let's take the navy, because that was just the beginning of the Honduran Navy which has now expanded quite a bit, because of "the situation." But at that time we inaugurated the navy... By the way, the officers and sailors were not trained in the navy. They came from the army. And they were used as military men, as such. So you have to understand the organization was not like the Battalions in the Honduran air or infantry force. By the way, I went to a graduation of one of the battalions. I was invited -- air force battalions. Very well trained -- the air force is fabulous. That's what won the war with El Salvador. Hondurans are very proud of the battalions of their air force.

Ann and I went to graduation exercise. She and I went up with the officers in the plane, where they were jumping off. And they put jumpsuits on us for safety, not for jumping. I was not going to jump. I can tell you that now. This gives you an idea of the good relations and respect I had with the military across the board.

Well, let's go down the line of personnel. Then I had Colonel Fesseden whom I mentioned. He had a big plane -- he and his assistant a captain, was a military intelligence officer. A very important post. For example, I could not go to El Salvador. I wanted to greet all my neighboring ambassadors with a mutual exchange. I did, except for El Salvador. Now, the ambassador of El Salvador was able to come across and visit me one time, later on in the spring. Colonel Fesseden would be permitted to fly into El Salvador and he regularly gave me information. He flew on many intelligence missions. He took me on missions outside Honduras.

Now he had his own line of intelligence to Washington. Remember, up until a certain point I was green -- I'm learning all these particular things. The CIA director, Dario Guanari and his wife became very close friends of mine. She died about a year ago of cancer, down in Florida. He's retired. Very good man. Absolutely tops.

*Q: Did CIA give you good support while you were there?*

BECKER: Oh yes, I was briefed on his activities. What I can say publicly is one of concern certain labor unions were being infiltrated allegedly by the radicals or leftists -- there were accusations of communism. His main area really was in the civil area whereas the military intelligence would be Colonel Fesseden's jurisdiction. It would be the unions, the Campesinos in the rural areas and other areas. He's a very likeable, pleasant person. He didn't show anything on his cuff that he was a member of any official force of any kind. He was able to get around the countryside, and they got to know him, and they liked him very much. They knew who he was -- no secret, no problem.

Then I had a financial, economic, commercial officer, named Stahlman. But he wasn't doing his job very well. I've had discussions about that with other Ambassadors or Foreign Service Officers. There are some that are good and make it to the heights right away, and others just stay in their grade. He was not exactly loyal, supportive or effective as far as I'm concerned. One particular important incident I'll tell you about. Anyway, we had the beginning of narcotics traffic. That's where Melgar was very, very cooperative with me.

*Q: This is the President of Honduras.*

BECKER: Melgar was great. The personnel -- we'll continue on -- the household, Ann can give you that -- wonderful help. One became a priest.

Then we had others, like the communications officers. One, I think was Sergeant. we had a very good staff on that score except two people. But, I want to go back to the military group. The head of navy came down to visit us, Admiral -- or Captain -- Best, from Mexico. So we had two commands. The military command came from Panama. The navy command came from Mexico City. Primary military jurisdiction -- without question -- was our command in Panama.

*Q: It is predominately a military command for Latin America.*

BECKER: Oh sure. General McAuliffe was chief of command -- a top officer with diplomacy. We should take a great deal of pride in our military. Not because I served in the war, and was Judge Advocate of outstanding infantry division -- the 30th Infantry Division, we had 30,000 casualties, and all kinds of records and awards. We had inspectors and had other officers from Panama. We would entertain them and established a good relationship between Honduran military and our own military. That was my mission. Another officer I must mention is the Consular Officer Hancock. His office was very busy with a lot of pressure for visas. I supported him. I did not interfere with his decision. He answered to Washington.

*Q: This interview is centered more on the workings of the Foreign Service, and for the education of young Foreign Service Officers and others. you were saying that -- there's no need to go into names -- but you felt that you economic, commercial officer was not giving you full support. What was the problem?*

BECKER: I think he had a personality problem, number one. Number two, for example information came to me from staff like George Knight who I trusted and others, to beware of

him. Though I invited him and his wife to social functions at the residence, I was never comfortable with him. I have to go back and tell you about my organization.

What I did, when I found I had a problem, with the number two man, my secretary and so forth, I set up a "super-duper" committee. Like an executive committee. We had meetings of staff once a week. I set up this super-duper committee consisting of about four or five people: George Knight, Fesseden, Kimball, Uribe -- I've got to tell you about him. Ernesto Uribe, absolutely the best officer I ever came in contact [with] in the USIA. He was an advisor and very helpful. Went on many trips throughout the country with me.

He's in the Dominican Republic. He's still a good friend of mine, by the way. He was in Peru; when he was in Peru someone burned the American flag. He went out and took this fellow by the shoulders and gave him a good cuffing and so forth. Big, tall Texas, Ernesto Uribe, and his wife Sarah are good friends.

Let me see who else I had. So we would meet regularly. When I say regularly, I'm talking about weekly also -- I'd call a meeting whenever I had a problem. Assess it, evaluate it, and do it. Oh yes, the MilGroup was represented, Colonel Basset. If he didn't make it he would send an alternative. Rex Miller was his -- one of his major officers. I don't know where he is now, but I was in touch with him when he was in Kansas. He attended a War College in Leavenworth, Kansas.

*Q: I can't think-- anyway, it's Army's...*

BECKER: Yes, well anyway, in the travels -- I should have told you about one thing. when I arrived there was a serious problem. Three officers and landowners were accused of killing two foreign priests, ten peasants and two students. It was before my arrival. It created quite a scandal. At that time, I was in a good relationship with General Melgar. He wanted the accused tried. They were convicted but given a small sentence. It was known as the Horcones Massacre.

On the North Coast there's the Bay Islands. The Bay Islands are just -- I've traveled the Caribbean -- there isn't anything like these Bay Islands. There are three islands, founded by the English years ago. the religion is Methodists; also the Bible Society has an organization there, and the multi-million dollar shrimp boat operation. It's run by a family named Hyde. I visited the Bay Islands and I brought the importance of the Bay Islands to President Melgar. I told him it was very important to develop the Bay Islands; not only because of tourism but also because the lack of roads -- they don't have anything and need help. Bridwell was my adviser, by the way.

So it was the first time he ever went to the Bay Islands. We went as a delegation, and we went to three islands by plane. As a result of that, they were going to do something on tourism by there still doing something about it. It's lack of money in promoting the Bay Islands. But I had a serious problem; Hydes contacted Bridwell, who called me, came over to see me. He said one of Hydes' boats has been picked up in New Orleans, Louisiana with marijuana. And he has another boat that he is suspicious of. The shrimp boats may have brought in some boxes and in the boxes may be some "coke" headed for Miami. He doesn't want to get arrested. What happened is, that I immediately got on the telephone directly to the Attorney General's office. I think I told State

what I was doing, but it was that kind of emergency where the boat was landing and I didn't want it to get picked up by the inspectors. My relations with the Justice Department were so good that I could do that. So I did. Stahlman was supposed to be the narcotics officer, too. But he never gave a report on anything on narcotics that was going on -- or any commercial or trade activities.

*Q: This is your economic officer?*

BECKER: Yes. Never gave a report. My efforts resulted--in the investigation that was made very quickly by Melgar who found that several of his officers were involved in narcotics shipment. I did save Hyde. The shipment in Miami did have coke. Now, what happened is, after my tour of duty, I learned that Stahlman took credit about this narcotic episode which only Bridwell, Hyde, myself and the Justice Department and probably State knew about. I didn't care about that. But I am giving you one example which is an exception. He did not -- where they needed help in Honduras with commercial agricultural, other activities help or report on any activity when any one sought information I would be contacted. I don't know what he did, nor trust him, therefore I did not include him in the super-duper group.

Now, I had no knowledge about him before I arrived. I learned about him after I arrived, or from his colleagues and my staff.

*Q: Well, it sounds as though you had a staffing problem. If you had a DCM who had a problem, an economic officer who was not very supportive, and a secretary who had been a problem elsewhere, you did not get the support you were entitled.*

BECKER: That's based upon -- still, that's even based upon my own experience in my profession. If you don't have a good secretary, it's just unfortunate. I don't have to lay emphasis on that. You asked me the question. The emphasis is on what did I do? I went into the field, I was not in the office all the time. For example, the Cobana Honduran Banana Industry Company in the field who exported 1/4 of the exports, had a problem -- the attorneys for United Fruit -- came in to see me and it was part of the agrarian reform where they wanted to take certain land, and take certain cattle, and so forth. Sure, I could go out and fight the agrarian rule like...

*Q: Sanchez?*

BECKER: No, that was not my business to get involved in the internal affairs of one's country. But it involved a United States corporation. I met with Cesar Batres Melgar's advisor and ultimately happily resolved the problem. Once, I went to a very large meeting when the officials of the Honduran government gave out deeds to the Campesinos. It was important to be there, and say some words. I spoke at all these different occasions including all the military units. I recall inaugurating a low a middle income housing project in San Pedro Sula. A \$4 million AID project. Another AID project was ParaMedicaid and Nursing Program. I presented them with two checks one for \$35,000 as part of a \$3 million program and another for \$3,000. they have a state police set-up called FUSEP, that's very powerful, very good. They were like the military.

Before I left, I attended the cartographers' association meeting, for Central America -- they held a Tegucigalpa -- I spoke to them and participated in the meetings. This is typical of other meetings



or conferences. USIA sent down Charlie Byrd, the guitarist, and I entertained him. He was wonderful. We had a couple other similar events. We had official visitors. The Ambassador from Guatemala, Bestir, who entertained me when I first landed in Guatemala City En route to Honduras and others before my departure.

Don Bridwell came to me and said. "Look, we have a major project here. The Patronadas are working on it in the Chiluteca area. Can you do this? You have to do it in a hurry."

What happened was when the water receded the river -- I'm trying to think of the name of the river -- they were able to cross and buy their goods, or traffic to the other side. And when the river would rise it would cut off 12-14 villages in the Agua Calientes. So there was no transportation or communication. They couldn't go to market or trade. I said, "Sure, we'll go on ahead and do it." I didn't ask for orders, or writings, or anything else. Just went ahead and I talked to AID, and I said, "Look, we just need a few dollars for this bridge. We did it orally, Don did it. We did that bridge in a hurry. I went to the inauguration ceremony, and out of the clear blue sky they named it, Punta del Becker.

*Q: Oh, how wonderful.*

BECKER: that gives you some idea of the relationship that developed. Within our own embassy; 2, with respect to projects to help Honduras; 3, the friendship between the United States and friendship both in the press -- particularly -- military, and other areas. I laid a very good base of relationship. Ann was a party to my activities. But then Melgar was deposed by Policarpo Paz Garcia. He was the Chief of the Armed Forces. During my tenure, I thought Melgar was a good, fair honest man -- but that is the game of politics.

*Q: Was he deposed during the time you were there?*

BECKER: No, afterwards. The following year by the Consejo. I have been told basically within the military. One --when he ordered court-martial against the military officers on Narcotics. Second, the lingering image of the Horcones Massacre. Also an exception to the peaceful Honduras and there were political reasons that led to the coup.

**DAVID N. GREENLEE**  
**Desk Officer for Honduras**  
**Washington, DC (1977)**

*Ambassador Greenlee was born and raised in New York and educated at Yale University. After service in the Peace Corps in Bolivia and the US Army in Vietnam, he joined the Foreign Service in 1974. In the course of his career the ambassador served in Peru, Bolivia (three tours), Israel, Spain and Chile, as well as in the Department of State, where he was involved in Haitian and Egyptian affairs, and at the Pentagon, where he was Political Advisor. Three of his foreign tours were as Deputy Chief of Mission. He served as United States Ambassador to*

*Paraguay and Bolivia. Ambassador Greenlee was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

GREENLEE: I spent three months as an acting desk officer for Honduras. That was an interesting time because President Carter was organizing—or his administration was organizing—the Panama Canal Treaty signing ceremony.

It was also a time when Jimmy Carter decided that he wanted a new way to set goals and objectives for the foreign service-- for the embassies and the State Department. He had seen something that was submitted by some ambassador. I don't remember from what post. We saw at the operations center a copy of that with a note in the margin from Jimmy Carter. The note was directed to Cyrus Vance. Carter wrote, "Cy, I want one of these for each embassy." When I was the acting desk officer for Honduras, I was tasked to come up with goals and objectives for that country. I, frankly, didn't know much about how to communicate effectively with posts. Also, the assistant secretary, Terry Todman, was worried about the cost of phone calls. So I came up with goals and objectives for Embassy Tegucigalpa without even talking to the embassy. The embassy was confused about what was going on. But when they saw my product, which was washed through the system of Central American Affairs--the office director was Wade Matthews—they thought it was OK, with only a few changes. That project was educational. I started to realize that one should be very tightly connected with the post from Washington, and with Washington from the post, and that it was important to relate the two systems. It seems obvious, but in practice it's not so simple. In my Lima tour I had not had to speak directly with Washington very much. Others, higher up, did that.

**MARI-LUCI JARAMILLO**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1977-1980)**

*Mari-Luci Jaramillo was born in New Mexico. Jaramillo was educated at New Mexico Highlands University. She then joined the faculty at the University of New Mexico and worked her way up to becoming an associate dean, vice president, and an assistant to the president of UNM. Ms. Jaramillo served as ambassador to Honduras and worked at the Pentagon. Ms. Jaramillo was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin in 1987.*

JARAMILLO: It was very, very nice; people were just wonderful. So, we left. At that time you couldn't go to Honduras quickly. We had to spend a night in Houston and then the next day we had to go to Guatemala; stay in Guatemala that night and the following morning get to Honduras. So it was a long, long time for a person that was as nervous as I was to get on with it.

I had heard a lot, in a lot of indirect ways--nobody ever telling me directly, but in a lot of indirect ways--I had picked up that, number one, the media was going to eat me alive because I had no experience with the media; number two, the military weren't going to pay any attention to me because I was a woman. That boiled down to, I was going to be failure. And I had heard that

many, many times. Never directly, but a smart person putting two and two together; that was there.

But I knew a lot of things. I knew that I had studied like crazy during those three months and I knew Honduras well. Number two, I knew I was bicultural completely and I knew that Hondurans were going to understand me, and I knew that I was going to show them that I would be the best that I could possibly be. In every job I've always taken it like that: "I don't know much about it, but I'm going to do my very best." That's my motto.

That morning that we left Guatemala, we were on the plane, and that's a short little distance--a short little hop--I was so nervous. And there I was, with my navy blue dress, tugging on it, tugging on it, and tugging on it, and saying to Heri, "I should have worn my slacks."

*Q: You hadn't had time to buy a new wardrobe?*

JARAMILLO: No new clothes whatsoever. I was going with the clothes that I had. I had spent some money buying evening clothes because I'd owned no evening clothes. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, very few people own evening clothes. That's where I had spent some money, but daytime clothes, I hadn't. So we're getting close to Honduras, and we've landed and I can see this row of people and I can see somebody with a bouquet of flowers and I see a lot of military standing around at attention. The plane stops and I said to Heri, "You know, they told me that the media's going to eat me alive. Look at the media." Here are all these cameras and all these people, and the television cameras and the other cameras. They asked us to come out first. Everybody just stayed in their seats and applauded; the word had gotten around that the American ambassador was on the plane. Heri and I got down and I came down the steps, and everybody kind of rushed, taking pictures and stuff. I had met the DCM in Washington, so he came up to me and hugged me, and then his wife gave me a big bouquet of gladiolas, or roses, or something--big stemmed. So I was carrying this, and that was a very nice gesture because, you were carrying something that beautiful, kind of was very, very helpful; what do you do with your hands? You don't think of all these things. I always thought that that would be a good cue for us to tell women when they're going into their first job, that if you can hand them something that looks like a very courteous kind of thing, it's very helpful.

So I'm playing with this huge bouquet of flowers--long-stemmed flowers--and I start going down the row of people. It's the high officers from the embassy, and they're all the Americans that I'm talking to. I'm looking at them straight in the face and everybody smiled. I have a very easy smile so it was, you know, like everybody was smiling. When I got to the end there, then the Protocol Officer said that I had to go to the VIP room. I was being led to the VIP room and I thought: "God, I've never been in a VIP room, I wonder what a VIP room is? People are talking around me and I got in. Well, the media had all gone through another door and there were all these people from the media. So I walked into the room and I made eye contact with the majority, and I knew I was home. They all looked like me! [Laughter]

They all looked like me, you know. I looked at them, made eye contact--the kind of contact that you make with your cultural group.

*Q: That's a wonderful quote--"They all looked like me."*

JARAMILLO: I sat there, and I sat at a place where they told me to sit. I had thought of two or three things to say informally and I said my two or three things--

*Q: In Spanish.*

JARAMILLO: In Spanish; in Spanish immediately. And told them that we had a lot to do together and that, you know--whatever it was; I've forgotten. So, just very informally, very--my style. I decided that moment I was going to be me.

*Q: Good for you!*

JARAMILLO: I wasn't going to put on any airs or something; speak a certain way; I was just going to be me. So I sat down, and then the questions started. And the questions would come, and the questions would come, and we were doing fine. And then one asked me a question and I've forgotten what it was, but I didn't know the answer, and I said, "I don't know. I've been studying like crazy, but that's one that got away. I don't know, but," I said, "call me in the middle of next week and I'll have the answer ready for you." So that kind of ended it, you know, the picture-taking and all that stuff. I've always been very self-conscious that I don't photograph well. At that moment that fear was gone forever because there's no way that you can stand there and "pose". You just can't. You know, people are going to be taking pictures everywhere. I'd always been very self-conscious; that I'd make a wonderful study for somebody that was really mean with the caricatures. I just knew that I was going to be blasted in the newspapers. Oh, I had thought of all those things.

We got into the car and here I was in the back seat of a car with a guard and a driver. I'd never had any of these conveniences. I sat in the car and I asked again what their names were--the guard and the driver. Then I said, "What was the name of the man that asked me the question that I didn't know?" That was my first question to them.

*Q: Were you and your husband alone in this car with the guard and the driver?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: The DCM wasn't with you?*

JARAMILLO: No, wait a minute; it was the DCM and me; I think my husband and the DCM's wife were in the second car. I said, "What was the name of that reporter?" They told me the name and I immediately made a mental note of it, and I remembered what he looked like. I'm a teacher. You know, I work with 40 students and I can remember who asked the question.

We drove off with the flags and all this stuff, up to the residence, and we came in and I was introduced to everybody there. I kept that in the back of my mind, that young man who had asked the question. Well, they had prepared lunch and I was taken for a tour. It was the biggest house I had ever been in. When it over I didn't know if it was two levels or three levels, and it

seemed to me I had seen so many bathrooms I couldn't believe it. Later on, Heri and I went around and counted them, and there were eleven.

*Q: Eleven bathrooms in the residence? Good heavens!*

JARAMILLO: So we knew that it was going to be different; a beautiful garden and everything. We immediately started in. They asked if I wanted to take the afternoon off to unpack, and I said, "No. I want to go meet people." So we talked to all the residence staff and then I went off and I met people informally. They had planned a big thing at a certain hour the following day. So, I got into it immediately.

*Q: Didn't you, though? Was there some sort of a function that evening? Within the embassy?*

JARAMILLO: I don't think so. I think that it was lunch and that they had planned to leave the evening for us to rest. Well, I didn't use the afternoon to rest, and then the evening is when we did whatever little unpacking we needed to do. It was the personal one, because the other one--there were people doing it. I kept helping them and Heri kept pulling me back. I would say, "I've been a servant. I know what they're feeling like, so I do it, too," you know. So, immediately--this empathy--those servants became my family. We just had this wonderful thing of those people doing everything to please, because we became a family instantly. So then I already had the support built into the residence. Then I went to my big meeting with the total embassy staff in a garden and I got up and--

*Q: This is the next day?*

JARAMILLO: The next morning. I had prepared something to say, and I said that I wanted to say it in both languages because I knew that there were some Hondurans in the group that spoke little English. So I addressed the group in Spanish and so the Hondurans came aboard!

*Q: Sure!*

JARAMILLO: Then I told them in English what I thought that we needed to do together and I said that I was team player and that I already had learned enough in Washington to know that the ambassador could do sort of what the ambassador pleased, but that they needed to know I wasn't going to be that kind of ambassador. I was a team player and in order for me to look good they had to look good.

*Q: You're so right.*

JARAMILLO: I heard lots of stuff later on. Of course, the first two days they didn't tell me, but later on, they said, "God, it was just the right thing to say."

*Q: They must have gone home so relieved.*

JARAMILLO: Yes. They had had a hard time at the Embassy. There had been problems; that's why they wanted me to go. There was a lot of friction and a lot of unrest. Due to some difficulty

before the former ambassador left, and then the long period of time without an ambassador, tension seemed to be high. It was thought that if the ambassador came on the scene, the tension would dissipate quickly.

*Q: Had they been without an ambassador for quite a while?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, they had a DCM for quite a while. The other thing is--another skill that I have as a teacher is, I remember people's names. I was introduced to people and then the next morning I'd walk in and address them by their names. See, those are skills I had from working with large groups of strangers all the time. So quickly I learned their names; I knew something about their families; I knew they had some problems and they were all just great people with me.

*Q: What did you do--sit down with file cards, to remember them?*

JARAMILLO: No, I just remembered where they were sitting, or where they were standing, or what they were wearing. I do my own game.

*Q: Well, who told you they had problems?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, that quickly came through. Whoever got close to me, (end of tape)-

I got involved. If there was a sick child, I got on the phone and called directly: "I heard that so-and-so was sick. How is he? How's he getting along today? I'd do the kind of personal things that I think this is about. Not only did I do that with the embassy staff; I did it a lot with them at the beginning, but as I paid my courtesy calls, the same thing with the others. To me, it was just an extension of my campus. I already had all these people skills on campus and all I was doing was using them in another setting. These are the same skills that I've had since I was a first-grade schoolteacher. I learn people's names; I learn what troubles them; I learn what pleases them. I personalize everything. I thank people for good work. I frown a lot if you don't do good work; you know if I'm pleased. I'm an easy person to read. I was very complimentary of good work and people knew it, you know.

I went to work at 7 and 7:30 in the morning. People were shocked. Ambassadors are supposed to show up at 9 or 10, or whatever. I showed up; so pretty soon everybody else was showing up at 7:30--never said a word. That's just my work style. I took many brown bags to the ambassadorial papers at lunch. [Laughs] And I worked right through the noon hour, just like I do on campus.

*Q: Didn't change your style.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, no; oh, no. I did exactly what I had always done; be a people person and cram my day with work; get as much work done as I possibly could. Then I started, you know, doing a lot more entertaining at noon. But at the beginning, I used that to set my tone. My tone was: work in a friendly atmosphere. That's what I wanted; productive work, but in a human environment; in a place where people want to work and work hard, and they're going to get a pat on the shoulder when they do good work. And everybody was just wonderful with me. We could go into each single division and people just stand out, people that went that extra mile to get

work done. Then with the Hondurans, it was the same thing. In my courtesy calls, I got to know people. I was a novelty; I was the first American Hispanic woman that had gone any place, so they felt that they were honored. Many of them told me, "What an honor it is for us to have the first woman Ambassador." So that worked nice for me, too; you see?

*Q: How nice!*

JARAMILLO: I'm telling you; I just have a lot of good luck. I quickly made friends with everybody across the board--the military, the church people, the business people, the campesinos, the media. By the way, the media, I guess, became my real friends. They were just wonderful. I know that many times I didn't say things as eloquently as it came out in the newspaper.

*Q: Really?*

JARAMILLO: I know that. Oh, they were wonderful. And on television, they learned that I take horrible side pictures, and that if I look into the camera, they would capture it--it was obvious to me; it was just obvious.

*Q: Went out of the way to shoot your best angle.*

JARAMILLO: They went out of their way to be nice, and to ask me questions that I could really expand, 'cause if they had wanted to, they could have asked me all kinds of questions that I wouldn't have known a thing about. So, we became friends instantly. It was just wonderful.

*Q: It's a real success story.*

JARAMILLO: And then what I decided to do was really get to know the country as quickly as I could; so that I was out constantly, just constantly--put in a day in the embassy, make sure that everything is going well; go on another day to some trip. I have this excessive energy; I never get tired. So I can start my day at 5:00 in the morning and I can end it at midnight and start at 5 the next day, and end it at midnight. I never get tired, especially if I'm enjoying my work, and I loved every minute of it, every minute of it. It was just wonderful.

*Q: And that enthusiasm, of course, is very infectious.*

JARAMILLO: It certainly is. If you're happy, people around you are happy. You know, if the boss sets the tone. . . I remember the Marines. I always was wonderful friends with the Marines. And so many of them said, "Gees, this is my second embassy, or my third embassy, and this is the first ambassador that knows me by name. This is the first ambassador that says 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon,'" every time I went by them. You know, it's common courtesy; just common courtesy. I think my greatest skill is: I am a people person. I think that's what it boils down to. So then all the technical stuff is easy because you can learn that quickly; you just read and ask questions and you're quickly boned up on it. But if you don't have the personality where you relax people, put them at ease, where people are willing to work with you as a member of a team, then you've got problems; I don't care how smart you are. And if you combine native

intelligence--that you can read and understand the technical stuff--and set it in that situation, you're on.

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*Q: Now the relations between the U.S. and Honduras at that time were quite good, weren't they?*

JARAMILLO: Very good. The relations were good. I'm sure that we had a great interest in them becoming a democracy, and that hadn't happened; they hadn't had elections for nine years. They'd been under the military rule for nine years. But quote, "we were friends."

*Q: Yes, well, we're their biggest customer.*

JARAMILLO: And vice-versa. They buy everything from us. And so, yes, we weren't fighting in any way. We were also trying to encourage them to settle their border affair with Salvador; they were still fighting over the border after the war.

*Q: After that soccer war?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. The relationship wasn't very good there, so there was another thing that was going on.

*Q: You, as an ambassador, had the right to select your own secretary and your own Deputy Chief of Mission. I gather that you kept the Deputy Chief who was there at the post.*

JARAMILLO: I did for a while, until there was the natural rotation.

*Q: I see.*

JARAMILLO: I believe very, very strongly that you don't yank people out right and left. I had no way of knowing if the person would turn out to be an outstanding one or not. The same thing happened for the secretary. The secretary was very concerned that she was toward her last few years before retirement and that I would come in and quote, "bring my own secretary." That was a thing that I did immediately upon arriving: I said I was not bringing any of my own personnel; that they were the professionals and I expected their guidance; that together we would make it. As it turned out, the secretary and I became such good friends. She retired and we remained very, very good friends. The DCM stayed until his normal turnover, at what time he was going to change posts, and that's, when I selected Fernando [Fred Rondon].

I went to Washington and studied a lot of vitae and talked to a lot of people, and a lot of people tried to politic and tell me how great this one was and how great the other one was. I thought, if it was just because I needed a person there, I would have tried to talk the other one to stay, although I don't think I could have because the wife wanted a change also. But I was after a certain type. I was after a type that believed in hard work, like I do, and that was completely bilingual and that was completely bicultural; that's what I was looking for. Because I felt that that



way, whatever I couldn't do, that person would do; whatever that person couldn't do, I could continue. That way, we were, again, getting two for the price of one.

*Q: You looked toward a symbiotic relationship with your DCM, didn't you?*

JARAMILLO: That's right. And I did look around and see if somebody would suggest a woman that would be available. I had thought it would be marvelous if the ambassador and the DCM would be women. But, lo and behold! Not one was surfaced in the process that we were using to surface them, who was free and all that. Not one. And I don't know if it was because of the language that I had stipulated, because I think since Latin America hadn't been paid attention to by women, I think Jean [Wilkowski] is the only one that had been around Latin America at that level, and at that time Sally Shelton had gone down to the other post.

*Q: Hadn't she been nominated to go to El Salvador and it fell through? She was serving in Washington, I believe, at this time; because she didn't go out to her post until 1979.*

JARAMILLO: Til later, much later.

*Q: You were only the third woman ever to be named [ambassador] to a Latin American country, you know. There was Clare Boothe Luce, named to Brazil--didn't go; Sally Shelton, named to El Salvador--didn't go; and yourself. There had been one in the Caribbean, but that's all. Women have not been in Central or South America, and I don't see why not.*

JARAMILLO: I don't either, because they're naturals for the way women work. Women have this observation power, this nurturing, this people-relationship that's, "Let's talk it out instead of fight it." You know, these kinds of skills that they have. They're natural for a setting where that's the way they operate, too. Just a natural setting for women. I don't know--they've had so many military all over that maybe that that was the feeling that they're not going to pay attention to women. Like I tell you, the military in a Latin country--it's up to us.

*Q: Yes, absolutely. How big was your staff?*

JARAMILLO: I think we had about 200 American families, and there were about a little bit better than 200 Hondurans in the Embassy. Then we had a large contingency of Peace Corps at the time; it was the second largest in Latin America. I've forgotten the exact numbers, but a large Peace Corps group. And then I think we had--gee, I'm trying to say about 4,000--and that sounds about right--of just Americans in business or in church-related groups, or whatever they were doing in the country; small businesses, big businesses, the banana companies, and like that.

*Q: What about AID?*

JARAMILLO: AID--

*Q: Pretty good size, was it?*

JARAMILLO: Pretty good size, pretty good size; doing lots of exciting work in small technology. With Carter, there was such an emphasis that the money had to go to the poorest of the poor, and so there was a lot of emphasis that money not stay at ministry levels but that it really work directly.

*Q: Well, you had a very good size mission, didn't you?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. Now it must look like peanuts, because now I understand it's grown by leaps and bounds. But the military part of it is what has grown. The military group at the time I was there was 11; by the time I left it was seven.

*Q: Really? Military group, 11 when you came?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, and seven when I left. We were working toward democratization of society. [Laughs]

*Q: The military group within the embassy?*

JARAMILLO: Ah-huh. The Americans. Wonderful people, both in the Air Force and the Army. We became very close friends. I still think that that's the way I'm connected with the military now, for speaking engagements.

*Q: Oh, really?*

JARAMILLO: I'm telling you, I lucked out everywhere. [Hearty laugh]

*Q: I think there's more to it than that. Now, how about the staff and country team meetings? You're a very organized person, so I'm sure these were very well organized, too.*

JARAMILLO: It was a lot of fun. You had your country team meetings, and I guess the way it had been handled had always been probably very bureaucratic, with the ambassador being the center of attention and everybody kind of catering to the ambassador. I came in with my team concept, okay? We all have to know what the other is doing. And we have to use this time to share problems, to see how we can help each other with the problems. We all have to anticipate for each other. Do you anticipate a problem in your area that we need to know about so we can be supportive? So it became a very close group of sharing time. I don't think that the word sharing had been used very much. Within the month that I was there I heard them say, "I think we should share. " And I would just--inside--oh, it made me feel so good, because I kept saying, "This is the time for us to share, both problems and things that are going very well, to see if we can pick up skills from somebody else that we could use."

It became a time of seeing where we had been, and anticipating, and then when somebody was writing a proposal or something, if we all had ideas for input, and those kinds of things. It was at that time that I would make assignments, if things had come into my desk that needed taking care of; then I would assign and ask people to write things. Toward the middle of my stay there, people were volunteering right and left to do things.

*Q: Were they?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. I would just mention that it would nice if we had--and somebody would say, "Well, I'll take a crack at that." It was a real good team effort. People really worked just great.

Oh, let me tell you one thing that I'm sure has never happened at another one, maybe where there's women. I found out when their birthdays were, and if their birthdays were on country team meeting day, we sang "Happy Birthday." [Both laugh] The first day we did that, I could just see one eye looking at another one: "Oh, God! Now we have to sing 'Happy Birthday.'" I did all these kinds of things that were just fun things; just break the ice; that we don't take ourselves so seriously. I know it's serious work, but we don't need to act as though we're God about it.

*Q: Did you find that the Foreign Service Officers are a pretty serious group? Take themselves seriously?*

JARAMILLO: At two levels. You have them taking themselves very seriously at their work place, and being a heck of a lot of fun at the informal, social level. And what I was trying to do was trying to get some of that fun that I'd see in them at the social level, and the sense of humor, over here too.

*Q: After a while, did the "Happy Birthday" singing go off all right? [Laughter]*

JARAMILLO: Oh yes; oh yes.

*Q: Did you find many parallels between--well, obviously, you operated the same way you had at home, but did you find many parallels between your staff at the embassy and the staff at a university?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, except that at the embassy there's always this feeling of the hierarchy. This one's in command and we all do things to please. And in the university, there's no such respect. [Laughter] Everybody's kind of even. This whole feeling of, "That person could ruin my career" is very prevalent in the Foreign Service, because they get evaluated with adjectives. And in the university, you get evaluated on performance-based criteria. You brought in so much money with a research project; so many students said you were an excellent teacher; you've written so many articles. In the Foreign Service, I really feel sorry for them, because they're really--at least back then--at the whim and fancy; if they got a person that cared about human beings, their work would show. If it didn't, I don't know what would happen to those people.

*Q: That's right.*

JARAMILLO: So, I kind of thought that that wasn't a fair system, because I kept thinking, to evaluate them you have to get a dictionary that's full of adjectives because you've got to have an adjective that's higher than the one from last time in order to make it. Now what I don't know is what happens when it gets into Washington and there are groups looking at it. Maybe that's

where the fairness comes. But in the written one, I always felt that I was not doing justice. I would have liked to have seen a chart where I could use very specific criteria that they were really doing superior work. In a narrative, it gets lost because it looks like you've inflated it.

*Q: Yes. But if you don't inflate it--*

JARAMILLO: Then they don't get anywhere.

*Q: That's right.*

JARAMILLO: I didn't think the system was quite right and I would have loved to have stayed in there and made a little difference, because I felt very strongly that if you got a person that--say, today didn't feel all that great about writing all these great adjectives, maybe you wouldn't get even a promotion. Now that's not fair, because maybe that person had been working very hard. Or if you had any kind of a disagreement with your ambassador, and why shouldn't you? The ambassador is just like anybody else. And yet, that person was going to be able to write something that would stay in your record. If I had gotten to stay, which I had thought I was--if I had gotten to stay, it was one of the things that I wanted to work on. I thought it really needed some serious adjusting. The information that came down, that from now on not everybody that came in should aspire to be an ambassador, but only a small percentage; something like if you join the Army, only five can be generals, I always felt that for that system it was going to be even more necessary to have a different kind of evaluation. Not one that was based so much on "Who do you know?" "Who went with you to Foreign Service School?" That put Foreign Service officers where you played games of calling friends: "Could you put in a good word for me?" And I thought that's degrading. These are professionals. They should be judged on the work that they do. But that's part of the system. I don't know if the system has changed, and I also can't talk with any authority on what happens after those original papers came in. But those original papers I didn't like. I worked very hard at them because the people that worked for me were very talented. But I didn't think it was fair, because if there were people that weren't as talented some place else, and somebody else could think of other adjectives, then that wasn't fair.

*Q: Yes, indeed. You have said already that you got along very well with the president [of Honduras], and I have been told that you had an unusually warm relationship with him; that he thought the world of you, and thought of you "as one of us"--not as "the American from over there."*

JARAMILLO: [Laughter] "The American snooper." Now I've got to clarify that I had three different relationships during those three years. When I went, President Melgar Castro was there, and we became very close friends, very close friends. He had aspirations, it appeared, of being something like a populist president; that maybe he would leave the military and run as a civilian, and they quickly put a stop to that, and they "disappeared" him and he got lost wherever military generals that have individual aspirations disappear to. And then we had a *junta* come. And the *junta* were three people: one from the Air Force, one from the Army, and one from the Police. And I had a marvelous working relationship with the three gentlemen there. And then that one got dissolved and the President that I think you're alluding to came aboard. I had wonderful relationships with four people.

*Q: Four people. Was President Paz the one?*

JARAMILLO: Paz was the one that was there the last. And we really had a wonderful relationship.

*Q: That was Melgar Castro you were talking about, who met you the first day?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, Melgar Castro.

*Q: I'm glad you cleared that up.*

JARAMILLO: And Paz--we just became good friends. President Paz was not highly educated, very obvious from a rural background. He had been a war hero in the Salvadoran/Honduras--had been a big war hero that all the people admired and loved because of that. Okay.

*Q: That was the El Salvador war, you say, he was a hero?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. He was a hero. And because we became good friends, he trusted me. He saw me, well again, as the cultural kind of bonding. You're not seeing citizenship; you're seeing identical cultures. You are seeing that you have the same belief patterns, core values, etc. Because I come from a poor background, that quickly came through, and so they could identify with me. Then, at the other extreme, because I'm educated, I can quickly identify with the rich, because now I know what the rich value. So I was very fortunate that way. President Paz and I met probably many more times than an ambassador and a president of a country will meet, simply because we were friends. I would call him at any time that I needed to speak to him and he'd come visit me, and he would call me any time he needed to visit with me, and we would meet. Sometimes it would be on a daily basis.

*Q: Terrific for the U.S. Government that you had that relationship.*

JARAMILLO: The U.S. Government had information about the rest of Central America through my embassy.

*Q: Oh, I'm sure.*

JARAMILLO: So that was just a real good feeling; especially that I remember some people hinting, "The military aren't going to pay any attention to you, lady." Ha ha.

*Q: Yes, yes. (Laughing) That's what they all said.*

JARAMILLO: A very special relationship. I think he really loved Honduras. I think that maybe if he had been an educated man, he would have done things differently, but I really believe he loved it. With all his problems, his personal problems, he really cared. To think that they were willing to give up power without bloodshed is something that, I think, should go down in the

history books. I feel very strongly that they could have said, "We will not give up power and we'll fight these civilians to the bloody end. They've done it in other places.

*Q: I know. Was he one of the Junta?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: He was the Army one?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, he was the Army one.

*Q: That is amazing, especially for that part of the world, where there is such a history of turmoil.*

JARAMILLO: That's right. I think it's just one of the success stories of the century, to think that you helped convince him that this was the best way that it should be done.

*Q: Yes. And it certainly saved the U.S.'s skin, didn't it?*

JARAMILLO: We landed up with a friend. We wouldn't have had that friend. It would have been Costa Rica alone. And Costa Rica--if you've been into the papers, you know that they "misbehaved." It really was Honduras that was left where there wasn't that kind of problem and that we could go in there. I didn't realize we were going to go in the way we are. Maybe I would have done things differently, but at the time I really believed that we wanted that country to become a democracy, if the military would give up some of their power.

*Q: What about the other officials of the government--the cabinet and the legislature?*

JARAMILLO: Oh yes. I can honestly say that I don't know of a Minister during the three years, and there were a lot of changes, who weren't close personal friends.

*Q: Really?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. And that's across the board--that's Housing, that's Education, that's Foreign Relations. I have no problems making friends. It's just par for the course; I just make friends everywhere I go. That they happen to occupy high level positions, in my way of thinking, didn't make any difference. It did make a lot of difference for my work, but in my personal relations, it didn't; it was the same kind of friendship that I cultivated with the cook and the gardeners.

*Q: Yes, yes. Did the same sort of feeling apply to your other diplomatic colleagues from other embassies?*

JARAMILLO: Other embassies? You mean--

*Q: The British Embassy, the French Embassy?*

JARAMILLO: No. There was a lot of stuff told to me, but "don't tell the other ambassadors. " I had lots of information that was related to me, not to tell the diplomatic corps.

*Q: What about the rest of the corps? Were they aware that you were so much on the inside? They must have been aware that you were on the inside.*

JARAMILLO: No, this lady--I did--

*Q: You were very discreet, I'm sure. But--*

JARAMILLO: Oh, very discreet. They would insinuate that I knew more than they did. So when something would come up, they'd say, "Oh, Mari-Luci, you certainly know about this. The Americans always know it. " And I'd say, "Know what? Why would we know more than you guys?" You know, and kind of laugh it off. But yes, I did. I had all of the info before it happened, of everything that ever took place in the country. I had advance notice of everything that ever happened at high levels. And sometimes I had to fake naiveness in public places so that I wouldn't give myself away; that I had had privileged information for days on end before something had happened.

*Q: Were the others jealous of you? Or did you have good relations with other ambassadors?*

JARAMILLO: No, all the ambassadors were my friends, too.

*Q: They were?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. Most of them loved to dance. [Laughs]

*Q: Oh, really?*

JARAMILLO: The mean woman ambassador was fun. Yes, we had a real good relationship with all the other countries. You see, we weren't mad at anybody, okay? We weren't doing anything. There were a couple of countries that had their nose out of joint a little bit. But then after we talked the first time they came in, and we said, "Look, it doesn't have anything to do with what's been happening there. You and I have a job to do here," that was the end of that. The only one where I got uncomfortable was when we broke relationships with Taiwan. The Taiwanese Ambassador and I were especially close friends, and when we broke off relations, we weren't supposed to do any formal kinds of interchanges. We constantly did nice things for each other and so it was-

*Q: You couldn't invite him officially then?*

JARAMILLO: Officially, I couldn't, but he could.

*Q: He could?*

JARAMILLO: He could. He was a very nice man and that was a little bit hard because I was supposed to invite everybody else and leave him out, in a tiny little country, when he was so good to me on a personal level and loved this country [USA]. His children and his wife were in this country [USA].

*Q: What did you do? How did you get around it?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, I had to do a lot of fancy stepping around it. I had to do a lot of "Mr. Ambassador, this is personal. This is not because I'm the ambassador of the United States. This is Mari-Luci, your friend." And it was very hard.

*Q: And if he invited you, could you go?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes.

*Q: Oh, you could go?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes.

*Q: Well, now isn't that crazy? What kind of a policy is that?*

JARAMILLO: It says that you can't--You can't do things with him. *You* can't invite him to the 4th of July celebration in your home.

*Q: What about Iron Curtain diplomats?*

JARAMILLO: We didn't have any.

*Q: No Iron Curtain? No Russians?*

JARAMILLO: No. That's in Costa Rica.

*Q: No Chinese?*

JARAMILLO: You see, we just had Taiwan.

*Q: Well, that was a problem then you didn't have.*

JARAMILLO: No.

*Q: And I know, from what I've been told, that you had friends across the board with local people--all walks of life.*

JARAMILLO: All walks of life; all social classes.

*Q: All over the country.*



JARAMILLO: All over the country. Rural (end of tape)-- We were told many times that no government officials had ever been there.

*Q: Really?*

JARAMILLO: That was just a fabulous trip. It was arranged by people in the embassy-- Hondurans in the embassy--that had contacts in these places. The owner of the television stations had become my friend, and so then he set it up. So, they were in places that we stopped; they televised.

*Q: What an experience!*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. It was seven days in a Jeep. People would say, "Oh, Mari-Luci, there are no hotels in that area." And I'd say, "But they're beautiful homes." "But you don't know anybody." "No, but I know people that know people and had already had it set up." It was just wonderful.

*Q: So you just know that country in and out, don't you?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. In and out.

*Q: Did your husband go with you on those trips?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes; oh, yes. He went on every single trip that--this kind of a trip. Once in a while he didn't get to go; when, let's say, we were going to go by plane someplace, and in an official party there wasn't space for him. But just about any time--especially if we were driving, he always went.

*Q: Wonderful. Was encouraging the country to have democratic elections the major problem you had when you were there?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, that was one of my goals; to encourage them to have free elections--really free elections. And that meant, encourage them to release power. And in sociology, you learn that if group A has power, they never turn it over voluntarily to group B. And I kept telling myself, "There goes Sociology 101. " How am I ever going to do this?" But it happened.

*Q: Just by force of talking to them and explaining?*

JARAMILLO: Just by mediation, of just talking out loud, consequences; talking out loud what it would mean to the country, talking the virtues of a democracy; talking what happens to people that participate in their government--all that good stuff that we learned in elementary school.

*Q: And they don't have that same background to draw on; so you had to do a lot of convincing.*

JARAMILLO: A lot of convincing. And you can't do it in formal ways; you can't do it in lectures. You have to take advantage of every opportune moment; sometimes together, sometimes separately. At cocktail parties, you would drop a hint to one and you drop something else to another; and then you pray like hell that those two talk to each other and they form a kernel of an idea. So that it's not obvious. I know that, certainly, I could have chosen to be very obvious so I'd get a lot of public credit for it. I chose not to. I played a role behind the scenes that only a few Americans know my role. I didn't think that I needed that adulation. "Oh, my God! She's brought us democracy!" I think that that's one of the ways that this country gets that reputation of having so many damn ugly Americans out there; that we want to take credit for what we did. I think we go to serve our government, and we should hide in the woodwork. You do your thing without people knowing.

Like I said a while ago, I had to pretend I was naive. Surely it would have been good for my ego when all these ambassadors are standing around saying, "I wonder what's going to happen," and I'd say, "Three days ago I found out what was going to happen." You don't do that. You don't do that; you don't need that. Where you get your rewards is in knowing that you did a fine job. That's where you get your rewards. But if you're going to send people as ambassadors that need stroking, that's bad, that's bad. You always have to be in the limelight; everybody has to be asking for permission. I think that is wrong, just terribly wrong because then that creates that whole thing of--this horrible hierarchy, as opposed to a team. Then you've got it all broken down to this one can't talk to that one and that one can't talk to that one. Listen, if we all knew what we were doing, we should each of us take advantage of dropping those hints, then regrouping: "Where did you drop a hint?" "Where did you drop a hint?" And the work gets done. So if I had to do it over again, I'd choose the same strategies.

*Q: Did you find that the Carter administration's emphasis on human rights was a plus for you?*

JARAMILLO: I think that that, along with my good luck, that is the *bottom line*.

*Q: Really?*

JARAMILLO: Can you imagine going into the hinterland in some place where you're with campesinos--these rural people that don't have anything, and you're out there in the middle with these people that have nothing in the world; have no home, have *nothing*--maybe a little shack to keep out of the weather--and they're standing there with the American ambassador in the middle of the field, talking about human rights, *their* human rights.

*Q: Yes. And that they're just as important as your human rights.*

JARAMILLO: That's right, that's right. And where would they have gotten it? They got it from Carter; that's where they got it from. So it was a perfect time. I know when I came back I heard things like, "President Carter wasn't a very good president," and I said, "Listen, I've been out of the country; I don't know what's happened here, but let me tell you, he was wonderful where I was at as a world leader." Oh, just fabulous, just fabulous." Because people were saying, "There's dignity to the person, and everybody should be working toward that. " So that was good.

*Q: Do you want to talk a little bit about the other problems in the country? It's such an economically depressed--*

JARAMILLO: The biggest problem is the horrible poverty; that's the number one, okay? That undergirds everything. Then that means that there is poor health, that there is poor education, poor housing. Everything is because of the poverty.

And so it's a vicious cycle. What we were trying to do, with small appropriate technology, was work with the people where they were, to help try to stop the mass migrations to the cities where the skill-less peasants get into the city and have nothing. We were trying to encourage them to stay where they were, because now they had some skills and they had access to simple tools so that they could remain there. The next thing that we were trying to do was to bring in something that would bring in money. You know, the small, cottage-kinds of industries, so that, again, to encourage them to stay there, but with a higher quality of life. The quality of life is so poor, and yet if they move to the city, and they have no job and no place to live, it gets even worse. Then they become displaced people.

So, the problem of poverty, of low education, of poor sanitation--well, it's the third poorest country in Latin America; so you know what that means. I think another problem has been that there's little history of people helping themselves. So that as a consequence, with the turnover of governments that they have had, always by strong-arm, people believe that the government should do these things. And then the government doesn't do it because the government can only get [resources] if people are producing, and if the masses are not producing, then there's no money. I think the masses of the people think the government should do it, and they don't think, "If we worked, and if we paid taxes, and if this happened; that there's all this that needs to take place before we get there."

*Q: It's a massive education program, isn't it?*

JARAMILLO: Tremendous.

*Q: So you see, you were just right for the job.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, listen, for education, it's--and right now, we're not paying attention to education and I can't believe it, because education is going to be the key. If you have education, so that you're going to have good health and some skills and some knowledge, and something about participatory democracy, and then you bring in cottage industries and small industries so that they can earn some money, it's going to turn it around. No one will become a Communist if they're not hungry, if they have a home.

*Q: Economics leads politics, doesn't it?*

JARAMILLO: Sure, and you cannot raise the economic level of the country if you haven't educated the people; and you can't educate the people if they're hungry; and you can't stifle hunger if the water is dirty. So it's just this vicious cycle. It has to be big infusions of lots of hard work on the part of a lot of people, especially a democracy like us.

*Q: Yes.*

JARAMILLO: I don't think we're going to get any democracies by force. I think we get democracies by modeling behavior, and I think if we go in and set up democracies, those democracies are doomed for failure. Democracies have to come from grassroots; because they believe in it.

I think another one of the big problems was their slow land agrarian reform; although I must admit that I think one of the reasons why they didn't have the peasant uprisings in large numbers is because at least they had a movement toward it; at least they had built some of these communities where people had houses and something to work on. But that is a problem, again, individuals owning everything. You have somebody owning the mountain and the valley and the stream. "People say, "My God, they're burning the mountains. Don't they know any better?" No. They don't know any better. They're hungry and they don't have any tools. How else do you plant, unless you slash and burn?

*Q: Ends up like Haiti.*

JARAMILLO: Again, it's a vicious cycle. But I think land reform was needed, faster and more efficient, but they were moving. There was movement there that there wasn't in El Salvador. And I think that makes the difference.

So many years of depending on the single crop to bring in their money from the outside. They have to have a diversified economy. One of the ministers there had been educated in the States and was really trying to diversify their economy. Even if they had to bring in some of the stuff that they produced before, they need to produce things that would bring in money. I think that needs to be done.

One thing that I think is a problem, but I don't know what to do about it; I'm not enough of an economist to know; and that is the nationalistic tendency that they must control everything. Therefore, sometimes foreign capital doesn't come in in large enough quantities. I don't know how that's taken care of, but I do know if they insist on 51% ownership, then maybe somebody doesn't want to bring in 49, but they would be willing to bring in 51 if they were going to control it, and they [the country] would have gotten 49. And I don't know how that balances out. As I talked to people that were looking to invest, they'd say, "Yes, we want to invest, but they control everything." So they were afraid. I don't know how it works out, but I know that I thought that was a problem.

I think problems of all those countries, and Honduras isn't singled out for this, is: one is a brain-drain. If they get educated, they find a way to move some place else. The other one is the money drain. The money that comes to Miami; that money should be put into businesses and bettering things in Honduras. Again, that's a massive problem: If you don't have faith in your government and in your country by putting in your money, then the economy doesn't grow.

*Q: You mean, people invested in Miami in U.S. banks?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes; oh, yes. I know a lot of money was coming to the States. I encouraged a lot that they put money in their own country. The rich have to show faith in their country. Why should the poor have faith in their country if the rich don't? And you model that behavior. I thought that was another of the large problems. Then they have all the small problems that all the rest of us have.

*Q: Boy, that's a plateful, isn't it? Did you have many problems with drugs--drug trafficking--when you were there?*

JARAMILLO: There were about four or five incidents; and it was very interesting. There were two ugly incidents within the country where they thought that it was because of drug dealings. There had been an awful murder, where they'd buried some people and just an awful kind of thing. I don't remember; it was two or three dead, but it was something--kind of a drug thing. They weren't using drugs in the country, but they had started using Honduran ships. Some Hondurans were willing to rent their ships to carry the drugs, and then the Hondurans would be caught with their flag on a boat that didn't have anything to do with Hondurans--or very little--you know, there'd be a few of them involved. So, that was the one incident where there was the ugly torturing and burying of somebody with a fight; and then the use of two or three boats. Then we had a plane that came in from the United States that landed there that was involved in drugs. And then we had one of the big drugs guys--in fact, every once in a while I read his name in the paper--who was Honduran by birth, but has lived all over, and is into the big Mafia scene. People had pointed out his home to me in Honduras--a beautiful home--and had said, "Now there's a drug person." Then when there was this other killing and stuff, he disappeared, and they said he had disappeared--I've forgotten where--but there was a connection with that. But he's an individual that is connected.

*Q: Moves all over.*

JARAMILLO: Yes. I didn't feel at the time that there was the horrible drug problems that you were hearing in other countries, but there was the beginning of it; the beginning of the temptation of making money; making money.

*Q: Did you have a narcotics agent there?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. And then, we had a group that were in Costa Rica who kept coming. We were able to get that going all the way to Interpol, to really look into the drug situation in large ways. But there was starting to be movement; there was starting to--easy money. But they weren't growing huge fields of this and processing it; not yet. I doubt it. Even less now; I imagine that with many more Americans probably it would even be worse. But that was--when you heard what stuff was going on in other countries--

*Q: Oh, I know; it can be a dreadful, terrible problem. Where did you put most of your emphasis? In the economic section? Political? Commercial? USIS?*

JARAMILLO: I would say, if I had to prioritize it--I tried to be all over the place--but if I had to prioritize it, I would say number one was political; number two probably was economic development, because I was trying to get American companies in; number three probably was AID--all the projects--very supportive of the projects and trying to get the funds, and those kinds of things. Probably next would be USIS--doing the kinds of things with *English As A Second Language* and cultural centers. Those are more the representational as opposed to solid thinking and going after contracts for Americans and that kind of stuff. Probably in that order.

*Q: How was your administrative section?*

JARAMILLO: I had a good one. I had a good officer, who knew where every penny was, and cared about where the money was. Very few people ever, ever in any way hinted that, "God, he wasn't the greatest." I was very fortunate because the whole section ran nicely. We had problems there and things taking forever when we'd order something from the States; but he would work at it, and work at it, and try to make sure that he found out what dock they were sitting on now--just great. Good section.

*Q: That's good to hear. Did you feel you got enough guidance from the Department? Or did you feel you were on your own running this show?*

JARAMILLO: I don't know. When we say "The Department," that makes it very hard for me to focus, but that there were people within that cared about what I was doing, yes. I don't know if those people just happened--that I met them at the beginning, and so then we established a personal relationship, but I knew there were people that cared about my work, that cared about me, even at the highest levels. I know that Vance--I got information that he had asked a couple of times. And he told me at my last session with him that if ever I needed him directly, to use a back channel immediately. I had that feeling that he cared about me as a human being, and I wasn't just one of thousands, but that there was somebody who cared. It's very difficult for me to toot my horn, talking about myself like this drives me nuts.

*Q: Yes. I can imagine.*

JARAMILLO: I knew no one to tell, "I'm doing okay," or "I'm not doing okay. It was my people in the embassy that told their counterparts; the word got out, and by the time I'd get to the State Department, they'd say, "Hey, I hear you're really doing a terrific job." And I'd say, "Well, I'm glad to hear that. Who told you that?" It was the officers that were sending out word to their colleagues, like probably the economic officer told the other one, "We lucked out. We got one that can read." [Laughs] I felt that they were doing that, and so because of their connections, too, there were other people that were interested. In the State Department, I always felt that somebody cared about us in the different sections.

*Q: And you felt you got enough guidance?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: You had a good desk officer, did you?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: Did you have very many people coming through? Any CODELs? VIPS?*

JARAMILLO: At the beginning of the time, I was told that a Congressman hadn't been there in I don't know how many years, and I wouldn't have to worry about that. Well, we hadn't been-- what--two months when Congressman Long came in. And remember, Long is the one that used to really be high into the technology, the agrarian reform and stuff. And then we had DeConcini from Arizona. Then we had all the big wheels from the Latin Division in the State Department: the Assistant Secretary.

*Q: You did?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. We had--Bushnell was one. Oh, I'm forgetting all these people's names.

*Q: Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. Oh, I'm blocking out names, but one of them that had preceded Bushnell. I guess he must have gone there three or four times. See, Central America was starting to heat up and so they would go over there more.

*Q: And the Carter Administration was giving more weight to what went on there.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes.

*Q: It had been sort of ignored. The lost continent.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. Very obvious. That is how come a woman sneaked in there. [Laughter] Please notice they haven't taken one since. That's how this one had sneaked in; they hadn't been paying attention to it.

*Q: What about consular problems? Did you have many consular problems?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. If there was one area that I would say causes problems for the United States, it's the consular section; not because you don't have highly qualified people and just hard workers, but it's the way it's set up. The system is set up to discriminate against the poor.

*Q: Is that so?*

JARAMILLO: Only the rich can come to this country; only the ones that have had access to English; only the ones that can show that they've had money in their savings account for many, many years. So then it sets up this dichotomy that our officers are caught. You never say, "You're too poor to go," but that's what it really boils down to; and those people aren't stupid. It's set up to get people to cheat and to say, "Oh, yes. I'm coming back," and then they don't come back.

Our officers are told over and over, they've got to do everything they can to make sure that they screen everybody, so a lot of times it comes out as terrible rudeness. This might be fine other places. I don't know some of the other world cultures, but I know that in Latin America, it comes out very, very rude. I always thought I would have loved to have had some time; that I wasn't so busy to be out there and see if there is a way that you can tell people "no" in a consular section without offending. Because that was the area where I had to spend the most time of settling people down that were very upset. Somebody's cousin had just been told "No," and this, and this, and this. So the Ambassador had to spend a lot of time healing wounds that had been caused there, and I do not believe that it was the personnel; it's the way the system is set up. I don't know of a better system, but that's the fact. So, consular problems I had--yes.

My sister and brother-in-law went down to visit me, and when they were coming back--they had just had these marvelous two weeks, getting to know everybody. They got on the plane, and they told the people who they were and what they had been doing there, and immediately, they said, "Oh, but she has this terrible consular officer," and they started in on the section. I think it's so unfair to our officers. So that was another one of those areas like the evaluation; that I thought that if I get to stay longer, I'd like to help people think this through.

*Q: It's the laws that are in effect.*

JARAMILLO: Right, right. It's the law, and they can't do anything about it. How do you do anything different? My feeling was that consular officers should get shorter periods of times at posts, with the same training they now have, but shorter periods, because I think it's a highly stressful job. Maybe even moving from one place to the other, even if that's all they do, but keep moving them, so at least they don't get the reputation of being the hateful one.

*Q: Yes, and they don't keep getting the same faces in front of them.*

JARAMILLO: That's right; right. I also thought that if there was going to be any differential in pay, probably consular officers who have such a high-stress position, not only would they be moved around a lot, but they'd get paid a little bit more, too.

*Q: That would be a novelty.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, my goodness, those people are out there in the front line. You know, if there's such pressure on them, then they create problems for us. Then we have to go and spend all this time healing those wounds. If they were paid a little more and didn't have to stay so long, and got that extra training, to take the little extra time, that they're not so [abrupt]. I think it would help; it could help. See, a lot of people tried to tell me, "You only have to worry about the ones that make decisions. You don't have to worry about the masses." Masses are important for relationships between people, and masses pressure leaders. Look in this country what's happening right now: I've heard a couple of people tell me lately, "You know, that Gorbachev; I'm starting to think that maybe he tells the truth. " You know what they're saying. My God! It's that masses do affect; they are going to make a difference. I think if we had masses of friends all



over the world, leaders would act differently. So that was one of my problems that we worked very hard at.

*Q: You are familiar, are you not, with the fact that, historically, consular officers are considered within the Service and are treated within the Service, up until the advent of Barbara Watson, as second-class people?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: Did you see much of that?*

JARAMILLO: No, I didn't. See, I came in when Barbara Watson was there, okay? So, I didn't.

*Q: But within your embassy, you didn't feel there was hierarchy with the political people at the top?*

JARAMILLO: No, but I did feel that there was a hierarchy with AID not belonging to the embassy, which just drove me insane.

*Q: What about USIS? Did you see anything?*

JARAMILLO: Yes, you sort of had the feeling that, "Yes, they probably quite don't have the credentials."

*Q: You mean that's the feeling among--*

JARAMILLO: Yes. Nobody said anything; you picked it up in vibes. And, again, they're out there in the forefront. And if they don't know what's going on, they can really flub it for you. I really felt that every single unit was crucial, and that it had to work together as a team.

I know that people tried to, I'm sure, hint about hierarchy; but when they saw that I wasn't very interested in that, I think that's probably why it wasn't made an issue. I'm sure that if they had found responses, that I would have gotten more information. I was trying to say, "Look, here we work as a team." But I never had problems with USIS. They were just marvelous people. I had a wonderful relationship with the local media out there all the time. The biggest problem that I had was with the consular office, and it was because they have to deny visas right and left; and we know they have to.

*Q: Yes, and you have such masses in Latin American posts, too. I mean, the workload down there is terrible.*

JARAMILLO: The lines! You could see that if you were human you were going to get short, and the minute you lose your temper, there goes--well, it becomes an international incident.

*Q: Did you have any incidences of people within your embassy--troubles either with alcoholism or nervous breakdowns? Out of that many people, it seems as though you would have some.*

JARAMILLO: I don't recall any.

*Q: That is very good news, because, as you said, the stresses are very great, and it is a hardship post.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. I'm going to put that in my little list to think about, in case that I would remember that.

*Q: In line with this same sort of general subject, did you not feel any rivalries between the various sections?*

JARAMILLO: I think that there was, and I think that my way of dealing with it, and being so up-front about "We're all in this together and we all put our foot forward," I think that that didn't let it get out of hand. I also think since they had been having so much trouble in the embassy--

*Q: Of this sort of thing?*

JARAMILLO: I imagine that that's what was happening, because they just kept telling me, "They need you to get down there. There are a lot of problems within the embassy." They weren't specific what the problems were.

*Q: Yes.*

JARAMILLO: And saw that I came in and got people to talk to each other and we do things together, and they probably decided, "Leave well enough alone. " But I did hear hints of the hierarchy, again, you know.

*Q: It can be very destructive of the American effort overseas when--*

JARAMILLO: Oh, when they start--

*Q: In-fighting.*

JARAMILLO: Yes, the in-fighting; that I could really sense who they thought was important. And, "Oh, well, it's just that." Enough was dropped of that that I caught on. But, you know, the good diplomat; pretend that you didn't catch on, and then make sure that you get those people--

*Q: Be more diplomatic than the career diplomats. [Laughter]*

JARAMILLO: There you go. And then you make sure that you sit them together at a country team meeting, or whatever. You do lots of these other things to get people to know each other as human beings, and then as professionals, and then it's not so important to know that you happen to have chosen that one and I chose this one.

*Q: They take different skills.*

JARAMILLO: That's right; that's right.

*Q: And, of course, if you valued them all and showed that you did--*

JARAMILLO: Right.

*Q: It would certainly make a big difference.*

JARAMILLO: And see, the other thing, maybe if I had come from one of those sections; maybe if I had been an economist, I would have favored the economist. Or maybe if I had been a business person, the commercial attaché. Maybe if I had a military background . . . But, see, I came from none of their professions. I came in as a professional educator with a Ph.D. in Latin American relations. And I didn't side in with any single one of them because I didn't know more about one than I did the other; I was learning about them across the board, and I think that helped.

*Q: I see, yes. In the official entertainment, you indicated previously that you, on a rotating basis, had all of your officers at some time--well, not only all your officers; I suppose all of your staff--to the residence at sometime.*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes. I had--and I also had just staff parties. For example, Fred [Rondon] just wrote to me the other day, and he said, "I used your idea because I thought that was fun." I had a party that I said, "Come to my shack." And that was all the party. I had set it up all over the gardens and everything, where it was all completely on your own. You could go to the pool and swim and do that, or you could go inside the house and play records and dance here, or you could go to the barbecue and fix things in the barbecue pit. You could do whatever you wanted to, and it was just for Americans. And, oh, that was a fun party, just a fun party. Then I did the traditional ones, like we did a dancing party and only Americans. I don't remember how many I had for just Americans; and they were really pleased with that because, evidently, because there's no entertainment money in that, ambassadors don't do as much of that. They always have to include the Hondurans in order for them to justify how they're going to spend the money. So they were very pleased, knowing that I didn't come from a rich background, that I was willing to have parties just for them.

*Q: Also I was impressed by what you said about your pool.*

JARAMILLO: Yes, yes. It was open for the Peace Corps volunteers that came into town, too.

*Q: Was it?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, they loved that. That was heaven. They would have been out, you know, for months in some little dusty place where they barely had enough water to take a bath. And then to come in and sit around the pool and the gardens, they loved that. So, that was open for them. Then the official entertainment--I tried to include junior officers, and I tried to rotate people so that staff got to come occasionally, so that everybody would feel welcome to the residence. If we

had stand-up parties, the Peace Corps office could invite two people, always, to come in. Normally the ones that had come from far away would get to come in. It would be a stand-up party, where nothing was being exchanged; no confidential information and stuff. One day, two young Peace Corps women had come in and I was introducing them around, and introduced them to the president; I was taking them all over. People started to leave and these women, I'd watch them, and they'd kind of follow me around, and I had the feeling that they wanted to say something, but I didn't know; there was something funny going on. Finally, one came up and she said, "Madam Ambassador, could we talk to you for just a minute?" "Sure. " So I wandered over to the corner with them.

One said, "We want to tell you something. We've got to tell you this before we leave and we don't know how to tell you." She said to the other one, "You tell her." And the other said, "No, you tell her." And I thought: Oh, God! What Is going on? You know, I thought, "My slip's been showing all evening." [Laughs] And she said, "We want you to know that before we came here tonight, we'd said, 'Yeah, yeah. The American ambassador has invited us. I betcha we get in there, we sit in some corner and nobody pays any attention to us.' We want you to know that tonight we're going away with the feeling we were center to the whole thing." And they got into it, and oh my God! I was just--I was choking back the tears like I am right now, and there I was, trying to be this very efficient hostess," Everybody that comes to my house is very welcome," and da-da-da. And then I said, "Sweetheart, I don't blame you for thinking that. If I'd been in your shoes, I would have thought that, too. I'm so glad that you found out that I really do mean it when I say . . ." They said that they could not, in good conscience, leave because they had bad-mouthed me so badly that I wasn't going to pay any attention to them, and then I had taken them to meet the president and had just introduced them to everybody, and praised them for their work. I did that because I thought that if the government people understood what tremendous work our Peace Corps were doing, they'd get more support.

*Q: Yes.*

JARAMILLO: Whenever I went into a small community, ahead had been sent the message: the Peace Corps person is to be there to meet me with whoever was going to meet me, and that gave that Peace Corps person stature like it wouldn't quit; because he had to be there with the mayor, the--you know, she has said that she wants to meet him. We'd sit at the lunches or the dinners and I'd insist that they sit with me, and so that gave them visibility in the community, that their work was valued. I always had learned what they were doing, and who was their counterpart, and they were being supportive; and so I always was able to personalize everything.

*Q: Yes, yes. Now we're getting down to Foreign Service Inspectors. Did they come through while you were there?*

JARAMILLO: I suppose they did; I don't remember.

*Q: Well, obviously, it wasn't a trauma.*

JARAMILLO: [Laughing] No. If they did, it wasn't a trauma. Surely, they were there. I was there three years. I don't remember. They must have been there.

*Q: They had come through just shortly before you came there.*

JARAMILLO: Well, maybe they hadn't.

Q: I really asked the question to see if it was a trauma, and obviously, this was not a trauma.

JARAMILLO: No, we didn't have traumas.

*Q: If they did come, then they treated you in a way you felt was fair, and so forth. Did you make the effort to train your young officers--the ones that were coming out--to make certain that they got the writing skills and, you know, on-the-job training?*

JARAMILLO: I don't think I, directly, as much as getting Fred to help them.

*Q: You did? In other words, that was his bailiwick?*

JARAMILLO: Yes.

*Q: But you did approve that?*

JARAMILLO: Oh, yes; oh, yes. I just thought it was important-- I'm a great career development woman, and I think that's the only way you move up. I've been so fortunate in other people helping me, that I'm very conscious of it. But I didn't do it directly. I also encouraged, in team meetings, in the country team meetings, the directors, for them to help their officers. So it was done in that way, too. I think it was covered, but not in a formal way.

*Q: Yes, yes. What about this item here: Major Successes and how being a woman contributed to them?"*

JARAMILLO: Major successes?

*Q: Was it because you were a woman, or just because you were such a skillful educator, and also Hispanic, and knowing both cultures? In other words, did any of your success, do you think, stem from your gender? One thing you said, about how Latin Americans stand back and let the woman talk first; maybe that would be an in?*

JARAMILLO: Yes. Just being a woman was an advantage; it wasn't a disadvantage. It was an advantage. Look, in the diplomatic corps, you remember how all the ambassadors stand by--in the reception line--by how long they've been in the country?

*Q: Yes.*

JARAMILLO: So you come in, and you're way at the back, right? Okay, I'm the American; I just arrived; so Brazil and I are at the tail end. I'd been there a couple of months--do you know that those ambassadors keep pushing you? Pushing me? They'd turn back and then, "Oh, no, no, no,

Ms. Ambassador." They'd stick me in front of them, and I'd say, "You're breaking all protocol." "The heck with protocol." They wanted me to be in the front of the line. That happened so many times. I'd always go to the back and stand in my place, and I was so correct. It was just a neat thing, and that was because I was a woman.

I think if I had successes, they were a combination of things. It was because, as a woman, you have special skills; because, as a minority person, growing up where there's a major culture, you pick up skills; because I, myself, am a people-person; because I had the skills and knowledge of a professional; and because I am an educator and have dealt with masses of different people in trying to convince them that the way I see the world is the right way to look at the world; and that's what a teacher does. And so then you take those skills and you package them to fit the occasion, and you're off. It's a combination. I don't think that just being a woman, or just being an Hispanic, or just being a minority, or just an educator, but when you combine those--boy, I was at the right place at the right time.

*Q: You certainly were. Did you feel when you left that you left anything unresolved?*

JARAMILLO: I really felt that we had come to closure on all our major goals.

**FERNANDO E. RONDON**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tegucigalpa (1978-1980)**

*Ambassador Fernando E. Rondon was born in California in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from University of California (Berkeley) in 1960. His career has included positions in Tehran, Tangier, Lima, Algiers, Tegucigalpa, and ambassadorships in Antananarivo and Quito. Ambassador Rondon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 4, 1997.*

*Q: Then in 1978, you were assigned to Honduras? What was your job?*

RONDON: I became the Deputy Chief of Mission of our Embassy in Tegucigalpa. I felt it was time for me to get managerial experience. ARA supported me in my desire to become a DCM, but Personnel objected--they thought I was still too junior. They tried to persuade Ambassador Mari-Luci Jaramillo that they had more seasoned candidates than Rondon. But the Ambassador, having talked to me, stood behind my selection.

My wife was a great help to me at this time. Mari-Luci was married; her husband did not fit in too well as a dependent because most of the organizations in Tegucigalpa were designed for the female spouses of ambassadors. Mari-Luci did not have the time to be both the ambassador and the Embassy's "first spouse." While we were still in Washington, the Ambassador discussed her problems with my wife. My wife was quite sympathetic and willing to support Mari-Luci as best she could. I suspect my wife's willingness to play the role of "first spouse" had as much to do

with my getting the DCM job as anything else. That may not sound exactly right these days, but it is the truth.

Ambassador Jaramillo had been in Tegucigalpa for about a year when her DCM was reassigned. I had heard good things about her work and therefore threw my hat into the ring. Todman spoke highly of Jaramillo as did Wade Matthews, the Central America Country Director. She had been an unknown quantity to the Department when she was appointed. In fact, she turned out to be a first rate ambassador. I was delighted when she selected me to be her DCM.

Mari Luci Jaramillo is a Chicana--from New Mexico. She had been nominated by the Carter administration. She spoke Spanish, of course. She had been a respected educator at the University of New Mexico. She served the administration's political purposes by being both Mexican-American and a woman. She was the first Chicana to be named as an ambassador. The word "Chicano" is used to describe a person of Mexican origins, although I have never used it for myself, even though my mother was Mexican. It is word that came into vogue about twenty years ago.

At the time, it seemed like a strange appointment. Honduras was run by a junta of colonels who had a reputation for alcoholism. The question was why we were sending a teetotaler to be ambassador to hard drinking colonels.

I think I might add a few words about the "male" bastion that the Honduras regime was. The head of the Junta did not want a female ambassador to call on him regularly at the palace. He thought that he should call on her at her residence. Mari-Luci said that if that was what the General wanted, it was fine with her. So the General would often visit the residence and meet with the Ambassador for an hour or so. They would discuss whatever business there was to take up and then would go to shoot pool with the Ambassador's husband. The other members of the Junta picked this up and began to do the same thing. The Ambassador, very sensibly, thought if the regime's leaders were more comfortable with that process, she would certainly go along. By the time, I got to Honduras, the Colonels had warmed up to her and would tell her virtually everything that was happening in Honduras. Being a teacher, Jaramillo was a good listener and knew how to get the best out of her interlocutors. So, in fact, a bond was developed between the Honduran military and our Ambassador.

When I got to Honduras in 1978, the country was very peaceful; not much of great moment was going on. It was caught between Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, all of which had strong governments. There was considerable violence in El Salvador and Guatemala. Honduras was the poor cousin in Central America; no one paid much attention to it. Honduran society did not have much of an elite upper class, so there were no great societal tensions. In fact, Honduras was best known for its tranquility--a backwater. We could travel throughout the country safely; there were no guards at the banks. It was just a very pleasant atmosphere with some very nice people.

The military Junta--the Colonels-- that ran Honduras consisted of professional officers who had attended the military academy and had worked their way through the ranks. Each took his turn in power. Had there not been a threat from Nicaragua, there may not have been elections and the

Junta might still be in power. The military officers became quite wealthy; being in government was a profitable enterprise.

In 1979, the Nicaraguan government was overthrown, with the Sandinistas taking charge from Somoza. Some remnants of the Somoza national guard fled into Honduras, changing the atmosphere in that country almost overnight. Terrorism, from both the left and the right, became common place. Bank robberies became a phenomenon. Our residence had no wall around it; within six month after the Nicaraguan invasion, a twelve foot iron fence was erected around our place. The whole atmosphere in Honduras changed overnight.

This was also the time during which the Carter administration was making major efforts to get along with the Sandinistas. The US did not want to be accused of having pushed the Nicaraguan government any further to the left than it already was. We wanted to give the Sandinistas a chance, now that they were in power, to govern more from the center and to allow a more democratic form of government to evolve. There was sympathy in Washington with the Somoza overthrow; he ran a repressive regime which was not palatable to the Carter administration.

At about this time, the FMLN in El Salvador was becoming a force to be reckoned with. It appeared that the moment had arrived for the left to sweep Central America. The question was which country would be next to succumb to "leftist" fever. All of the sudden the US had to become concerned about Honduras' stability and its security. There were members of some of the leading families in Honduras who were becoming concerned about their future. They were lining up at our Embassy to get their visas in case they had to flee their country. So Honduras went from being the peaceful and harmonious country that it had been to another Central American cauldron. It suddenly counted for the US.

US pressure on the Paz government increased. Ambassador Jaramillo discharged her brief very carefully; she avoided lecturing the Junta. She tried to explain that the US-Honduras relationship would be greatly strengthened if the Junta were to move to a more democratic system. In fact, that development did start and the Ambassador did not have to be very critical of the Junta and the military because they themselves were moving in the right direction.

At the same time, there were disturbing signs about Honduran society. People were beginning to disappear; arms were flowing through Honduras to El Salvador. The US Congress passed an amendment barring assistance to Nicaragua if it was found to be a shipper of arms. Eventually, Nicaragua violated the letter of the law. The Carter administration was most reluctant to invoke the amendment. There was a feeling that to suspend assistance was premature, even if the law was being violated. The administration wanted more time for discussion to see whether the US could convince the Junta to stop the arms flow to El Salvador.

Unfortunately, the USG was not successful. We reported truthfully what was happening in Honduras. I know our reporting made Washington uncomfortable. It was about that time when the administration decided to "promote" Jaramillo to be a deputy assistant secretary in ARA. It named a more experienced practitioner as ambassador, in part because there seemed to be a desire in Washington to play a more artful game in Honduras that would impact on Nicaragua as



well. As I said, Jaramillo was very truthful about events in Honduras. She was concerned about the security threat to Honduras and was able to get US military assistance increased.

I don't think Washington wanted to hear anything about possible Nicaraguan violations of US law. We were receiving evidence of arm shipments to El Salvador. The facts as we reported them would have required the imposition of sanctions on Nicaragua.

I thought that the Carter administration wanted to bury its head in the sand with respect to the revolutionary intentions of the Sandinistas. However, Congress wanted to tie the administration's hands, thereby eliminating any possibility of exploring whether the Sandinistas could be weaned away from their hard line revolutionary positions. In fact, I don't think that it would have been possible to do that, but Congress barred any possibility of exploring that avenue.

Human right violations in Honduras was not a major issue during my two years there. The issues of torture and disappearances was just beginning as I left. Our number one priority in the field of human rights was to convince the Junta to hold free and democratic elections. In fact, the country was proceeding in that direction. The Ambassador spent most of her last year holding the hands of the center/left--the liberals--who did not believe that the Junta would allow elections or if it did, they would not be fair ones. But elections were held; they were free and fair and both liberals and conservatives celebrated the outcome in the streets of Tegucigalpa--some cried joyfully.

American business was not a political factor in Honduras during the 1978-80 period. US investment assisted Honduras with its balance of payments--e.g. export of bananas managed by United Brands and Standard Fruit. The Embassy had good relations with United Fruit, which by 1978, had changed considerably. It was no longer the monopolistic giant that ran governments in its heyday. By 1978, United Brands was a respected, well run American company which operated in Central America as a responsible private enterprise.

In the years after my departure, under the Reagan administration, Honduras became a bastion in Central America--or rather it became a fortified camp as we poured more and more military material into that country.

**BARBARA H. NIELSEN**  
**Cultural Attache**  
**Tegucigalpa (1978-1981)**

*Barbara H. Nielsen was born in New York in 1949. She attended Middlebury College, Indiana University, and Yale University. She has also served in the Peace Corps in Katmandu from 1972 to 1974. Her career has included positions in Montevideo, Tegucigalpa, Dakar, Santiago, Algiers, Stockholm, and Athens. Ms. Nielsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 16, 2004.*

NIELSEN: Tegucigalpa. It's going to be hard for the current generation to understand this, but in those days a phone call from Washington was a big deal. You kind of trembled whenever Washington was calling. By the way, Washington is a very common first name in Uruguay. The Uruguayans had admiration for George Washington. Even modern Uruguayans have given their children the name of Washington as a first name. So there were quite a few of them on our staff. But when Washington called, meaning headquarters, it was usually a cause for fear and trembling. Thus, there was a fateful day when out of the blue Washington called and told me I was going to Tegucigalpa in three weeks. My first question had to be, "Well, where is that?" It turns out it's Honduras. It was a very nice place as well. I had no role in the selection of my onward assignment and that was normal in those days. You just got a call and off you went.

*Q: So you went to Honduras from '78...*

NIELSEN: I arrived in February of '78. I was there until April of '81.

*Q: What was Honduras like? What was the political-economic situation in '78?*

NIELSEN: It, too, had a military regime. It used to change its military leader with some frequency, but it did so peacefully. You'd have a bloodless coup and wake up the next day with a new general in charge. Unlike Uruguay, the big contrast was the level of education and development. Honduras was very much a third world country whereas Uruguay was a second world country. Tegucigalpa was much less economically developed. AID was a big part of our mission there. Peace Corps was also a big part of the mission in Honduras. So, you were dealing on a very different level. The director of the university had a BA and he was considered highly educated. Anyone in that society who had a college degree flaunted it. They would use the honorific "licenciado," which means they graduated from college. That was an accomplishment. That said, it was a rather nice place to be a junior officer. You could be a somewhat bigger fish in a small pond, have some budget that you would oversee and have control over, a small staff that you would manage, and very easy access to the leaders of the country -- at least the leaders in the cultural and educational field, which is what I was doing there. Of course, it was also a very hospitable place. Anywhere you went, you were treated with distinction.

*Q: Was there any revolt or disturbances at that time out in the hinterland?*

NIELSEN: Not much. There was anti-American sentiment present. Central America has a history of some negative feeling toward us. Honduras was the home of Standard Fruit operations up on the coast. University students could be expected to have some negative reaction to our policies at that time, both historically and current policies. I was there during the Nicaraguan revolution which we supported in a way, but we weren't thrilled with the Marxist regime that took over from Somoza. But I was there only at the incipient stages of the Contra-

*Q: The Contra thing really got going somewhat later.*

NIELSEN: When I left in '81, we didn't have anything like the military presence that we had later.

*Q: Reagan had not appeared. He just had been elected.*

*Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

NIELSEN: Mari-Luci Jaramillo. She was a very fine educator, “goodwill” ambassador, a political appointee. It was still a time when you could have a “goodwill” ambassador and that person could succeed and could carry out U.S. policy quite adequately.

*Q: What was her background?*

NIELSEN: She was a professor of education from New Mexico. Her husband accompanied her, so that was something of an adjustment for him in a macho society to be the husband of the ambassador, but I think she was very successful and very well liked there. She was succeeded by Jack Binns. At that time, things were becoming a little more difficult politically and he was brought in to take a harder line with the Honduran government. I can’t remember who the Honduran president was at that point.

*Q: They kept changing.*

NIELSEN: They kept changing. I can remember the first two generals, General Melgar and then Policarpo Paz Garcia. Paz Garcia was notable because he was an army general -- I guess he had won fame in the very brief “soccer war” with El Salvador -- but he was not highly educated. In fact, he was a third grade graduate, so you didn’t look to him for great vision. During those years, El Salvador was in some turmoil. It was not sufficiently safe to travel to San Salvador, though you could travel to some other parts of the country.. Neighboring Guatemala was okay to travel to, but they were also having trouble with civil unrest, such that Honduras was the peaceful country in the region.

*Q: What type of work were you doing?*

NIELSEN: Cultural work. I was the cultural attaché and there was no assistant, so I did exchanges, English teaching, libraries, binational center, cultural presentations. I also met my husband there. He was the English teaching fellow who came down to work in the binational center.

*Q: What is his background?*

NIELSEN: He did his studies in teaching English as a second language. He was a freshly-minted graduate and USIA had this program for recent TOEFL graduates, largely to staff binational centers in Latin America. We had two binational centers, one in San Pedro Sula and one in Tegucigalpa and he was assigned to the one in the capital.

*Q: I take it Honduras was a pretty poor country.*

NIELSEN: Definitely. It really had no industry to speak of. I guess it still doesn’t. It relies on its agricultural production, coffee, bananas, pineapple.

*Q: Who was coming to your binational centers? Were there good target audiences? One thinks of some of those countries particularly at that time and 10-12 families run the place.*

NIELSEN: Unlike the polarization in El Salvador and in Nicaragua, Honduras didn't suffer from that to the same degree. The ruling class, in the case of the military, was composed of people who were not very wealthy, like General Paz Garcia.. The generals were from the lower class. Overall, there were relatively few wealthy Hondurans. The middle class did have some opportunities to get an education and if they were professionals, they could live a decent middle class existence, not so impressive by our current standards perhaps, but for the most part you just didn't have this terrible disparity between the rich and the poor.

They had two political parties, which did not differ a great deal. You belonged to the party that your family had belonged to for generations. They alternated government.

*Q: The Whites and the Blues?*

NIELSEN: Yes, they were the Nacionales and the Colorados, but they weren't very ideological. Generally, you were born into one or the other and you just kept that affiliation. So, in that sense, they weren't ripe for civil war and they didn't have an oligarchy. They have actually progressed to democracy now.

*Q: Did you have any particular target groups? What about the college students?*

NIELSEN: Sure, we worked with a lot with students, with young professionals as well. The natural audience is always the young professional class, some of whom had studied in the U.S. and others who wanted to study in the U.S., so the Fulbright program was a big draw for those folks along with the short term technical training that AID used to do. That was a real avenue for upward mobility for enterprising Hondurans. If you worked with the Americans, there would be opportunities to go to the U.S., get trained, and come back. Obviously the universities were targets. We also worked a lot with the arts community.

*Q: I take it the military was beyond your problems?*

NIELSEN: It wasn't part of my portfolio. I'm sure the political section was charged with working with the military and we probably sent many of them for training, but it wasn't a cultural issue. We always worked with the journalists and our other traditional audiences. I remember trying to inculcate a better sense of professionalism. The newspapers there tended to be sensationalistic and tabloid in their approach, which meant that they would plaster the latest traffic accident on the front page. The degree of professionalism was relatively low. We were trying to remedy that and contribute to improvements in journalism. We had a radio section and we used Voice of America radio programming quite a bit there. It was still an environment where local stations needed programming and could benefit by using some of ours.

*Q: On the social side, was it a hard society to break into?*

NIELSEN: They were very hospitable. There were a number of Americans who would come to Honduras. The prototype is the American man marrying a Honduran woman. That seems to work very well. Why is that? I guess Latin women are good wives, if you will. The reverse doesn't tend to be the case. It tends to be very rare for an American woman to marry a Honduran. It happens, of course. In part, it's because, at least at that time, Honduras was a machistic society and educated females were not universally appreciated. Education per se might not be viewed so negatively, but assertive females wouldn't be appreciated. So while it's very easy to have lots of Honduran friends, that's just one level of social interaction; you didn't necessarily feel that these were going to be intimate friends for life.

*Q: I interviewed somebody somewhere in Central America that said that at one point a good number of Americans settled along the Caribbean coast and maybe got married, but they were older men who would get younger wives and then they'd die. This became sort of a consular problem.*

NIELSEN: Yes, okay.

*Q: They may not have been in the same social group that you were in.*

NIELSEN: That's right. I can think of an example along those lines. Honduras would be a cheap place to live and it would be an easy place to find a Honduran wife or servant or whatever you wanted, so you could afford to do that. The climate was good. I can see how the phenomenon might occur.

*Q: What about United Fruit and the plantation owners? Did you have much contact? How were you seeing that particular relationship there?*

NIELSEN: The American fruit companies had departed by the time I got there. Their interests, they either liquidated them or they were in the hands of Hondurans. There were still vestiges of United Fruit. You could see... I can recall visiting a pineapple plantation and the houses for the workers had been built by United Fruit. They created company towns in cities like La Ceiba, where if you worked at United Fruit, you had a good job, you had a good standard of living. You might not have had the freedom to unionize or have all the rights you might want as a laborer, but it was a pretty good existence compared to that of a laborer in a Honduran company. The presence of the American companies was no longer an issue. Their legacy was something that you could debate.

**JACK R. BINNS**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1980-1981)**

*Jack R. Binns was born in Oregon in 1933. He received a bachelor's of science from the Naval Academy in 1956 and subsequently served overseas with the U.S.*

*Navy. In 1963, he joined the Foreign Service, serving in Guatemala, La Paz, and San Salvador. Mr. Binns was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Your next assignment was as Ambassador to Honduras. How did that come about?*

BINNS: I am not exactly sure. Bill Bowdler came to Costa Rica and said to me: "Jack, you know you haven't been here very long, but I have a proposition to make. I don't know whether you'll find it acceptable; I don't know if I were in your shoes that I would accept it". That piqued my interest. He said that the Department had been watching what we were doing in Costa Rica and some of my messages had reached the Seventh Floor. They thought I had done a real good job and besides the Seventh Floor remembered me from London days. So Bowdler had asked Harry Barnes, then Director General, if I could be considered for Ambassador to Honduras, even though I was still in a relatively low rank. Bowdler said if I accepted the offer, my name would be forwarded to the White House for approval. I really didn't want to leave Costa Rica because it first of all a very nice place and I was enjoying it immensely and secondly, I had a daughter who was senior in high school, who would have to move for a third time during her high school years, which would not have been a good thing for her. She was very happy in Costa Rica and as it turned out, was very unhappy in Honduras for a number of reasons. But after a family confab, we agreed that the Ambassadorship was an opportunity that couldn't be passed. So I accepted.

*Q: Did you have problem being confirmed?*

BINNS: There were attempts to block the appointment from two quarters: a) the right and B) and some non-Congressional Democratic opposition. The right considered me too liberal--I was caught in one of the usual contests between Senator Helms and the Department of State concerning Frank Ortiz, for whom Helms wanted an Ambassadorial assignment which State didn't want to give (there were some twelve Ambassadorial appointments that Helms was holding up at the time). Ultimately, the Department did something for Ortiz and my appointment was approved. The other problem stemmed from a Presidential Commission that Carter appointed while I was in Costa Rica. It was supposed to study agriculture in the Hemisphere to see what we could do to advance it so that Latin Americans could feed themselves. It was headed by the former President of Florida University and was composed of a distinguished group of farm experts, academics and some people interested in economic development--one former AID Mission director, for example. That Commission came to Costa Rica first for some reason and we scheduled to talk to Costa Ricans knowledgeable in agricultural matters. It became clear after the first couple of days that the Commissioners were almost unanimously opposed and made no secret about it to land reform as was being proposed in El Salvador at the time. Without exception, including the President, the Costa Ricans favored land reform. When the Carter Commission left, I sent a NODIS (very limited distribution to high ranking officials in the Department only). I made a mistake of including other US Embassies in Central American for distribution because the Commission was supposed to go to those posts. I sent the cable because this was an American Presidential Commission ostensibly on a fact finding mission that appeared to have predisposition against one of our principal policies; i.e. the support of land reform in El Salvador. I thought the Department and the White House should be made aware of this as well as my colleagues in the posts that the Commission would visit. It happened that the Commission went from San Jose to Guatemala where our Ambassador showed them the cable. I

am told that they hit the roof when they found out that I was reporting their prejudices before the report was written. One of the members of that Commission subsequently tried to stop my appointment. He stalled it, but didn't stop it.

*Q: You were in Honduras from 1980 to 1981. What was the situation?*

BINNS: There had been a military rule in Honduras almost uninterruptedly since 1963. Briefly, there had been a popularly elected government in the early 70s that served about eighteen months before the military replaced it. In light of the events in Central America, especially Nicaragua and El Salvador, the Honduran military had gotten religion and decided to get the problem of governing off their hands and to return to democracy. We of course had been twisting their arms and trying to force them in this direction for almost fifteen years.

The Honduran military had announced that it would hold elections and turn governmental power to a democratically elected government. Basically, therefore, my instructions were to do everything I could to make sure that those elections took place and that there would be a peaceful transition to a constitutionally, democratically elected government. It turned out that way. The election in November 1981 was very close. There was an almost-coup in September of that year, but it didn't occur.

*Q: What tools of influence did we have?*

BINNS: The principal tool we had was the Honduran people, especially after the military had announced that they wanted an election and a transition. The political parties geared up. Popular sentiment supported the transition to democratic government. We used every means at our disposal to underscore our support of elections. Every speech I made--I made a lot of them--, every interview I gave and in almost every meeting I had with Honduran officials or members of the private sector, I underscored the importance we gave to the elections. I also pointed out the potential consequences of not following their commitment by pointing to El Salvador and Nicaragua. We were able to make to push the door further open.

*Q: How would you judge the ARA Bureau? What policies was it pursuing?*

BINNS: It was trying to inoculate Honduras from the same disease that had infected Nicaragua and El Salvador and potentially Guatemala; i.e. civil war. We didn't need another communist-backed insurgency in the region and the best way to do that was to make our best efforts to allow the people of Honduras to determine their own future through a democratic process.

During my period in Honduras, the Sandinistas were not much of a problem. Their activities to spread the romance of revolution were couched more in evangelical terms than in actual subversion. They were using Honduras as a base to provide material--weapons and ammunition--to the insurgents in El Salvador. But they did not actively try to subvert Honduras.

*Q: Did you receive instructions to try to stop the Sandinistas from using Honduras as a transfer point?*

BINNS: Yes. I was trying to gain Honduran cooperation to make arms interdiction more effective. We spent a lot of time on this issue and the Hondurans made one seizure. The problem was that the Salvadoran insurgents and the Nicaraguans had a pretty good apparatus. None of the seizures and very little of our successes were based on any intelligence that shipments were coming. The evidence tended to be circumstantial. The big shipment that was stopped came as the result of a low level policeman seeing a warehouse that seemed to hold very suspicious material. He went into one day when no one else was around and found a semi-trailer, without the truck, with its top pulled back. That struck him as very curious; he reported it and the police came and investigated the warehouse and found a concealed basement that was filled with arms--several hundred US combat weapons and munitions. When they looked at the trailer, it had once upon a time been a refrigerated van. The cooling coils had been stripped out and the space was used to store munitions and bring them to the warehouse. From there, the shipment would be broken down into smaller quantities and smuggled to El Salvador. This was not an intelligence coup, but the result of good police work. One interesting aspect was that after the police had made the discovery, they cleaned the place up and staked it out. One day, a pick-up truck driven by a Salvadoran, pulled up and the police grabbed him. Within twenty-four hours, throughout the US, Mexico and El Salvador, there were screams about the Hondurans arresting one of the principal insurgent leaders. Our intelligence people went to the Hondurans to check the story and were told that the Hondurans had never heard of him. They wanted to know who he was. After a couple of days, it became clear that the Salvadoran driver was the leader in question. He had been traveling with two passports, both of which were fakes. The truck he was driving had been constructed so that rifles and ammunition could be hidden in it. So a Salvadoran insurgency leader was captured by sheer accident. That was typical of the kind of success we had.

*Q: What was the human rights situation in Honduras in the late 70s?*

BINNS: We of course were involved in that issue, but there weren't many problems in Honduras on that score. One of the interesting thing about the Honduran military rule and Honduran society in general did not condone repression and therefore there wasn't much. There was some, but not much. The military had never been violent against their own people, One did see the kind of repression in Honduras that you saw in Guatemala, El Salvador or Nicaragua.

*Q: That suggests that these countries are much more different than is usually thought.*

BINNS: That is right. If you have been there and have spent any time in more than one, the differences are clearly greater than their similarities. In the macro sense, their similarities are strong, but at the micro level, dissimilarities prevail.

I might just mention the Contra issue as it manifested itself toward the end of the Carter administration. When Somoza fell, much of the National Guard left Nicaragua, especially the leadership. They went to Costa Rica and Honduras. Initially, in the latter country, there were about three thousand former Guardsmen in holding camps. The Honduras left it pretty much to international organizations to support these refugees. Some went to the US; some filtered into the Honduran society and became legal immigrants. Eventually, all the people in the camps dispersed and they were closed. So we had about one to two thousand former National Guardsmen in Honduras. Many settled in the Choluteca area which is the south corner of



Honduras. Some of them staged raids across the Nicaraguan border, which according to our information, were not so much military actions than they were just harassment. For example, they would rustle cattle to bring them back into Honduras. These incursions were not significant or effective either militarily or politically. In Tegucigalpa, there were a number of former Guardsmen or Somoza supporters who were running around telling everybody that they were the leaders of one Contra group or another which was fighting in Nicaragua. Most of that was illusory; most of these individuals were pretty seedy.

I thought I was on the same wave-length with the CIA, although near the end of my term, there were some events that caused me to raise my eye-brows. It was not entirely clear what was going on. I only put the whole picture together later when more information was revealed. Indeed the CIA was preparing for a Contra movement, but during my time in Honduras, I think there was a consensus in the Administration that these guys were little better than criminals. In many cases, the organizations they claimed to represent were penetrated by the Sandinistas; that is to say that some of the people in leadership position of these organizations were suspected to be either Sandinista agents or at least sympathizers. That came from CIA intelligence as well as from the Hondurans. So we did not take these organizations seriously. On the other hand, these groups were constantly trying to push the Embassy in one direction or another. I think they were trying, by being seen with us, show that they US support. At one point, I issued a policy that the Embassy staff have nothing to do with these people--they were not to be invited to our parties, we were not to accept their invitations. If they came into the office on legitimate business, such as consular, the policy was to deal with them in a business-like fashion, but to avoid any public contact with them. I had a couple of Embassy officers who were a problem in this matter; that is the reason I issued that policy directive. In one case, the officer had served in Nicaragua and was sympathetic to the Contra cause on a personal basis and was opposed to the Sandinistas.

But the Contra movement at that stage was not a serious matter. I advised the Department of my policy and never received any disagreement. My view was supported by our Embassy in Managua because both of us felt that we should not appear to be favoring the anti-Sandinistas.

In the Summer of 1981, there was a growth in lawlessness in Honduras which became a concern. Bank robberies increased dramatically, super market and payroll robberies increased; there had not been much of this before. Then there was a kidnaping of the child of a wealthy Nicaraguan Somoza supporter who was living in Honduras. We suspected that the bank and payroll robberies were being conducted, in part at least, by former National Guardsmen and so reported to Washington. The kidnaping, as it turned out, was conducted by former National Guards elements--Contras. They were holding the child for ransom to finance their movement. We reported this event since the information reached us through liaison channels. Ultimately, the child was released and the Contras were warned by the Honduran authorities that "enough is enough" and that either the crime would cease or that they would be expelled to Nicaragua. That stabilized the situation in a hurry. It was clear that certain Contra elements were engaged in criminal activity. We reported all this in both State and CIA telecommunication channels. The Agency instructed the Station Chief to stop that kind of reporting, or so he told me. That was a straw in the wind. He also received similar cautions about reports of human rights violations by the Hondurans.

When I arrived in Honduras, we knew that there was a group of between 10-12 Argentine military officers working with the Honduran G-2 (Intelligence). We didn't know why or what they actually did. They kept to themselves and neither our MilGroup or defense Attachés were able to get any information on their activities. You will recall that at this time Argentina was under a forceful and repressive dictatorship. It turned out that these officers were training the Contras with the knowledge of the Honduran military, if not the whole government. Subsequently, in the Reagan Administration, we approached the Argentines, got them to increase their staff in Honduras and used them to train the Contras, before we had authority to get involved on a large scale ourselves.

*Q: How did US politics influence your activities? At this time, the US was close to the election which brought Ronald Reagan to the White House.*

BINNS: It played in a number of ways. We have already talked about the Contra issue, although that didn't flower completely until after my departure. Another aspect was in Honduras itself. There were two parties contending for the Honduran Presidency: the Liberal and the Nationalist. The former was marginally to the left of the latter, but not as far left as, for example, the Christian Democrats. The Liberals were pretty much a centrist party that had won the two previous electoral outings, although their governments never completed their terms. Their presidential candidate was

The Nationalist Party was led by Zuniga, who had been a major player in Honduran politics since 1963 when he was Minister of Interior and a key advisor to General Lopez, who took power in 1963. Zuniga had been in and out of powerful positions since that time and had always been a power behind the throne. He was widely discredited; believed to be very pernicious, influenced by many people, many of whom were unsavory. He was a man who had attempted on various occasions to manipulate and indeed remove American Ambassadors for real or perceived interventions. John Jova was entrapped by Zuniga; he purchased some antiques, which had been stolen, unbeknownst to John of course. Jova had been set up by the Ministry of Interior. Fortunately, John had already been named to another position, but Zuniga took credit for having the American Ambassador removed. He had running feuds with a series of Ambassadors; he felt that I was a leftist and mounted a campaign even before I got there trying to discredit me and thereby weaken my influence. He did develop close relationships with the extreme right--the nutty--wing of US politics. Among his contacts was Senator Jesse Helms and members of his staff. That staff was perfectly capable of being disruptive even in a country like Honduras. Immediately after the US election, rumors were floated that I would be relieved immediately. Fortunately, I stayed on for another eleven months so that the rumor proved unfounded. But Zuniga was constantly stirring up the waters and I became an issue in the American campaign. Once Reagan had been elected, Zuniga was able to play more cards. There were at least two people from Helms' staff who would come now and then to Tegucigalpa. One of them is now the Under Secretary of State for Economic affairs--Dick McCormack and the other was Chris Manion, who I think is still a member of the Helms staff. McCormack was a loose cannon and a fool. He was convinced the Liberal Party candidate was a cat's paw for the Sandinistas and that he and his Party had received financial support from the Sandinistas. McCormack was sure that if he were elected, he would tilt dramatically toward the Sandinistas. In fact, the reverse occurred. He allowed us to run the Contra support operation from his country and was very

helpful to our pro-Contra policy. McCormack, on a couple of occasions, has said to me that I had been absolutely dead right in my judgement and that he had been wrong. In any case McCormack and Manion were in Honduras trying to undercut what I was trying to do. Zuniga was involved in trying to prevent the elections because he felt that he would lose, which indeed is what happened.

*Q: When Reagan was elected, was there a feeling that there would be a major change in our policy in Latin America?*

BINNS: There was that perception immediately among the right wingers in Honduras and the Contras. These people had been in touch with their American friends and allies throughout the election period. They had been told that as soon as Carter was out, so was the concern of human rights and that *real politik* was in. The Honduran Democrats would be back in and the bad guys would be thrown out. The change in Administration was used by Zuniga particularly in Honduras in support of his efforts to frustrate the electoral process. He kept pointing out that the new American administration was different from the last one and that therefore I no longer represented the Administration and that no attention should be paid to the Honduran election--this was all said privately, not publicly. Publicly, Zuniga was campaigning for President.

*Q: The inference I have gotten from other interviews that the change in ARA leadership was more of a "hostile take-over" than just a change. Did you have that impression in Tegucigalpa?*

BINNS: Indeed. Bowdler was tossed out unceremoniously to say the least. It was one of the worst examples of personnel management in the Department that I have ever witnessed. Bowdler has served several administrations loyally. He was literally given until noon of January 20th. to clear his desk and get out of his office. Unheard of!

*Q: How did that impact on you and your Embassy staff?*

BINNS: Well, we still worked for the Department. There was still some one in charge of ARA--John Bushnell as acting Assistant Secretary. He was "acting" for quite a while. I also had friends on the Seventh Floor who were feeding me information. They knew that I was on the so-called "hit" list that the transition team had prepared. I was also told that Haig had thrown that list away and that I was not in immediate jeopardy. Then I was told that I would be replaced; Enders, the Assistant Secretary-designee, called me and told me that I would be replaced. Then he called and said a problem had arisen with my successor and that I would have to stay for a while. Indeed, during my last week at post, he called and asked me to stay for another two weeks, but that was after all my farewell activities and I said: "No way!".

*Q: Was your effectiveness damaged by the rumors and what was going on in Washington?*

BINNS: There were a number of agendas being carried out by different people; there was a State Department agenda--at this time it had not yet taken the decisions to support the Contras, but was certainly considering it--was to hold the Nicaraguan government's feet to the fire to insure that there would be an election. Vernon Walters made two trips to Honduras to talk to President Paz and senior military officers about holding those elections. We did not want the Hondurans to

think that if they didn't hold the elections, business would continue as usual. In terms of my principal over-riding objective, there were no differences between the Embassy and the Department. We had the largest economic assistance program in Latin America, which in fact grew after my departure. As far as military assistance was concerned, the new Administration wanted to provide more money than I thought could be reasonably absorbed. Despite that, the Hondurans got more; what we were trying to do in the military sphere doubled, much of it ill-advised. For example, in mid-February 1981, my MilGroup commander came to me to tell me that he had just received notice from SouthCom that it had been tasked to develop a plan to interdict the arms flow from Nicaragua to el Salvador. SouthCom was putting together some recommendations which including the assignment of over 200 American troops to Honduras to assist the Hondurans in this interdiction effort. These Americans would lead small combat teams to cut all the trails through the mountains, etc. which might be used as infiltration routes. I have never seen anything about this plan, but I got this information. I sent another NODIS cable to John Bushnell in Washington, asking what was going on. I said that I had not been consulted and that it was nonsensical idea. I pointed out that we were working on the issue with the Agency through different means and this involvement was the silliest thing I had ever heard; it was counter-productive at best. Little did I know that the decision to task SouthCom for those recommendations had been taken by a very small group; there were allegedly only four people in the Department who knew anything about this. So I was blowing the news all over the Department, even though I had sent the cable NODIS. Bushnell was incensed that I sent the cable. I told him that I had not known anything about it and that I had received this information which I thought should be passed on to the Department. I repeated that I thought it was a stupid idea. It never reached fruition, but they found other ways to accomplish their aims.

*Q: When you returned, did you see the new emphasis on the Nicaragua and el Salvador threats as over-blown?*

BINNS: In regards to Nicaragua, it was mindless. The notion that a rag-tag bunch of individuals--the Contras--, who were mostly former Guardsmen and hated by the Nicaraguans, could enter their country and overthrow the regime, even a totalitarian one, which was supported by at least 75% of the population, was sheer non-sense. The idea of doing it covertly was even crazier. I happen to think that there are occasions when covert operations are appropriate, but one has to be extremely careful and select the situations very carefully which will permit a country to have "plausible deniability". You can't be totally inconsistent with international law and practice. Most importantly of all, you have to have a political support base in the United States. None of these conditions had met when the operation started against the Nicaraguan regime. We should have continued to try to co-opt the Sandinistas, even if the chances in the short run were not very good. That was what Pezzulo was trying to do and I supported his efforts wholeheartedly.

**HOWARD L. STEELE**  
**Project Officer, USAID**  
**Tegucigalpa (1980-1982)**

*Dr. Howard L. Steele was born in Pennsylvania and graduated from both Washington and Lee University and Penn State University. Assignments abroad have included Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras and Sri Lanka. Dr. Steele was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.*

*Q: Leaving Bolivia, off to Honduras. You were in Honduras from 1980 to when?*

STEELE: Until the fall of 1982. I got there in late summer of 1980. I went back for my father's funeral. My wife, Jane, and little Jenny made the move to Honduras. So I got back after I settled Dad's estate and took care of my mother. I got to Honduras around September of 1980. I was there until about October of 1982. Then I went to Sri Lanka.

*Q: What was the situation that faced you in Honduras?*

STEELE: Those were some of the most exciting work assignments I had. I was responsible for Public Law 480, Title I and Title III activities. Title III was a new wrinkle back then. Title I was the long-term loan to buy surplus U.S. government commodities at very favorable terms, a low interest rate, 30 year repayment, other terms. If the country agreed to sign a Title III agreement pledging to improve the agricultural sector, whether it was the marketing system, storage, transportation, other aspects of the rural sector, roads and such, by monetizing the sale of the U.S. surplus commodities in the economy and putting that money into these developmental improvements, that became a grant. At the very liberal terms that our Title I agreements were, it was almost a grant anyway. But then at Title III it automatically became a grant. They didn't have to pay any principal back at all.

*Q: What were you doing?*

STEELE: That was the first part. I was responsible for putting that together. Bring in a Kansas State University technical assistance team to try and convert what was called IHMA, the Honduran Institute of Food, which had been set up, I think the U.S. encouraged them years back when there wasn't much of a private sector in Honduras, that the government should buy, store, handle, sell, export all the basic food commodities – corn, beans, rice, sorghum, etc. Now that there was a growing private sector group in Honduras, a growing capital market, process manufacturers, the U.S. in its wisdom said to the Honduran government, "This is one of the biggest money losers you have next to electricity. So, why don't you think in terms of getting out of the business of buying all these commodities, storing them, handling them, keeping them in good shape, and selling them, and make the IHMA into a research entity that gives advice to the policymakers, does basic research? And they bought off on that. A lot of those Honduran people I worked with like Dr. Benjamin Villanueva, who was the minister of finance, had his doctorate from Michigan State, a very knowledgeable guy, very flexible, he had trouble convincing some older government officials that this was the correct way to go. The Kansas State University team USAID brought in soon convinced the government this was the correct approach.

The other project that I managed for the USAID Mission/Honduras, was an export development project in the Comayagua Valley of Honduras. Getting farmers trained to use

their land all year, even in the dry season but with irrigation. These were 5 land reform cooperatives, called asentamientos, with about 250 families in those 5 organizations. The farmers normally let their fields lie fallow in the dry season, that is didn't produce any crops. So, we put together a project – there was lots of water running through the valley in a large river and its tributaries from the surrounding mountains. – we put some check dams in to get the water into little ponds that would be available for irrigation during the dry season. Then we taught them how to raise vegetables in the dry season on that land using drip irrigation. Very technical, but they were willing learners and good learners. We had to have good management. Fortunately, I had a man named Dr. Donald Braden who had been with the Standard Fruit Company in Central America for years and knew vegetables. He was an agronomist with a Ph.D. from Rutgers. He knew how to work with those Honduran campesinos. He would just give them fits if they did something wrong during the work time, but as soon as the whistle blew and they stopped packing cucumbers or other produce, he'd go play volleyball with them and drink with them. So, he had the right touch.

Before I left there we were exporting 110 tractor trailer loads of super select cucumbers to the 6 Ls in Miami and they'd distribute them all the way up to Ontario, Canada, from Christmas until April, and were working on tomato production and other things for the domestic canners there right across the river.

*Q: This was a period where we were having trouble in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras, where the Contras were training. Were they stepping on your cucumbers?*

STEELE: No, not at all. Honduras is a pretty good sized country. I used to fly a lot. I flew a Cessna Skylane II that my neighbor wanted me to fly because he had bought it for his son and his son was in Florida and he was flying all the time and wasn't going to classes. So, the father brought the plane back. He was in real estate and wanted somebody to fly it. Boy was I delighted. I would fly down to Comayagua to where our projects were. From Tegucigalpa, it took me like 29 minutes to fly. It was like a 2 ½ hour drive over the mountains. I flew down to Apollo, an island in the Bay of Fonseca, between Nicaragua and El Salvador right in the middle of the war and I landed on a strip there just on Sunday to practice a little bit. I took my former mother-in-law and some other visitors down. Of course, there were soldiers who came out who were guarding that. In those days, I wore a Fudpucker World Airlines captain's cap and a blue jumpsuit. They would salute me and I'd salute them back. They assured me that everything was safe on the island. They wanted to know what was the soccer score the night before.

John Negroponte was our ambassador.

*Q: Did the war intrude?*

STEELE: Not in the least. Ambassador Negroponte and the military were building a brand new airport there near my cucumber project that had been a military base anyway. They had these large refugee camps on the borders which VIPs would come down from Washington and study, but our projects went on full speed ahead. We had no problems at all.

*Q: One thinks of Honduras as having military rule and also some of the families that control it. Did the internal system interfere with your work?*

STEELE: No. I worked in El Salvador before that civil war and I can tell you there were 25 families that ran that country. They controlled everything. I didn't see that in Honduras. Yes, I saw some problems like a man named Miguel Facusay, who was Lebanese by ancestry. Anybody who was in business down there from any place over in that part of the world was automatically called a Turko.

*Q: Because the Lebanese came out of the Ottoman Empire and all that.*

STEELE: You're right. Miguel had a soap factory. He had this canning fruits and vegetables factory in Comayagua. He was a banker. He was in everything. There were a number of people like Miguel Facusay. He was accused of having sold his factory to the government and then buying it back and selling it again and buying it back and made a killing out of it that way. I don't know whether that was true or not.

*Q: But basically you were developing an efficient supply machine to deliver goods to the United States and other places. Was the money going to the campesino.*

STEELE: Oh, it was unbelievable how much money they were making. In fact, they were making too much money. We had a problem with this. Yes, this was the Caribbean Basin Initiative in its earliest phases before it really got a lot of attention. But we knew what was coming and we knew that was one of the engines of development there. Yes, the problem we had was that these campesinos wanted that money now. Here in the United States, we pay a nice first price upon delivery and then we settle up a month later and we also have checkoffs. Especially in the produce business, which is so volatile – you can have disease problems, weather problems, market problems, but one year out of every 5 you've got some kind of a serious situation. So, we put money aside in reserve accounts. Now, they didn't want to have anything to do with that. Why? Because they had been ripped off over the years by dishonest managers and crooked accountants and so forth, bankers, too. So, what we did – and some would raise question about this ethically – we had a known price in Miami. Of course we had our instantaneous communication at our little packing plant. Don Braden ran this with the 6 Ls, the Lipmann Brothers. The Lipmanns were absolutely honest. They were the best brokerage firm I've ever dealt with. If a trailer load on one of those ships, if a trailer refrigerator broke down and they found it, they'd unload that trailer and they'd repack it, throw out the stuff that wasn't any good and get rid of the other, and accounted for all of that. I'm off my point except to say they were so good. We would get a first price from them and we would pay the campesinos immediately that amount of money out of working capital. That was enough to satisfy them immediately and make them very happy. Then we'd say, "There may be some slow sales up into Canada, so we may hear about additional sales later from that last batch that went out. But we know how much you shipped. Here's your record. So you'll participate in that, too." But then we got the presidents of these 5 groups to agree that that money ought to go into the local bank account as a reserve and couldn't be spent unless there were 2 signatures on there: the president of the sindicato and the manager, Don Braden. Well, they would come in with their hats, the board of directors, "We want another

truck.” Don Braden would say, “Well, you just got a truck this year. You don’t need a second truck.” “We want another truck.” “I don’t think you need another truck.” “Well, it’s our money.” “Well, I don’t want to approve that and here are my reasons.” The next day, they’d come back with a whole membership and their families. One of the radicals would get up with a bullhorn and say, “We need our money.” Dr. Braden would say, “Okay, but you’re not going to ship cucumbers here next year. I’m not going to accept any cucumbers from you because you don’t know when you’re going to have a disaster disease, hailstorm or whatever. This is for your own good.” It was pretty tough. He was the bad gringo. But the one group that he refused, they insisted and so he did release the money out of their account to that group and they didn’t ship the next year and the year after that they had a complete disaster. They learned the hard way. And they had no funds to recover.

*Q: Did you have any problem with the United Fruit Company? For years they had been the bad guys down there.*

STEELE: No. They were diversifying and so was Standard Fruit. They divested themselves of many of their lands and were contracting with sindicatos or cooperatives of producers but providing technical assistance packages and forward pricing. There were enough trained Hondurans by the time I was living there that they kept the farmers out of trouble and negotiated prices with Standard and United Fruit. United Fruit also closed down several of their large research stations. USAID and the U.S. government and the Germans and somebody else, I think the Swedish, helped the Honduran government take over the United Fruit facility. That became the nucleus for the first Honduran agricultural research center. From that they had satellites in place. But they always had relied on United or Standard for all their agronomic research.

*Q: During this period, there was a great deal of migration from Central America to the United States. Part of it was because of the war but it was also for economic reasons. Did this play any role in what you were doing?*

STEELE: I can’t say that it did. I would suggest that El Salvador had the highest concentration of people per square kilometer. When I worked there on a tripartite team before I went to Guatemala, that was the only agricultural sector report – it was a tripartite team of the World Bank, USAID, and the Inter-American Development Bank – that the government would refuse to allow to be published. It was a very serious report saying, “You’ve got to have land reform here. You have got to do this and that.” Well, it was done in more diplomatic terminology than that, but there wasn’t any question about what this tripartite team said was going on in the rural sector of El Salvador and that if they didn’t do it they were going to have a revolution. It came to pass. They didn’t do anything about it. That’s where the out migration was the most serious problem. And in Nicaragua, too. There were Hondurans that were leaving, but I think Honduras had a pretty good development approach and not as much out migration, surprisingly.

**MARCIA BERNBAUM**



**Assistant Education Development Officer, USAID  
Tegucigalpa (1981-1984)**

*Marcia Bernbaum was the daughter of a Foreign Service officer and born in Quito, Ecuador. She joined USAID in 1977 as an International Development Intern. Her placements abroad included Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras and Kenya. Ms. Bernbaum was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

BERNBAUM: Actually, we were allowed to stay on, but we decided it was time to leave. We had two small kids, and I was getting nervous. Things up until then had been fine. The Sandinistas were very friendly toward us, but the atmosphere was beginning to change. The AID mission in Honduras lured myself, Eric and another AID employee, Gordie Straub, over. So we literally rolled over the border back to Honduras. Eric had worked as a contractor there with AID. I now was direct hire. We arrived in Honduras in March of '81 and were there until July of '84.

*Q: What was the situation in Honduras?*

BERNBAUM: Melgar Castro was the President. He had been freely elected. Honduras is a very poor country. It was a backwater AID program at the point when we went and had a very small amount of funding. During the period we were there, the funding started going up dramatically. Eric went in as the Deputy in the Projects Office. I was a fledgling Assistant Education Development Officer working in the Human Resources Development Office.

*Q: Was there any issue of dual employment? That used to be a real issue.*

BERNBAUM: At about the time that Eric and I came in, AID had just issued a policy that favored tandem assignments. Other couples had experienced difficulties up until that point, but Eric and I came in at just the right time. We were fortunate in that the Latin America Bureau had two people who were deeply committed to career enhancement for people they felt were talented — Buster Brown, then Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Latin America Bureau, and Terri Stephen who was in charge of the Latin America Bureau's Executive Office. For our first four posts — Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Washington, we were fine. We didn't bother to look for our next assignments because we knew that the powers that be were taking good care of us. At that point, we were both low enough in the bureaucracy that there were no problems with tandem assignments. And there was flexibility. In the case of Honduras, the AID mission had to come up with a job for me. But, at the time, that was not a problem. There were difficulties later on when we moved up the career ladder.

*Q: I see. You've been in education so far. What was the agency's interest in education?*

BERNBAUM: At that time AID had education programs in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The focus was on primary and secondary. In primary education AID was providing support with textbook development, production, and distribution, teacher training, classroom construction...

*Q: Well, I'm interested because you were in Honduras during the Reagan administration, right? And my understanding is that in AID, at that time, there was a strong feeling that the U.S. had nothing to offer in this field.*

BERNBAUM: Not in Latin America. Wait until I get to my period when I was the Deputy in the Education Division in Washington. We were throwing money at education in Central America like nobody's business.

*Q: We'll come back to that.*

BERNBAUM: Fine.

*Q: In Honduras, what was your position?*

BERNBAUM: I was the Assistant Education Development Officer. Let me put this into perspective. As we have learned over the years, if you are going to make a difference - especially working in an area like basic education - you're talking about a long term commitment. In countries like Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador there is a rich history of 20 or 30 plus years involvement in the education sector.

*Q: U.S. involvement?*

BERNBAUM: Yes, through AID. However, as I understand it, AID is now bowing out of the education business and handing responsibility over to the World Bank and the IDB. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the World Bank and IDB were primarily involved in bricks and mortar. AID was the primary actor when it came to support for the "soft" activities - teacher training, textbooks, Management Information Systems. It wasn't until the late 80s that the World Bank and IDB started including support for "soft" activities.

But let me go back to the beginnings of AID's involvement in education in Honduras. Actually it dates back to the '60s to the Servicio period.

*Q: Was there any recollection of IIAA, the Institute for Inter-American Affairs? It goes back to the '40s.*

BERNBAUM: Does it? I didn't know that.

*Q: That's when the Servicio idea started.*

BERNBAUM: Okay. I believe that in Honduras AID was involved in helping the Ministry of Education get started. But there was a definite history of AID involvement with smaller programs in education. Just before I arrived in Honduras in 1973 to do my dissertation there had been a major to-do. AID was supporting a large secondary school program. It included classroom construction, curriculum development, teacher training, textbooks, the whole nine yards. A contract was let to a consortium of Florida Universities. It was under a loan. The Florida consortium came in. There was a weak Ministry of Education. The Florida Consortium was

under pressure to produce results. On a parallel plane there was a textbook program in Honduras being financed by USAID's Central America regional program, ROCAP [Regional Office for Central America Programs].

Anyway, the Florida Consortium came in and immediately got on the wrong side of the teachers' union. The teachers union, at that time, was strongly leftist and had tremendous power over the Ministry of Education. The teacher's union saw the Florida Consortium as a U.S. incursion into their affairs. They also resented that the advisors were loan financed and were getting very large salaries. In an effort both to embarrass the U.S. government and put their own government into difficulties, they went out into the streets and lodged large public protests. They burned the ROCAP texts in a visible place in downtown Tegucigalpa, and they went after the Florida consortium. Eventually the President of Honduras, desiring some political capital, took it upon himself to personally throw the Florida Consortium out of the country.

By the time I arrived in 1973 (this had taken place a year or two before my arrival) the word Florida Consortium had become a bad word. There are some marvelous stories. One is that you could go to the marketplace and witness a woman who had never been to school admonishing her mischievous four year old that he if he doesn't behave himself she will get the Florida Consortium after him. When I began my volunteer work with the Ministry of Education in '74, the U.S. government and AID, in particular, had a very bad name. AID by that time had dropped out of anything that wasn't construction, finished the construction activity under the secondary education loan, and had stopped working in education because relations were so bad.

*Q: Was this the time when the Latin American Bureau was emphasizing major sector loans for education?*

BERNBAUM: Yes. In the mid-1970s AID in Washington was sponsoring two education sector analyses, one in El Salvador and one in Ecuador. Shorter sector assessments were also in vogue. In fact, before leaving Honduras for the U.S. in 1976, I was hired by an AID contractor, the Academy for Educational Development, to participate in an education sector assessment focusing on rural primary education.

*Q: But you worked for AID.*

BERNBAUM: Not at the time. I was a volunteer with the Ministry of Education.

*Q: Right. Right.*

BERNBAUM: But when I returned in '81, AID had decided to reenter the education sector focusing again on "soft" support. I was put in charge of a small pilot project that focused on curriculum reform. The idea was to adapt for application in Honduras a very successful program that AID had helped start in Colombia called Escuela Nueva. The program, designed initially for use with multi-grade classes in rural areas, permitted children to drop out of school to help their parents with the harvests without penalizing their progress in school.

When I arrived the program was in bad shape. When it was designed there was the anticipation that there would be outside technical assistance from Colombia and other countries. However, a recently appointed Minister of Education put his foot down and said that he would not accept outside technical assistance, not even from other Latin American countries. He appointed to these positions Hondurans who were not qualified for the roles assigned to them.

When I arrived Rafael Pineda Ponce, the Director General of Primary Education who I had worked for in the mid 1970s, had been named Minister of Education. He took up with him as his advisors a number of the people I had worked with while in Honduras in the 1970s. I was thrilled. My dream of supporting people like Pineda Ponce, which I had shared when I was interviewed to join AID, had finally come true.

However, when I arrived in March of 1981 it was a very political year. Pineda Ponce left his position soon after I arrived to go on the campaign trail, and I was left with a program that had become highly politicized being run by technical advisors who lacked the skills to do their jobs.

That was the worst time in my whole career. Given my past history with the Ministry of Education I mistakenly thought that I was still one of them and tried to do everything to advise them on what needed to be done to fix the program. However, they weren't interested. What's more they kept indirectly giving me signals, which I didn't pick up, that I was no longer one of them but an AID officer. It was a very tense relationship. Pineda Ponce left to campaign, and another person came in as interim Minister of Education who I found quite difficult to deal with.

Several months later a letter arrived from the Minister of Education addressed to the USAID Mission Director. I had taken over the Education office while my boss had gone off for home leave and training. The letter said basically "We're looking forward to Marcia's boss coming back. We find her hard to deal with." I was devastated. What I saw as a great opportunity had become a nightmare. I've never been so low and so disillusioned. I was chagrined that I didn't get their indirect messages that I was no longer part of them. I also realized, from an AID perspective, how difficult it is to work with a political Ministry of Education. It was a very sobering experience.

In '81 something happened that turned my stay in Honduras from a very negative to a very positive experience. The Caribbean Basin Initiative [CBI] was launched, and all of a sudden the focus was on preparing Honduras for an expanded export market to the U.S.. I was looking for something to do. I didn't want to work with the Ministry of Education. I wasn't needed or apparently wanted.

I went to my boss and I said, "I'd like your permission to get together with a group of businessmen to see whether there are any labor productivity issues related to expanding exports to the U.S. and, if so, what AID can do to be helpful. Will you permit me to spend a month or two seeing if there is a role for us?" The response was positive.

Ironically, my husband was working at that time on the demand side while I was working on the supply side.

I approached a very wealthy businessman who ran the largest textile mill in the country and said, "I'd like to organize a group of businessmen as advisors to help guide us."

He said, "I will only become part of your advisory group if you include people from labor and the government."

I said, "Fine."

So he identified some people from the three sectors - the head of the major labor confederation, the person at Ministry of Planning responsible for education, a number of leaders of business organizations in Peru. In May of '82 I hosted an initial meeting at my house. Here I was, a young woman in her early 30s, surrounded by a group of notables in Honduras' public and private sectors. I said to them, "You are all very busy people, but we want to know if there are issues with labor productivity and what we can do to be of assistance. I realize you are all busy people so I will be happy to come to your offices to talk with you."

The busiest person in the room, the head of the textile mill that I initially approached, responded: "This is very important. We need to meet with you six times to give you advice." I'll never forget his reference to "six times."

A year and a half later that group had met in my living room at least once a week, every week, and we'd been on an observation tour to the United States. I finally threw them out of my living room to launch on their own, and I say that with great caring because this was the most extraordinary experience I've had in my career in AID.

At the beginning none of us knew what we were doing. I came in with no preconceived notions. We started having meetings, talking about what we saw as the issues and potential solutions. The complaint was with INFOP, similar to the institution I tried to work with in Panama, which was financed by a payroll tax. The key complaint was that, as businessmen, they were paying for low quality training that was not meeting their needs.

One day after about three months of weekly meetings, one of the youngest businessmen in the group said, "You know, it just occurred to me. We've been sitting here complaining about the government but we're part of the problem. If we don't insist that the government change things, then who are we to complain?"

That, then, led us into organizing an observation tour to the United States to see the role that private businessmen play in supporting education. In the United States for years, vocational high schools have had trained advisory committees - people in electricity or mechanics that come in and advise the school. So this was my first experience with an observation tour. I now swear by them. I went up to the U.S. with most of the group. Over a 10 day period we visited vocational training institutions and learned about competency based instruction programs. We also went to the American Management Associations in New York. I'll get into that in a moment because it was very significant.

During that trip I put everybody to work. Everybody was assigned a day. At the end of the day that person was responsible for running a meeting where we reviewed what we learned that day. The person running the meeting was then responsible for writing up the day as part of our trip report. I was kiddingly called the tough taskmaster. It was a tremendous bonding experience.

The day before we left the United States we spent the afternoon sorting out what had we learned. The person responsible for that day said, "You know, I've been thinking about this. I've seen the role that private businessmen play in the United States in guiding training and I've been thinking about it. Instead of being an advisory group to AID, I think we should become an advisory group to our own country." I have never been so proud in my life.

That's when I decided it was time to throw them out of my living room and help them become their own organization. They became CADERH, the Honduran Advisory Council for Human Resources Development. CADERH, in keeping with our group composition, was designed as a tripartite organization, with representation from labor, government, and the private sector.

*Q: And the three were on your trip?*

BERNBAUM: Yes. The three were on the trip. I had the luxury, which very few direct hires do, of spending the next six months helping CADERH prepare a proposal for AID support. Here I was a U.S. direct hire officer who, for a year and half, had the luxury of devoting the majority of my time to helping to nurture this group.

When we left in August of '84, the Ambassador and his wife hosted a farewell luncheon in our honor at the Embassy Residence. We were asked to come up with the guest list so I included several of the CADERH people. I'll never forget this. Sitting on my right at lunch was the labor leader and sitting on my left was the head of Honduras' most influential businessmen's association. One had dark skin; one had light skin. The head of the labor association turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and he said, "Who would have ever thought two years ago before I met you Marcia and teamed up with this group that I would have ever agreed to sit at the same table with this guy, much less consider him my friend." When I returned to Honduras last year, 14 years later, this group was still together.

*Q: Good.*

BERNBAUM: Good and bad. The same person said, "It doesn't mean we don't fight tooth and nail over labor issues, but we are together when it comes to our dream of what we want to do with vocational skills training."

Basically what they wanted to do, and several of these people were members of the board of INFOP, was revamp INFOP. They wanted to gain private sector labor control over it, because at that time it was in the hands of the government. The program we came up with was to develop competency based materials that INFOP and other skills training institutions in Honduras could apply to improve the quality and relevance of their training. CADERH, with its tripartite composition, would be responsible for certifying skilled labor. So if you come out of INFOP or another vocational school and I'm a businessman who is going to hire you, I say "I want to make

sure you've been credentialed and certified by CADERH." It was a dream that, 14 years later, hasn't yet become reality, although I understand there are some promising advances in this direction as of late.

That was very exciting, building a vision and seeing people keep with that vision.

*Q: You say it hasn't reached reality yet?*

BERNBAUM: I'll go into that in a moment. First, I would like to share with you another thing that I did in Honduras, during the same period, that gave me tremendous satisfaction. The advisory group in its formative period decided that it was important to expand its focus to also include management training. We visited vocational skills and management training institutions in Honduras. We invited groups to come to our meetings and make presentations. We also sponsored two sets of supply-demand surveys: one focusing on vocational skills training, the other on management training. Hours and hours of their busy time, often taking one or two days off from their businesses, went into this.

In one of our weekend events, we invited a number of management training institutions to present to us what they were doing and what their plans were. Among those who accepted our invitation was a group of young businessmen from San Pedro Sula, Honduras' key industrial city called GEMAH. They were young (in their early 30s), most from middle to lower class backgrounds. What brought them together was a Dale Carnegie course. At the course, they decided they had to do something to improve democracy in their country but they weren't exactly sure how to do this, although they thought that management was one route. At the time, they were working out of a tiny office in the stadium. They had sponsored a couple of first aid clinics, but they had a vision that they wanted to do something much more far reaching.

Tony Cauterucci, now USAID Mission Director in Honduras, and I had at separate times been to visit the American Management Associations in New York. We were very impressed with them as an organization and particularly with their Vice President for International Affairs, John McArthur. I deliberately invited the President of GEMAH, Teofilo Castillo on our observation tour to the U.S. and arranged for us, the last day, to visit the AMA in New York. I tipped off John McArthur in advance that on my agenda was helping to establish a "match" between his organization and the incipient managers association from San Pedro Sula.

John played his role beautifully and, by the end of our visit to the AMA, Teofilo couldn't wait to invite John to Honduras to set up a correspondent relationship between his association and the AMA. We used project development support funding to cover John's travel expenses to Honduras a couple of months later. With great fanfare and lots of newspaper coverage there was a formal signing ceremony to establish the relationship. During my last year I nurtured this relationship and, among others, helped GEMAH write a proposal to USAID which had GEMAH taking advantage of what AMA had to offer through the correspondent relationship to assist GEMAH, in three years, to become a self-financing management training institution and, in so doing, support the Caribbean Basin Initiative.

And it worked like clockwork. AMA came in, brought their name and expertise and gave GEMAH a tremendous image. Within three years, as planned, GEMAH became a self-financing management institution. It eventually outgrew AMA, although relations remain very cordial. Today, 14 years later, GEMAH is highly regarded in Honduras. As happened in Panama with the APEDE, USAID/Honduras turned to GEMAH a number of years later for support with a small business development program.

I'm convinced, based on this experience and others, that when all is said and done an important key to success in development is being in the right place at the right time with the right resources. Had we approached GEMAH a year before or a year later, I don't think they would have been as ready for our assistance.

*Q: GEMAH stands for what?*

BERNBAUM: Gerentes y Empresarios Asociados de Honduras — Managers and Businessmen Associated of Honduras.

*Q: Is it a private institution?*

BERNBAUM: Yes. It's a for-profit non-government organization. It runs courses for businessmen who can afford to pay, although they are increasingly, now that they are doing very well, providing courses to individuals of limited means.

*Q: And for labor or just for?*

BERNBAUM: They provide various levels of training for high level businessmen down to mid-level managers and supervisors.

I would now like to get back to your earlier question.

The CADERH experience shows both the naivete of the project design — I will take credit for that — and what happens with changing personnel and circumstances in AID. When I left Honduras in 1984, we had designed a very ambitious project. We had a vision of what we wanted to accomplish, which I think was a good vision. What we didn't have was the technical know-how to convert this vision to reality. The mission, after I left, had difficulties contracting qualified technical assistance to assist CADERH to develop competency based training modules, which were central to the project design.

The person who replaced me was outstanding. He had the technical know-how that the members of CADERH and I didn't have, but he had a different vision. At the time, we were focusing on improving the quality of vocational skills training in Honduras primarily as a vehicle for making Honduran businesses more competitive under the CBI. He didn't disagree. However, he was deeply committed to helping small, non-profit vocational skills training institutions provide improved skills training for the poor.



Under his tutelage CADERH began focusing on this new area. It also, as time evolved, accepted funding from USAID for other activities that were ancillary to its vision. They depended entirely on USAID for their financing and, for this and other reasons, never said "no" when a new project was offered to them. They attempted to engage in self-financing activities, with USAID's support, but most of the activities they took on were not successful in reaching this objective and diverted a lot of CADERH's management time and energy from achieving its vision of improving the quality and relevance of vocational skills training in Honduras.

For many years, they were considered a great success and then last year in January, Elena Brineman, the Mission Director, approached me. She said "Marcia, CADERH is experiencing growing pains and there is only one person who can come and help them out. You're considered the "mother" of CADERH. Therefore, you have an obligation to help them."

Last April, 14 years after I left Honduras, I returned with great trepidation. When I debriefed the group at the end of my consultancy I said to them, "The good news is that you're all still on CADERH's Board. The bad news is you're all still on CADERH's Board. The board hadn't changed. It had become very ingrown. They maintained the original vision but were working outside of that vision. John McArthur and I had taken them through a strategic planning exercise in the early 1980s when CADERH was in the process of being formed. However, since then, they had not done any further strategic planning.

I gave them some pretty tough medicine. Their problem in part - and I will take partial credit for this - was that they started with a lofty vision which was too ambitious. They then got caught in the vicious circle of keeping afloat financially and, in so doing, accepting funding from USAID for activities that took them away from their vision. We agreed, at the end of my visit, that it was time to reconsider what their vision was and to abide by whatever that mission might be.

I have to give tremendous credit to AID and Elena Brineman, the USAID Mission Director. She said, "I realize that we've got a problem. And I realize that we at AID are part of the problem. I want you to come in and help solve it. I want you to be very honest. The important thing is to get CADERH back on track." Both the USAID Mission and CADERH wanted me to tell it to them like it was. That shows, on both sides, tremendous integrity.

From what I've heard since, CADERH took my recommendations seriously, and they appear to be getting back on track implementing their original vision.

*Q: So the core of the issue was [that] they were being pulled in too many directions?*

BERNBAUM: That was one of the problems. They kept taking on interesting new activities that promised to generate income that fit with other USAID objectives. When I was there last April, I said to the CADERH people, "You've got to learn to say no, even to USAID. You've got to be clear on what your vision is." They had also become so ingrown among themselves that they were not as functional as they could be. Again, what can I say? There are a lot of lessons from GEMAH and CADERH that I'm still sorting out. It's both exciting and very humbling.

*Q: They were being used in effect by AID.*

BERNBAUM: I wouldn't put it exactly that way. There was no problem with GEMAH. GEMAH became self-financing, as planned, in three years and went off the AID dole. Years later, when USAID approached them for assistance in implementing a small business development program, GEMAH took it on under their terms. Of course, GEMAH had a major advantage over CADERH. They could charge, and charge well, for their courses. This is a problem we've encountered time and time again with so many NGOs we support. The experience with CADERH is not the only time that AID has helped establish groups with the hope that they will become self-financing only to find that they don't have the capability to do so. In the interest of keeping these institutions alive, AID pushed them to get involved in money making schemes. The result is that, in so doing, they run the risk of getting deviated from their mission.

*Q: That's a good message.*

BERNBAUM: With regard, to CADERH, we'll see where they're headed. I think they actually did take my recommendations. I did a participatory workshop with them the last week I was in Honduras. At the workshop I said, "The bad news is you got off track. The good news is you have a lot of things in your favor. There's a lot you can do." I played cheerleader. I also challenged them to examine their weaknesses openly and critically and take steps to do something about them.

Going back to the Ministry of Education. I left off in the early 80s — no mid 70s with the Florida Consortium — and the very bad vibes and then I returned in the early 80s. The atmosphere was still frosty, no desire for outside technical assistance. The teachers union was still going strong. In 1983 a very dynamic woman became Minister of Education. Single-handedly she broke the back of the teachers union. With that the atmosphere started to change.

When I departed in '84, the door was beginning to open to outside advisors, including very hesitantly, one or two from the United States. One of the people who subsequently came over to work for AID, Marco Tulio Mejia had been the Vice Minister of Education in the early 80s. Marco Tulio is a dear friend. We go back nearly 25 when he helped me identify students in his program at the Secondary Teachers Training College to help me do coding for my dissertation. Interestingly enough, Marco Tulio was trained in the United States, compliments of the infamous Florida consortium.

Between '84, when I left Honduras, and '98, when I returned, AID had become the lead donor in supporting education in Honduras. During the period of the war in Central America in the late '80s and early '90s, the multilateral donors (World Bank and IDB) stopped providing support in the region. This left the playing field open to AID who was the only big donor during this period in the region. With grant funds, which made a big difference, AID was financing U.S. advisors to assist the Hondurans with teacher training, textbook development, management information systems. AID also sent a large group of Hondurans from the Ministry of Education to the University of New Mexico to get Master's degrees in administration and teacher training.

I hesitate, however, to claim that the Ministry of Education had improved a great deal. Indicators of access and quality had gone up, thanks to AID support, but there continued to be serious problems with the management of the Ministry. A number of excellent USAID education officers went through Honduras — Dick Martin, Ned Van Steenwyck — and I have to congratulate them on the work they did. A recent report prepared by Ned shows impressive trends in increases in enrollments, along with improvements in educational efficiency, much of which can be attributed to AID support.

AID helped the Ministry put in place, actually I was the "instigator," an educational management information system, one of the first in the region. This, by the way, has not been an easy process. It has taken years to become up and running. AID is also in the process of assisting the Ministry of Education to extend education beyond the classroom to reach youth who have dropped out of school or who no longer qualify to do to school. The program, "Educatodos" recently received a UNESCO award.

My concern, in Honduras and elsewhere, is that starting in the mid 1990s USAID, due in large part to funding declines, started handing over its education programs to the World Bank and IDB. From what I have seen, I am not convinced that either institution has the technical expertise to provide the kind of assistance that AID has been providing in Honduras, El Salvador and elsewhere.

One key lesson learned, which you can't get around: if you want to see results, especially in basic education, hang in there for the long term, tough it out through thick and thin, take a low key/back seat role when you need to...

*Q: How many years altogether to do this, do you think?*

BERNBAUM: We're talking 20-30 years. If you look at AID support in countries such as Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala you are looking at a record (with a couple of interruptions) that goes back to the 1960s and probably way before that.

One of my pet peeves is that we don't document our accomplishments over time. Everyone agrees it's a good idea but somehow there is never funding to do it. And it's a shame, because there are some fascinating stories to be told and not just in education but most sectors USAID has worked in.. That's one of my frustrations: that we don't take time as an agency to go back...

*Q: Would you say the education program was Americanized by this process?*

BERNBAUM: Oh, I don't like that word.

*Q: I know. That's why I said it, because in a sense it was such a heavy U.S. engagement in the process. How do you deal with the multicultural.?*

BERNBAUM: We often contract advisors from other countries. For example, when AID introduced the Escuela Nueva approach from Colombia in Guatemala, a very competent Colombian was brought in.

This doesn't exactly address your question, but I would like to set aside a few moments to reflect on AID and its competitive edge in education. A little over two years ago AID, in a reduction-in-force, got rid of six of its most senior education officers, virtually gutting its technical expertise in education. I can count on the fingers of one hand the senior education people left in the Agency and this is very distressing. There is no doubt that in education, and I hear that the same is happening in other sectors, that AID is losing its competitive edge. So if you were to ask me know what is AID's comparative advantage in education, I would have to hesitate before replying.

AID's special niche is that it has the capability with grant funding to finance innovations to be on the "edge" of new technologies and approaches, to take risks. AID, which provides grant funding, has the ability to bring in advisors in a way that the multilateral banks, that provide loan funding, can't. While I don't ordinarily agree with pushing advisors when they aren't wanted, there are times when you need to nudge the right people. AID has played a key role in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras on the quality side — with management information systems, achievement tests, innovative textbook programs, teacher training. However, given what is happening right now, I hold my breath. The drop in support for education, at least in Latin America, was not during the Reagan Administration but rather the Bush and Clinton Administrations when scarce funding for education starting "migrating" to the Africa region due to Congressional pressure.

*Q: That's very interesting because I sat in meetings with administrators and others in AID during the Reagan Administration, and they were very vehement that the U.S. had no comparative advantage in the education sector.*

BERNBAUM: How fascinating. Well remember, we were protected in Central America in the 1980s. Central America had all this Kissinger money coming in which, for political reasons, we had to spend and spend quickly. Right now the Africa Bureau is protected because for years there has been an earmark for basic education in that region. So, I think you may be right. I was looking at the Latin America Bureau only. Of course in the '80s, as I'm about to get into, we had more money than we knew what to do with in all sectors in Central America...

*Q: How did our efforts respond to preserving the Honduran cultural dimension or did we stay clear of the social, historical.?*

BERNBAUM: I think that's a very good question, and it's one that I can't answer because I wasn't there the last 14 years, and I don't know to what extent we respected the cultural side. I know that Ned, who played a key role throughout this period, is a deeply respectful person. I can't speak for the other advisors. I know that the Academy for Educational Development is one of the best education groups out there, and I understand they have done a good job. I know, from when I was in Honduras in March of last year, that the vibes I got were all extremely positive in terms of the quality and usefulness of technical assistance. We were in a variety of technical areas. We were in management information systems, achievement tests. When we got into things like textbook design which is very sensitive, it was Marco Tulio Mejia who represented AID. As a Honduran, and a highly respected one, there was clearly cultural sensitivity.

*Q: He was a senior FSN [Foreign Service national] then?*

BERNBAUM: Yes. During this period, USAID/Honduras had the continuity of both Marco Tulio Mejia and Ned Van Steenwyck, although you had other education officers coming in and out. Ned basically kept the ship together on the CADERH and GEMAH side. Both Marco Tulio and Ned, in their dealings with the Ministry of Education, were very low key. Much is accomplished through relationships built on confidence and trust. Something we frequently struggle with in AID is the constant turnover in staff. When we have continuity on both sides, we do very well if we've got a good group.

*Q: Looking at Honduras more broadly. What was the situation? How was it evolving beyond education? Did you get a feel for that?*

BERNBAUM: I was in Honduras during a pivotal period. You had the Caribbean Basin Initiative. A few months before I left, Henry Kissinger and his commission came in. I was the Control Officer that day, I remember. The whole program — USAID's presence in Honduras, the U.S. Government presence, the U.S. military presence — expanded. The U.S. Government established military bases in Comayagua outside of Tegucigalpa. You had the beginnings of a very, very rough civil war period where Honduras was being used as a launching point for dealing with the problems with the Sandinistas.

*Q: Was that going on while you were there?*

BERNBAUM: It was beginning as I left. It was I think maybe '83 when that all started.

*Q: You didn't have any connection with the Contra operation?*

BERNBAUM: No. I had no personal connection with it. But by the time Eric and I left the floodgate was opening, increased interest in Honduras on the part of the U.S. Government because of the problems with Cuba and the guerilla movements not so much in Honduras but in Salvador and Nicaragua.

*Q: Were you having a problem with the Cubans in Honduras?*

BERNBAUM: No. There was no Cuban presence in Honduras that I was aware of. What you had was a very left politicized teachers union. However, as I mentioned when I was there in the early 1980s, its back was broken. You never had the dynamic of what happened in Salvador and Nicaragua take place in Honduras.

*Q: Why would Honduras be different?*

BERNBAUM: I'm not so sure. I would be a poor person to make a definitive statement. But let me take a couple of strikes at it. You don't have as much a disparity between the rich and poor in a country like Honduras as you do in Salvador and Guatemala. Nicaragua was another story. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the war had a lot to do with limited arable land and many people fighting over this land. That was not an issue in Honduras.

*Q: What was their economic condition?*

BERNBAUM: The economy has done fairly well. I think, and again I wasn't there in the last 80s, that Honduras did take advantage of the CBI. In fact, one of my husband's legacies was that he designed a project that helped initiate several export zones in Honduras that generated high levels of employment. When I returned to Honduras last year, his former colleagues told me, "Your husband would be so proud." The project he designed met its targets and exceeded them.

*Q: But the poverty was pretty pervasive?*

BERNBAUM: Strong poverty.

*Q: .despite all this positive feeling.*

BERNBAUM: And it's still a very poor country.

*Q: And even more poor today.*

BERNBAUM: And, of course, Honduras is devastated. Hurricane Mitch has just been horrible...

*Q: But the basic population was fairly uniformly very poor?*

BERNBAUM: I wouldn't say uniformly very poor. I would just say - and again you'd have to go back to statistics which I haven't tracked for years - that the disjuncts between the rich and the poor are not that large. You have in Honduras an increasing middle class.

*Q: Did they have different indigenous groups?*

BERNBAUM: No. Unlike Guatemala where you have many different indigenous groups, you do not have this situation in Honduras. Like in Salvador and Nicaragua it is primarily a Latino population, with the exception of La Mosquitia - the jungles - where there are various indigenous groups. You have the big difference that you have in many countries between the highlands and the coast. The highland capital, Tegucigalpa, very conservative, low key. The coastal city, San Pedro Zula, a boomtown with many well to do businessmen. For example, Teofilo Castillo, who was director of GEMAH, when I was there in '84 and until at least year when I visited Honduras still General Manager of GEMAH, has risen from the ranks of being a lower income individual without a father who, with his family, had to scrape to make ends meet, to being an established businessman who lives very comfortably.

*Q: There was also the dominant role of the U.S. plantation - bananas, etc.?*

BERNBAUM: Of course, yes. You had the banana plantations that have been there for years. What you are hearing me say, by the way, is from the eyes Marcia Bernbaum, the Education Officer, who was off in her little corner not necessarily always looking at the big picture. If you

were to interview a person such as my late husband Eric who was a project development officer, you would have a broader perspective.

*Q: What about education in relation to the plantations.?*

BERNBAUM: Yes. Well, we didn't have much to do with that. I do know from what I've been told more anecdotally that the banana companies did in fact invest quite a lot of money in education of their personnel, that they had good schools for the kids and such. But I can't tell you much more, because we weren't involved with.

*Q: So it was isolated from the general public?*

BERNBAUM: I suspect so. Remember, when I was working with business training and vocational training, our focus was primarily on the industrial sector and on companies who were preparing to export their goods to the U.S. I was not involved at all in the agricultural sector.

*Q: How did you find working with the Hondurans?*

BERNBAUM: Very frustrating. I love the Hondurans dearly and many of my best friends are Hondurans. Eric was a Peace Corps volunteer from '67 to '69 so we have friends that go back 25 almost 30 years. The Hondurans, however, are famous for never saying exactly what they think. You can go into a meeting with the Minister of Education and think you have total agreement and find out that you don't. I found that very difficult because I tend to be very direct. It's one of the reasons I enjoyed working with CADERH because many of them had been trained from the United States, and I could communicate with them differently.

I remember saying to a good friend of ours who worked with Eric and later became Minister of Finance, "Moncho, you know, it must be some problem with my language, my Spanish. I don't get the right nuances. I don't fully understand often what happens in meetings even though I speak good Spanish I tend to misinterpret signals."

His reply, "It's not just you." He jokingly said, "Why do you think we are such an underdeveloped country? We never say what we think. We never communicate with each other." That's sort of a joke. I think you find that in Guatemala. You don't find that in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguans are very straightforward and put on the table exactly what they think.

*Q: Do you have any understanding of why that is one of their characteristics?*

BERNBAUM: Larry Harrison, who has written on this, would tell you that this goes back to the Spanish colonization and the Catholic Church — the notion that there is a self-fulfilling prophecy and that your future is out of your hands. That's a gross overgeneralization, too, because you find many exceptions to that rule. But what I can say is that is very different in Kenya. In Kenya being forthright was an important value. This made me very comfortable because I am a forthright person.

**SARAH HORSEY-BARR**  
**Consul General**  
**Tegucigalpa (1981-1984)**

*Mrs. Horsey-Barr was born in Maryland into a Foreign Service family. She was raised in the Washington DC area and abroad and was educated at Georgetown University; and Loyola University in Rome, Italy. Her service with the State Department took her to several posts in Latin America dealing with both consular and political/management affairs. Her last assignments were with the Organization of American States, where she served in various senior capacities with the U.S. Mission. Mrs. Horsey-Barr was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: So in '81 what did you do?*

HORSEY-BARR: So in January of '81 I went off to Honduras as consul general. Well, I wasn't actually consul general right away. I went off as number-two for three months or six months until the consul general left, and then I was consul general.

*Q: You were in Honduras from...*

HORSEY-BARR: January of '81 until about June or so of '84.

*Q: What was the sort of political economic situation in Honduras at that time?*

HORSEY-BARR: Oh, that was very interesting, because the whole Contra operation, the whole Nicaraguan operation, was just starting, and no one else in the embassy could talk to these insurgents because at that time we didn't have a policy of supporting them. I think the Argentines were supporting them. But we didn't. So the only folks in the embassy couldn't have any dealings with these people, but we could in the consular section, and so they would come in for visas. So everybody would slip me these list of questions and, "If so-and-so comes in, find out this that and everything." It made it very interesting, because to a large extent we were where the action was. The nice thing about consular work, in my experience, was that if you did the job well, everybody would leave you alone, which was nice, not to have people breathing down your neck, and not to be in a position I found when I was later a political counselor as being the ambassador's staff aide essentially. But the other nice thing about consular work was that you could think very creatively about the situation you were in and almost anything you wanted to get into you really could, because there was very little that would be going on that didn't somehow relate to protecting Americans or figuring out who was leading the country and why and how, and so it gave enormous scope for getting into society and really doing the formatting of different things. It gave a freedom that, as I looked at colleagues in other sections, I never quite saw duplicated in other sections.

*Q: What was the government of Honduras like from your perspective.*



HORSEY-BARR: Honduras never had the disparity between rich and poor that's so typical of other countries in Latin America and particularly Central America. They are sort of mediocre. At that point they were stable, unlike other countries. At least in 1981 there weren't any strong leftist inclinations. What they wanted was money, money for development. There was a large amount of corruption. And there was an almost exclusive focus on the United States politically, socially, economically. The country was dominated economically by the U.S. Banana Company. In many respects it was a satellite, a satellite of the United States.

*Q: Were they having human rights problems there?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, they were, but people didn't talk very much about them in the late '70s. By the time they started talking about them in the '80s, our policy required Honduras to be in a partnership but there was very little talk about them then. Now, there has been a lot of talk about what was going on in the '90s, but there wasn't much talk about it then. Yes, there were abuses going on. I guess in the '80s the most one heard about regularly were the police abuses, but the army abuses were well known. But the overriding concern was keeping Honduras as our ally in the Central American difficulties.

*Q: What sort of thing did the Contras play in the politics of the Nicaraguan conflict?*

HORSEY-BARR: They didn't really play in the politics. They played in the US-Honduras relationship, because essentially we give the Hondurans billions of dollars in aid, and in return Honduras let the Contras train and have camps on their soil from which they could go back into Nicaragua. But there wasn't that much discussion in the press publicly except on a couple of occasions. The border roads would be mined, and every now and again somebody would get blown up and, of course, that would be reported in the press, but it was accepted. In many of those societies the people that were being blown up were the peasants, and the line between sort of the peasant level and the folks that controlled the press, controlled the economy, controlled politics was really insurmountable. So, yes, it was reported, but it wasn't the better off, the better connected, the better educated that were getting blown up. They weren't out in the country on these border roads. So it was reported sort of matter of fact, never a big here and cry about it. There were a couple of instances which did provide a lot of attention, ongoing attention. One was when a couple of American journalists got blown up in one of these border wars. One of them was a reporter for the L.A. Times. That was in '83, if I remember correctly. And, of course, that got picked up on in a big way by the US press, and the story lived on and on, opened the door to just what were these reporters doing there and what was the United States interest and so on. And another time, which was perhaps that same year or the next year - I can't remember - an American priest, and American Jesuit, accompanied a column of Nicaraguan guerillas across the jungle mountains into Honduras and disappeared, died. Then there was a lot of attention, which goes on even today, about what happened to this American Jesuit. I think that incident - that was probably '83/'84 - was the first opening of the door to examining Honduras' human rights record stemming from the involvement of America.

*Q: Was there a feel of threat from Nicaragua? Did Ollie North ever cross your sights?*

HORSEY-BARR: No, not my sights. [Inaudible.] I just never had anything to do with him.

*Q: Was there a feeling in the embassy that something's going on here?*

HORSEY-BARR: Oh yes, everybody knew. I guess not everybody knew, but everybody knew something was going on. They often say that the happiest posts are the posts where there's pressure, and certainly people were very happy. People thought they had a mission, and looking back, it was very satisfying. What did Reagan care about? He cared about Nicaragua and he cared about Afghanistan. So if you wanted to be where there's action in the foreign policy sense, Honduras was one of the few places under Reagan where you certainly knew you were getting attention. In that sense I think it was very satisfying. It was interesting to watch the growth of the embassy over that period of time, because between, say, '82 and '85 the place tripled in size. Whereas in the early days it was a smaller post and everyone knew each other, now there were all kinds of strange characters walking around towards the end of that period. People had funny stories to tell about camping out on hillsides with night-vision goggles watching this, that and the other things. You'd meet them at parties and it would be the only time you'd ever see them. It was interesting in that sense.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you there, ambassadors?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, Briggs was there - no, not Briggs; what was his name? John Negroponte was there for most of my tour, but who was there when I first arrived in '81? I don't remember.

*Q: That's all right. We've got Benz and then Negroponte.*

HORSEY-BARR: And then Negroponte, exactly. John stayed, I guess, for about six months. Then John Negroponte was as prize given the fact that it was such a pivotal place in terms of the Reagan policy, he was a very strong person, John Negroponte. It became clear he knew exactly what he thought should be done to advance the policy

*Q: Were you feeling any of the heat that was coming out of the United States that was descending on our ambassador in Nicaragua itself but sort of the liberal left, the literati of Hollywood and all, that had taken up the Sandinista cause and were giving the Reagan policy holy hell?*

HORSEY-BARR: Yes, one saw that in the number of visitors that came through the embassy. Very few of them ever wanted to talk to the consular section. But my husband was in the political section and my closest friends were in USIA (United States Information Agency) and they would all be involved in these endless visits, hundreds of people every month, not just CODELs but private people to whom courtesies needed to be extended because of their interest, members of the press calling in for interviews, wanting to know what was going on. I wasn't directly involved in this sort of stuff. They weren't interested in consular stuff.

*Q: Thank God.*

HORSEY-BARR: Thank God, yes, because I was hearing stories from these other people. Their lives were absolute hell, because they were spending days each week taking care of these visitors

and then they'd have their regular work to do on top of that. It was really six- and seven-day weeks for most of these people and very tiring.

*Q: Did visas raise their head there? Was this a problem or it was fairly routine?*

HORSEY-BARR: We always had the problem of refusing, that usual sort of problem, but that was manageable. And, as I said, we did have the interesting aspects to that work that one didn't encounter elsewhere in terms of the Contras coming in and talking to them about things other than visas, if you will. And also, as things got more involved, it was interesting when high-ranking government or military officials would come in and figuring out what was it they were really going to be doing in the United States; those things and then the dead Americans who got blown up or disappeared from time to time.

*Q: Did you send out search parties looking for the Jesuit?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, we didn't send out search parties because it truly was tropical canopy jungle. I remember going out several times with the family by helicopter, by military helicopter, going up and down these ravines. But those things don't last. When there's that kind of jungle, the decay rate was fairly rapid. And there aren't paths. Where do you go?

*Q: Was there any feel about what had happened? You mentioned Nicaraguan guerillas. Whose guerillas were these?*

HORSEY-BARR: I don't know if they were manipulated or organized by a higher party, but they were about, oh, 80 to 100 of them and they were coming over to Honduras to engage in terrorist acts.

*Q: These were essentially from the Sandinista side?*

HORSEY-BARR: Yes.

*Q: The lower ranks of the Catholic Church were pretty much in bed with the Sandinistas.*

HORSEY-BARR: Yes, exactly. And the southern part of Honduras had a number of churches and priests that sort of espoused the more radical liberation theology. And these guys were coming across. The priest in question had in fact worked in Honduras earlier down in the south. So he came with them, and most of the rest of the column were 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds. This guy was in his late 60s, so just from a physical standpoint it's not surprising to think that he might have perished. Of course, the family and other extremists in the United States insisted that the Honduran army had captured and tortured him to death, and that's why they didn't come up with the body. Who knows? Perhaps they did. I don't think so, but it's possible. His vestments were recovered and his Bible and what have you, but his body wasn't. But a lot of men and women - there were women there, too - who were considerably younger and, according to other eye-witness reports, in considerably better shape than this priest died. There was nothing to eat in those jungles either. There's no game to catch or fruit or anything like that apparently. They described the most awful conditions. So I don't know what actually happened to him. His family

wrote a book in which they speak really castigatingly, if you will, towards our efforts. But what can you do?

*Q: Within the embassy, the officers of the embassy, was there any dissent in private or something that maybe we shouldn't be doing this or we should be nicer to the Sandinistas or anything?*

HORSEY-BARR: I never picked that up at all. I think most people in the embassy thought the Sandinistas were pretty awful people. The people that I know from that period in Honduras that I've seen since certainly haven't changed their minds. No, I didn't detect that. It was interesting at that time, and later in the '80s too, how few FSOs go to Central America, and you hear about people not wanting to go because they didn't agree with the policy. I don't know if the people that were there when I was there, I don't know how many of them agreed with the policy strongly or not strongly, but I think there was overwhelmingly the sense that, hey, we're where the action is and that's what we're in this business for. So clearly whatever, if you want to call it, morality or right and wrong about the situation, you might have thought about was not that strong to take over a feeling of being at the center of what the United States is all about in the foreign policy sense at that time. I never heard anybody say that. But it was interesting to think of how many people's careers got ruined by Central America, and there was a fair number, and I think that was because of politics in the Department and politics on the Hill and how many people wouldn't come, how often those jobs were going vacant because nobody would bid on them.

*Q: Was it a matter of conviction or just 'this is a hot potato' and because of the Congressional pressure and some of the true believers in the State Department...*

HORSEY-BARR: I don't know, but either way, any way you cut it, doesn't speak very well to the Foreign Service. At a subsequent time I was desk officer for Ireland. In fact, when I came back in '84 I remember just being appalled at how many people bid on DCM Dublin. There'd be 120 or 130 people, and at the same time you couldn't get anybody to go to Central America, but you had a lot of people joining the Foreign Service. It's all very well that we all like a nice post every now and again, but to me...

*Q: Sounds like retirement place. There's nothing happening there.*

HORSEY-BARR: Nothing happening there a perfectly pleasant but one doesn't need the Foreign Service to go and have a perfectly good life in Ireland, because whereas being involved in real policy issues, you can only do that in Honduras. But it's just an interesting thought. I don't know if that's the case today.

*Q: It's hard to say, but I think the Service keeps changing all the time, and there's a tendency to try to get a job that looks good on paper.*

HORSEY-BARR: A lot of people in Central America, as I said earlier, did not get supported by the system thereafter, did not get promoted, did not have a system in their embassies and things like that.

*Q: Why was this?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, I think in the end, like everything else, it's a combination of factors, but if the system wants people to go and take the tough jobs, there should be ways to make sure that there is some reward other than...

*Q: There was certainly a system that dealt with it fairly well in Vietnam.*

HORSEY-BARR: There may be. I wish I had gone to Vietnam, but I didn't, so I don't know that much about it. But people not getting promoted, that's probably a combination of poorly written OERs, which can do it for you anytime, maybe broad antipathy toward Central America. I don't know. But people not getting embassies, having their names withdrawn because of strong Congressional feelings for the other side that's something that perhaps not at the very time but later on, could have been corrected. There are guys down there just now getting their first embassies that were in ARA at the time in the mid-'80s, and here we are year 2000 and they're just getting their embassies. That's absurd, 16 years. Some people did go on, but there are enough who did not that it makes you wonder whether when one perhaps says as a continuing effort, someone might look and say, "What happened to the people that did the tough job in the '80s? Did they get rewards?" In the future that might well argue to people not to take the tough jobs, because they see what happened the last time there was a very strongly felt issue in the United States.

**LAWRENCE COHEN**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Tegucigalpa (1983-1985)**

*Mr. Cohen was born and raised in Pennsylvania and was educated at Dickinson College, and the Universities of Pennsylvania, Tel Aviv, Chicago and Northwestern. Entering the Foreign Service in 1980, he served variously as Economic, Political and Political/Military Officer at posts in Mexico, Honduras, India, Hungary, Nigeria and Brazil. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington Mr. Cohen dealt with Foreign Assistance and Environmental and Scientific matters. His last post was in Afghanistan, where he had two assignments with Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Mr. Cohen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: Okay, off to Tegucigalpa. You were there from when to when?*

COHEN: I arrived in Tegucigalpa in April of '83, left in June of '85.

*Q: April 1983; what was the situation in Honduras?*

COHEN: When I arrived Ambassador John Negroponte had been there, I believe, for one year.

The press called him the “pro-consul.” The situation in El Salvador had destabilized to the point of a civil war. Guatemala was also in upheaval. In fact, a Department travel warning about Guatemala prevented me from driving the Inter-American or Pan American Highway through Guatemala to Honduras. It was something I really wanted to do. Nicaragua was controlled by the Sandinistas. The U.S. was ramping up its assistance programs in Honduras and Salvador, as well as covert activity in Salvador and Nicaragua. I was the junior economic officer in a two-person economic section.

The post received plenty of visitors and numerous CODELs (Congressional Delegations). Our military involvement was expanding. The U.S. buildup was in its early stages. USAID had grown dramatically. There were about 60 direct hire employees worked for USAID in 1983/84 – this is before “contractors” replaced actual pay-rolled employees. The level of Economic Support Funds (ESF) budgeted for Honduras was around \$300-400 million dollars. Honduras had a population just over four million. That was a huge level of involvement in a small country.

*Q: Your job, you were number two in the economic section?*

COHEN: I was the junior officer in a two-officer economic section. My first supervisor was Paul Wackerbarth. He was an outstanding teacher. I long remembered his advice.

*Q: I have interviewed Paul. I call him “mon generale” because he did look a little like Charles de Gaulle.*

COHEN: And he is tall. Paul also had a good sense of humor. Paul taught me a lesson I found absolutely critical for a reporting officer. “Larry,” he said. “When you write a cable, it does not have to be a finished product. It does not need to be a thoroughbred racehorse. You make a draft horse. I will turn it into the thoroughbred.” Paul said he needed me to do the tough part, prepare a draft first. When you write a report, get it down on paper. Do not try to edit it yourself to the Nth degree into a finished product. Perfection, he meant, is the enemy of the good. Get out the body of the text and work together to make it a good report.

That was good advice.

*Q: Very good advice.*

COHEN: The embassy had just installed its first Wang computers. I do not know how many posts had been computerized by 1983. I’m sure not many. We received a few Wang computers. I had not had any training. I suspect the State Department did not even offer training. The first time I sat in front of a computer my first month in Tegucigalpa, I was lost, clueless. Eventually, I mastered the rudimentary aspects of the Wang system. The word processing was nothing like today, nothing like Windows. Cables still needed to be typed. We did not have the ability to save documents. Cables were typed on an IBM Selectric II typewriter with an OCR-readable font. Each page of the document had to be letter perfect.

*Q: The cable was fed into an optical reader.*

COHEN: The communications unit folks utilized an optical reader. The final report to be cleared by the Ambassador or DCM Shep Lowman had to be letter perfect, no typos. If a typo existed on a page, the entire page had to be retyped. We did a lot of retyping. The State Department was making the painful transition from IBM typewriters to the Wang computer system; we had one foot in each. What an extremely difficult and trying period it was to write simple reports! We constantly had to redraft and fix errors.

As the junior economic officer, I dealt with the country's various sectors: agriculture, energy, aviation, commercial disputes, etc. As Paul use to say, Honduras' economy was overwhelmingly dependent on "dessert" products: bananas, citrus, sugar, coffee, pineapple, tobacco. The country was extremely poor, just as it is today.

*Q: On that, the banana plantations, sugar, etc., was this a United Fruit or the equivalent sort of system?*

COHEN: The two major U.S. fruit companies in Honduras were Standard Fruit and United Brands. United was based in Tela, on the Caribbean not far from San Pedro Sula. Standard had its plantations around La Ceiba, to the east. The two companies were rivals; both grew bananas, plenty of bananas. Standard had substantial pineapple plantations. I collaborated closely with both companies. In 1984 my new wife, Lourdes or Lulu, and I traveled on a Standard Fruit banana freighter from La Ceiba to Gulfport, Mississippi where the bananas were off-loaded. It was a two day cruise up the humid Gulf of Mexico. The ship was Dutch as was the crew, four passengers, and 100,000 boxes of bananas.

One day Ambassador Negroponte called me in. He said "Larry, I want you to be my eyes and ears over at USAID." Perhaps, he suspected that USAID was off the policy reservation. They had a huge program and, as I said, many employees. God knows how many hundreds of local staff served them. AID occupied five floors of an office building across the street from the embassy. Two floors of the building were occupied by the consular section and the public affairs section. The rest was USAID. It was an enormous operation. Being a young officer, I was intimidated by this directive from the ambassador. There was no way that I could audit everything that USAID did. But I did work closely with the USAID staff. I was friendly with all of them and had a good handle on what they were doing. That also gave me a leg up on understanding how the country functioned.

*Q: What sort of government did Honduras have at the time and how did we view it?*

COHEN: The Honduran president, elected by popular vote in 1982, was Roberto Suazo Cordoba from the Liberal Party. Before his election, Honduras had a long tradition of coups and authoritarian regimes. It was the prototypical banana republic. President Suazo Cordoba was the first civilian to be elected after the Sandinistas took power next door in Nicaragua.

The real issue, in my view, was not the fact that Suazo Cordoba's was a democratically elected government. The first popular election, I feel, is not as important as the second! That second election answers the question whether the democratic system can self-perpetuate with peaceful transfers of power. The transition from one democratically-elected government to a second is

vital. I later witnessed this process in Nigeria. The first election after a military regime or authoritarian system is good but not the critical piece to the puzzle. Can the system survive through the next election? In 1986 when Jose Azcona Hoya, also from the Liberal party, was elected president, it was Honduras' first peaceful transfer of power in thirty years. Suazo Cordoba was the president, and not a very good one at that. But would he be re-elected, voted out of office, or be dumped in a coup? Since our presence in Honduras was so overwhelming, there was little chance for a military coup. It was always a possibility though.

Very early in my assignment, the front office sent me to investigate an incident on the border between Honduras and El Salvador. There had been an attack on the Salvadorian border station at the bridge where the Pan American Highway crosses into Honduras. The bridge reportedly was destroyed. In my Volkswagen Rabbit I drove to El Amatillo on the border. The bridge over the river had been blown and was unusable. The attack occurred a day or two earlier. One could cross on boards placed on the girders of the destroyed bridge. On the other side the Salvador border station was a shambles. I walked across the bridge into El Salvador. I do not remember meeting any border guards. Life seemed semi-normal. I hailed a cab; the cabbie asked where I wanted to go? I said to the nearest town.

Santa Rosa de Lima, in La Union, is in the far eastern part of El Salvador. Where small bridges and culverts had been blown, the cabbie drove across the riverbeds. After about 25 or 30 minutes, we arrived at Santa Rosa de Lima. I wandered around for a few hours. I went to the plaza, had lunch, and actually did a little shopping. I bought El Salvador towels, the type found in Bloomingdales Department Store. I spoke to a few people in the market about what had happened. Nothing seemed much out of the ordinary. I returned to the border in another cab and crossed back into Honduras. I wrote the trip report. I had no appreciation that this area was the heart of Salvadoran rebel activity. I had driven right into it, hung around, and then came right out. People back in the embassy were flabbergasted.

*Q: Were the American companies dealing with some of the basic crops targets of dissatisfaction, unhappiness? Were they considered the exploiters?*

COHEN: There was some of that, certainly. But in the 1980s, U.S. companies were not as pivotal in the complex Central American situation as they had been in earlier decades. U.S. firms were tangential to the various civil wars then occurring in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Perhaps the companies were still perceived by the local inhabitants as exploiters, but they also provided desperately needed jobs. Labor issues were severe. There was plenty of propaganda and rhetoric. The banana companies were easy targets.

A U.S. mining company - I cannot remember the details - operated the old Rosario Mining Company operations. I worked closely with U.S. tobacco companies. One Kentucky company grew burley leaf tobacco for cigarettes; a second grew Cuban leaf tobacco and produced quality Zino Davidoff *Mouton Cadet* cigars. Another company manufactured Don Tomas cigars. Although I have never smoked cigarettes, while stationed in Honduras I learned to appreciate good cigars. Ray Guy was the American representative of a tobacco company with operations near the Nicaraguan border. One time his life was threatened by contras or locals. We assisted with his security arrangements.



I never felt that the overall situation in Honduras was quite as bad as made out by the media. On the other hand, rumors abounded. A lot of bad information was fed to the press.

*Q: As the economic officer did you get a chance to look at the labor situation?*

COHEN: The embassy had a labor attaché, Enrique Perez. I did not have to deal specifically with labor issues. Enrique worked closely with the local AFL-CIO representatives. My interest in labor was tangential: labor as a component of the economy rather than dealing closely with labor leaders.

*Q: People who went to Nicaragua from the United States, were most of them hostile to our policy there?*

COHEN: I did not see much of that. It was an issue for the embassy in Managua. When I spoke with friends and family members in the U.S., all had their own perceptions of what was going on. In general, and with glaring exceptions, I was supportive of U.S. policy.

Under Ambassador Negroponte, our policy implementation towards Honduras was not bad. He had a tough mission under an aggressive Republican Administration. Clearly, our footprint was huge and we were not deft in how we handled local issues. We overwhelmed the institutional capacity of the Hondurans. I met with the press and occasionally gave interviews. The Ambassador allowed us leeway with the press. In a NPR (National Public Radio) interview, I tried to explain what Honduras was really like in a manner the American audience could understand. I described Honduras as the "Appalachia of Central America." Honduras was the region's poorest, most underdeveloped country -- except for how far Nicaragua had sunk by then. In that situation our presence was so overwhelming. We sensed our involvement was not going to be sustained beyond the end of hostilities in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Of course, no one knew the endgame for all the strife. Sure enough, ten years later, Honduras and the rest of Central America had regressed to their traditional backwater status. I just happened to be there at the height of our attention.

*Q: Were you aware of the Ollie North, other type of operations that were going on there?*

COHEN: No, that was compartmentalized from me. I met some of the contra leaders. I escorted CODELs and STAFFDELs. Everyone wanted to meet Adolfo Calero, the nominal head of the contras. It was part of the route, the dog and pony show.

One time at the airport, perhaps it was in San Pedro Sula, I met Felix Rodriguez. I did not realize then that he was a big operative. Years later, I discovered he and I attended the same school, Perkiomen!

I felt like the Peter Sellers character in the movie Being There.

*Q: You mean Zelig.*

COHEN: Not sure now. As in Mexico, I had many interesting experiences in Honduras beyond the scope of my job.

I mentioned at length about my interest in cave exploring. A few cavers came down from the United States. Rick Finch, a professor at Tennessee Tech University, Cookeville, Tennessee, also worked as a technical expert for the *Direccion General de Minas e Hidrocarburos* of the Honduran Government. For years he conducted geological field work in Central America, usually on contract with the oil companies. We became friends and caved together.

In December 1984 Rick organized an expedition to the Mosquitia, the sparsely populated jungle region of northeastern Honduras. During his field work, Rick over-flew a mountainous region of the Mosquitia, the Montanas de Colon, which comprised a folded, highly karstified limestone formation thousands of feet thick. (Karst is the limestone from which caves are formed.) From the air, he observed amazing karst features, such as sinkholes and disappearing streams where cave development might be substantial. Unfortunately, the unbroken jungle canopy prevented any but the most massive land features to be identified. To Rick's knowledge no caver expedition had reached this remote area. Rick's Mosquitia photos showed sinkholes miles across. But because of the thick ground cover, it was impossible to see land features very well.

The purpose of the expedition was to seek caves and cave structures from the ground. We used my house in Tegucigalpa as the base of operations. U.S. cavers Trent Carr, Elwin and Debbie Hannah and Ed Yarborough, friends of Rick's, came down to Honduras to participate. Getting to the Mosquitia was a challenge. There were no roads, pitifully few airstrips. The area Rick targeted required traveling upstream on the Rio Patuca, the major river of the Mosquitia, by dugout canoe. We had to bring everything with us. Rick chartered a four-seat single engine airplane. Since there were six of us in the expedition, the plane had to deliver us in two shifts. For the canoe, we brought an outboard motor and enough fuel for the trip upstream and down. We had food for ten days, tents, caving gear, etc.

We flew from Tegucigalpa's Toncontin Airport to the village of Ahuas. The flight took about an hour. The entire movement took much of the day. At the village we rented a *pipante*, a dugout canoe 44 feet long and made out of solid mahogany from one tree. The next morning we placed all our gear in this canoe, attached the outboard to the stern, and slowly churned up the Rio Patuca. After the first day on the river we stayed the night in the impoverished Indian hamlet of Wampusirpi. Then we chugged up the river the entire next day. Except for extremely isolated huts along on the river, we saw no one. Eventually, we reached a confluence with a smaller stream that entered from the east, the Sutawala Valley. It was the entry point to the Montanas de Colon, the rugged region Rick had identified for our survey. We set up camp there along a stream and used the canoe as a bridge. For the next five days, we chopped through the foliage and explored the area for caves, large caves.

We camped in a jungle clearing, using large banana leaves on the ground to prevent creating too much mud. We cooked and cleaned in the stream. A narrow muddy trail led off towards Nicaragua. It no doubt was utilized by contras to enter Nicaragua. We saw very few people. Our guide using an ancient rifle provided us with monkey meat which I declined to eat.

*Q: Is this where the Mosquito Indians are?*

COHEN: Yes. The Mosquitia is well described in the Paul Theroux book The Mosquito Coast. It is a very wild place. We were in its heart. We explored the mountainsides to the south of our camp. Unfortunately, the vegetation was so dense that it was almost impossible to find cave entrances. You literally had to walk across a cave entrance in order to find it. The really promising area for caves rested on the other side of the mountain crest. The elevation climb was a couple of thousand feet through jungle. We could reach the top but did not have enough daylight to go down into the huge sinkholes and return before nightfall. We were just not close enough, unless we set up a second camp farther up the mountain. We never did get to the area that showed the most promise for caves. But it was quite an expedition. Very few people have ever done anything like that.

*Q: From time to time we hear about Mosquito Indians being mistreated or ignored or something; what was your impression of that situation?*

COHEN: Frankly, I cannot say. I was not following human rights issues closely. The native residents of the Mosquitia certainly were among the poorest, most simple people I have seen in the western hemisphere. A few villages that we passed were barely above the Iron Age. These people had little food; they were out of the Honduran mainstream. We feared for their future. There was talk in Honduras about exploiting the resources of the Mosquitia, particularly the mahogany and other forest products. We sensed that the inhabitants would be pushed aside. Their lives were far from idyllic, but it was theirs to live.

*Q: Brushed aside, yes.*

COHEN: Yes. After I left Central America, I did not follow the issue closely.

I caved with Peace Corps volunteers, primarily in the Department of Olancho. At the time Honduras had one of the largest Peace Corps programs in the world. Located between Tegucigalpa and the Mosquitia, Olancho was reachable by a recently completed hardtop road. Although it is in Honduras' east, it was called the country's "Wild West." A few Peace Corps volunteers -- Beto Santell from Wisconsin was one, Tim Martinson, Roy Schachter, and Bud Welborn were others -- worked in the town of Catacamas, a two and a half hour drive from Tegucigalpa. A French caver, Marc Rabaud, whom I met while visiting Roatan Island also joined us. Later, his replacement, Luc Levi-Alvares, caved with us. The caves were a few kilometers northeast of town. We surveyed the caves. Serving as cartographer, I drafted cave maps; eventually, I published the maps in the NSS News (National Speleological Society.) We surveyed one small cave on a hill above a corn field. The cave contained grenade canisters. We assumed they had been placed by the Honduran military to prevent the cave's use as a shelter by the contras.

Most of the caves we explored were known to the locals. There was a significant, complex and beautiful cave called Cueva del Rio Talgua. A stream flowed from the main entrance. To survey the entire cave, we took many caving trips. The cave wound up being just over three kilometers in length. In addition to the main stream passage, a dry section led back to a fifty foot rope drop.

Towards the rear of the cave, a wet portion required us to swim. It was a really charming cave, with a little of everything including a few entrances. I published the cave map in the NSS News in May 1986.

In 1994, long after I had departed Honduras, I returned from overseas. I moved into temporary quarters at the Oakwood Apartments. Surprisingly, the phone rang. It was someone in Texas. The caller, a caver, asked if I knew anything about Honduran caves. I said that I did. He explained that some Peace Corps volunteers had made a fascinating discovery in a cave in Honduras. An expedition was being organized to check out this discovery. "What kind of discovery?" I asked. Jade artifacts and crystallized bones! I wished them luck.

A month later I received another phone call, this time from a cave archaeologist from George Washington University. Dr. James Brady thanked me for the information I provided. The discovery was a bone ossuary containing rare proto-Mayan artifacts, found in Cueva del Rio Talgua, the cave we had surveyed. I asked where in the cave? Brady explained that the artifacts were found in a passage above the main stream. We must have walked under the passage a dozen times! The unseen passage was accessible by scaling a chimney just off the passage. The chimney was just wide enough for a tall, lanky person to straddle up. We had never climbed the chimney. From below, I had placed the location of the chimney on our map, but we never climbed it. Ten years later, other Peace Corps volunteers were exploring the cave. They did climb the chimney. Above, they found the bone cache and jade objects. The bones had been calcified by the drip of cave water. A light shining on the bones caused them to sparkle in reflection. The cave was then popularly called "Cave of the Glowing Skulls."

The discovery was big news and not only in archaeological circles. The site was not Mayan but pre-Mayan, a civilization that up to then had not been known. Ironically, the discovery occurred around the same time as a major Paleolithic cave art discovery near Avignon, France. That pushed the discovery at Rio Talgua aside. However, the Honduran discovery did get press in Time magazine. The science section of The New York Times published my cave map. The National Geographic prepared a documentary. At National Geographic Society headquarters, I attended a filmed interview with Dr. Brady. Five months later, the Inter-American Development Bank in collaboration with TACA Airlines and the Honduran government brought the treasures to Washington. They were put them on display at the Bank which hosted a large reception. Professor Brady spoke and showed slides of the cave.

*Q: You mentioned you are married. Now, have we talked about that?*

COHEN: No we have not.

*Q: Can you mention the background of your wife and all that?*

COHEN: For that, I have to go back to Monterrey.

*Q: Alright.*

COHEN: Lourdes, or Lulu, was an employee of the consulate. She was the secretary to the

deputy consul general. The consul general was Frank Tucker, the deputy consul general was Jim Budeit. For much of the time I was stationed in Monterrey, Lulu and I went out. We decided to get married after I left Monterrey for my onward assignment in Honduras. We were married on April 15, 1984, a Palm Sunday. The wedding took place at the Hotel Ancira, the very same hotel where I lodged for six weeks upon my arrival in Monterrey in August 1981. Marrying a Mexican was not unusual for male FSOs in Monterrey – or Mexico for that matter. In addition to Kevin Richardson whom I mentioned earlier, I can name Dan Darrach and Stuart Seldowitz in my Monterrey cohort.

In 1984, I was already stationed in Tegucigalpa. For the wedding, I drove to Guatemala City and flew to Mexico City. I spent four or five days negotiating the bureaucratic obstacle course to obtain a Mexican marriage license. It is no easy matter for a foreigner to marry a Mexican, in Mexico. The paperwork was finalized with the immigration authorities at the Mexico City airport on Friday afternoon. I flew to Monterrey. The wedding was Sunday.

My family was not exactly ecstatic with the marriage of their son, a Jewish boy to a Mexican Catholic. Immediately after the wedding reception, Lulu and I left for the Monterrey airport. We flew on the last evening flight to Mexico City. The onward flight to Guatemala departed very early in the morning so we spent our first night at a forgetful hotel near the airport. For our honeymoon, we stayed one week in Guatemala. We visited the sites: Antigua Guatemala, Lake Atitlan, Quezaltenango, Chichicastenango, and Tikal. Then we drove back to Honduras via Copan and San Pedro Sula.

We departed Monterrey so quickly we did not have the opportunity to open our wedding gifts. The still wrapped gifts were shipped by the consulate to Tegucigalpa along with boxes of Lulu's personal belongings. The consulate general services office (GSO) sent the boxes un-containerized. On each box the packers had written a description of what was inside. After a couple of weeks, the embassy in Tegucigalpa received a message from the embassy in Mexico City. "What do you want us to do with these boxes?" The boxes apparently had arrived in Mexico City from Monterrey and were left forgotten on a tarmac somewhere. Rain had damaged the cartons and some of the items inside. One box was missing. Guess which box? The box with the unopened wedding gifts! Not placing the cardboard boxes within an airfreight container and writing on them descriptions such as *cosas de lujo*, luxury items, was an invitation for theft. Since the boxes had been left out uncovered on the tarmac in Mexico City, the inevitable happened.

*Q: Well, you left Tegucigalpa when?*

COHEN: We departed post in June of 1985, the same month that Ambassador Negroponte left.

*Q: You say you supported what we were doing. When you left how did you see things in both Nicaragua and El Salvador?*

COHEN: Let me take a step back. Rick Finch, my friend whom I mentioned earlier, had the right viewpoint. Rick was very familiar with Central America. He told me about a conversation he had had a few years earlier with Violetta Chamorro, widow of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the

publisher killed by Somoza in 1978. She later became Nicaragua's president. Her husband's assassination sped the fall of Anastasio Somoza and the rise of the Sandinistas. After Chamorro's assassination, Nicaragua's upheavals began. Rick visited Mrs. Chamorro around 1980, perhaps 1981. Violetta Chamorro told Rick that the way to get rid of the Sandinistas was simple. Build up the economies of the other Central American countries, Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, and leave the Sandinistas to their own devices. The regime, she argued, would collapse on its own. That was her simple equation for fixing this mess.

Her formula was essentially correct. Much of what we contributed to in Honduras and elsewhere in Central America was exactly that. By building the economies of the Central American countries, attracting private investment, developing agriculture, etc., the Nicaraguans next door eventually would become discontented living in misery, no matter the regime. Did we do it right? Not really. Were there mistakes? Yes. We screwed up more on the security/military side. Our efforts often not sensitive enough to the people, nor did we sufficiently respect human rights issues. But, ultimately, our heads, if not our hearts, were in the right place. The concept that Mrs. Chamorro enunciated to my friend did in the Sandinistas by the end of the 1980s.

In early 1985, Lulu and I visited Nicaragua. We stayed with a friend of Lulu's, Karen Krueger, who was the embassy personnel officer. We drove around Managua and outside the city. Karen feared that even her car had been bugged. Their poverty reached a depth that did not seem to exist even in Honduras. It was a poverty of lost hope. Restaurants presented menus but had no items on it to serve. To buy the famous Nicaraguan rum, *Flor de Cana*, an empty bottle and cap had to be returned. Twelve years after its devastating earthquake, Managua remained a shambles. Nicaragua's proximity to its neighbors is analogous to one American state next to another. When a country's GDP (gross domestic product) is collapsing, its citizens no doubt will look next door to what is occurring. In Nicaragua's neighbors, the GNP was rising. The equilibrium cannot remain as is. Things have to change. And, I believe, that is what happened.

*Q: John Negroponte, in 2008, is now deputy secretary of state. He has been through many jobs but he has always been dogged by something, I cannot even remember what it was? It happened in Honduras. Do you remember what it was? Were you aware of this?*

COHEN: I cannot think of any one incident. You cannot point to one episode of John's Honduran tenure and assert that it tarnishes the rest of his career. President Reagan gave him a challenging assignment. He did it well. The policy belonged to the White House. The press called Ambassador Negroponte the "pro-consul," as I said. In making an omelet, he broke some eggs. He created many enemies, particularly in Congress. However, of all the ambassadors I have served under, he was the most professional. Even in those days – this was his first ambassadorship – he took a special interest in his staff. Morale in the embassy was quite high. I do not know the morale of other posts in the region at the time. It certainly was not high in Managua. There, President Reagan was almost taunting the Sandinistas to attack the embassy and "make my day!" But in Tegucigalpa, we felt we were part of the mission. You have to attribute that, in large measure, to Ambassador Negroponte.

If there is a career regret I have, it occurred at this moment. At a reception at his residence the week of our mutual departure, the Ambassador asked me whether I would be interested in

working for him back in Washington. He was returning to Washington to be Assistant Secretary in OES, the Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Scientific Affairs. At the time, I was slated to take six months economics training and the four month mid-level course. Then, in the summer of 1986, I expected an assignment in the Department. I thought that was my career direction. I told John that I appreciated the offer, but I would stick with this economic direction. Had I taken the offer and gone in with him, I would have entered the world of the Department's Seventh Floor *nomenclatura*. My career would have been quite different.

Lulu and I returned to Washington, to a condo in Arlington. I began FSI's six month economics course in August 1985. Immediately, we were informed that the mid-level course which was to begin in January 1986 was cancelled. A rebellion had occurred in the previous class and, I guess, the Director General believed the complainers. He cancelled the mid level course. Those of us who were to take it had anticipated bidding for an onward assignment for the summer cycle in the summer of 2006. We were unceremoniously thrown onto the winter off-cycle. As you know, fewer jobs are available during the winter cycle. And the timing was too late to find a good job. A few of us were left high and dry. At that point, I should have gone back to work for Ambassador Negroponte. We are getting ahead of ourselves.

*Q: When did you leave Honduras?*

COHEN: I left in June of '85.

*Q: One further question about Honduras; how did you find dealing with the Honduran government?*

COHEN: The Honduran Government had the institutional capacity of a typical county government in the U.S. Honduras' economy was far smaller than that of most small U.S. cities, even towns. The talent cream was very thin.

Let me say something about being an economics officer. Quantitative skills for economic officers are important but not essential. An economics officer does not have to be another Milton Friedman. Experts from USAID, the World Bank, the IMF, etc. generate statistics. An economics officer need not calculate GDP or run numbers on a country's economic accounts. Someone else always seems to do this. An officer must *understand* quantitative data and be able to draw conclusions. In a place like Honduras where the country's institutional capacity was so thin and narrow, you did not have to be a super economist to deal with it. Interpersonal skills, however, are vital. This is an aspect of the job frequently overlooked.

In a society like Honduras' different techniques help build personal relations. One Christmas, I delivered holiday gratuities of Johnny Walker Red to my key contacts. We loaded the back of an embassy Suburban van with bottles of Johnny Walker wrapped in Christmas paper. We drove to the office of each of my key contacts. I delivered to each a bottle of Scotch and wished him or her well for the holiday. That was more important, I believe, than being able to communicate on economic terms.

With Honduran institutions like the Central Bank, I frequently scratched my head and wondered

“how did this person get into this job.” One Central Bank chief I described in a cable as “smarter than he looks, but dumber than he thinks.” Whenever Luis Arreaga who was in USAID and I spoke about that particular official, we would both crack up.

The Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) was negotiated in 1983 and launched soon after. With the CBI, the U.S. sought to augment trade with and investment in the region by negotiating bilateral agreements with each country. Participating countries – which meant everyone except Nicaragua – benefited from reduced or eliminated tariffs on their products and commodities. The countries had to agree to protect intellectual property rights, phase out unfair trade practices, and comply with other obligations. Assembly operations for apparel that otherwise might face quotas or high tariffs were a particularly appealing sector and a few assembly operations started up on the Caribbean coast in a free trade zone. I do not believe the CBI worked as well as it could have. The U.S. sugar lobby, U.S. textile manufacturers, etc, pressured Congress to attach numerous strings to the effort. However, on the whole, the CBI helped these poor countries develop their economies.

I also assisted with the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America – also known as the Kissinger Commission. The Commission traveled swiftly through the region and spent just one day in each Central American country, again minus Nicaragua. Local leaders met with the commission which took on an imperial air. It was a real dog and pony show! The Commission’s eventual report examined the economic and social challenges faced by the Central Americans. Its recommendations, which did not require a huge circus or Washington politicians to discover, did lead to a more bipartisan program of security and development assistance.

By 1983 the U.S. began to expand a military presence in Honduras to counterbalance the perceived weight of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The main U.S. base was JTF-Bravo at Comayagua in the central part of the country, north of Tegucigalpa. In the preliminary negotiations with the Hondurans over base rights issues, I worked with a U.S. lieutenant colonel to address specific questions. Between the Hondurans and U.S. sides, the negotiations occasionally took a bizarre twist. I do not refer to any language barrier. We were speaking in different cultural dimensions! Our side sought duty free entry for PX products such as shaving cream; the Hondurans focused on U.S. procurement of local produce such as tomatoes and watermelons – as if U.S. soldiers would go grocery shopping in the local vegetable markets! I’m not sure we ever really understood each other. My interest was to ensure that our presence would not destabilize the local economy. A huge influx of U.S. military could do just that. A skewing of local communities occurred anyway. Prostitution, allegedly, skyrocketed. Planted stories in the press called the problem *flor de Vietnam*, venereal disease. U.S. soldiers were accused of infecting Honduran women. I believe the stories were planted. That stuff was just unavoidable, I guess.

There were also positive impacts. Money did trickle down. Development did occur. Towns had their roads paved. Communities were electrified. It was two steps forward, one step back. Over time, I think the net result was positive.



**THEODORE WILKINSON**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Tegucigalpa (1984-1986)**

*Theodore Wilkinson was born in Washington, DC in 1934. He received his BA from Yale and his MA from George Washington University. He served as a lieutenant in the US Navy from 1956 to 1960. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961, and his postings include Caracas, Stockholm, Brussels, Mexico City, Tegucigalpa and Brasilia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 11, 1999.*

WILKINSON: I went to Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I had at one point hoped to get the job as political counselor in Buenos Aires, and that went to somebody else, and John Negroponte told me that his political counselorship was open and wanted me to come down and see him and talk about it. I think we knew each other from years gone by, not well, but he also knew my role in Mexico, and he wasn't quite sure if I was the right person to come and work for him in Tegucigalpa. So I went down, and actually Xenia went with me, and we spent a couple of days in Tegucigalpa sizing each other up, and I liked John very much and admired the way he operates. And I said, "I'd be happy to work for you, and as far as my political views, I'm apolitical. I'm a Foreign Service officer, and I'm not going to advocate a position either left or right of what my government is trying to do. Although I do have my doubts about the wisdom of some of our policies, I'm not about to sabotage them." John had a reputation at that point as a proconsul. He had been so designated by *Newsweek* as somebody who was, in effect, dictating to client state Honduras and running the war against the Sandinistas with U.S. support of the *Contras* out of Tegucigalpa. This was an unfair label and false impression. There was an impression, I think, probably that, at least, among some of the opponents of the anti-Sandinista effort that we were giving Honduras substantial military assistance in return for them allowing the *Contras* to operate very freely out of Honduran territory. Several years later when the Iran-Contra scandal became public, Negroponte denied under oath when he was asked to testify about this, I believe, later that there was any discussion of linkage. The Hondurans may have adduced that in order to receive the levels of military and economic assistance they were receiving from the U.S., that they needed to cooperate with us in assisting the *Contras*. This was never a written understanding or anything that I was a party to.

At any rate, Negroponte handled the Hondurans with grace and did not behave like a pro-consul, and I felt comfortable working with him in Honduras, and with his splendid, upright DCM, Shepard Lowman. Xenia was offered the post of commercial officer there, the same post that Larry Eagleburger started his diplomatic career doing, so nobody could say that it was a career dead end. There was some resistance from the Commerce Department who said, No, we want to send one of ours, and Negroponte said, All right, send me somebody who is as fluent in Spanish as Xenia is. They couldn't, so she got the job.

And the next couple of years I spent in Honduras watching a process which was very different from what went on in Mexico.

Q: *Oh, can I have the years you were there, from 1984 to -*

WILKINSON: Yes, from '84 to '86.

Q: *Okay.*

WILKINSON: A process that's very different from Mexico City, because here, obviously, we were dealing with, if you will, a client state. Mexico certainly is not a client state. We might be able to overwhelm Mexico economically, but we can't push them around, and the few occasions when we've tried to do that we've had to send troops in, and that's left a bitter legacy in Mexico. In Honduras on the other hand, we had a base. We don't call it a base; it was a "task force," from which we were able to conduct limited regional activities at least, like training, search and rescue, or civic action projects in not only Honduras but also in Central America. But also the "task force" was a very convenient way to show solidarity with friends in the region and discourage any meddling by others. The Hondurans were obviously out to attune their foreign policy very closely to our desires. And Negroponte handled them with great dignity and care. Once when Foreign Minister Paz Barnica was on a trip to Washington in search of aid, Negroponte had planned to come up and be with him, but he couldn't for some reason, so he sent me up and asked me to organize a dinner for Paz Barnica, which I did, and made sure that all doors were open to him in Washington and that he was treated like a foreign minister of another sovereign state should be, rather than as somebody who was running errands for us. That part of his job he handled with great skill. I noticed that other people who came down from Washington tended to behave in a very patronizing way, and we constantly had to modify that and try to tape it over. I remember once when a White House person came down - actually it was a Foreign Service officer on detail at the White House - and was told certain things by the Foreign Ministry which weren't exactly the way the White House wanted them to be, so he simply sent a report in in which he said what he thought the White House wanted to hear and misquoted the foreign minister completely, and I was appalled. It could have easily been written as a footnote - okay, we'll talk to him again and straighten it out - but no, this is what he said. He distorted the record. There certainly was a lot of that, and one had to constantly attempt to modify and mollify Washington's high-handedness. And one also had to take account of what was going on behind our backs. I may be a little bit naive. I met Ollie North, and Ollie appeared in Honduras with regularity, and he'd go off and meet with the military, and we knew that he was helping orchestrate assistance to the Contras, but beyond that we did not know a great deal about his activities, so some of the things that were being done back in Washington by Ollie and the so-called Regional Interagency Group [RIG] and Elliott Abrams and Dewey Claridge were almost certainly being done without the knowledge of, I expect, even the ambassador.

Q: *To begin with, could you tell me about the government of Honduras in this '84-86 period?*

WILKINSON: Yes. Let me just add a footnote about relationships with the station during that period. I mentioned that I might have been a little bit naive about what they were doing and how they were doing it. I got a phone call in 1985 - actually I had been there for a year or so - from a tradesman in San Pedro Sula, which is the second city of Honduras in the north, saying that "Your boots are ready." And I said, "I'm sorry, I don't remember having ordered any boots." Maybe somebody had given me a pair, why didn't he just send them up by mail. And he asked,

“Seven thousand pairs?” And I said, “Oh, thank you very much,” as it suddenly occurred to me that somebody had used my name to order boots for the Contras.

It was an interesting period in Honduras. Like so many other Latin American republics, it had gone through a period of military rule. The military dictator, a general named Policarpo Paz, turned the government over to an elected successor in 1981, and that elected successor was Roberto Suazo Córdova, a liberal politician who was about as much of a small-town country hick president as I’ve ever run into, admittedly so. He kept his 15-year-old mistress at hand whenever he wanted her, and he had a grotesquely overweight first lady who ran the nation’s charities, as they do, but he didn’t have much to do with her. But he had a tremendous grasp of the politics of the country. He told Negroponte once that the people of his small country were like his fingertips. He could feel anything that was happening in Honduras, and I suspect that’s partly true, because it’s such a small country. He used to call our public affairs officer, Chris Arcos, up from time to time and just chat, and when Arcos left, he called me up once or twice, just to talk. It was kind of odd to be sitting there watching television and all of a sudden the telephone rings and it’s the president, not through a secretary. It’s *el presidente* on the line when you pick up the phone. He had a unique vocabulary. He called the Communists *Ñangaras*, which is a Spanish word that doesn’t mean anything to anybody but to him, but we all after a while started referring to *Ñangaras* as the forces of evil of the left in the country. When he was on his way out, having been succeeded democratically by another elected president, he had a sort of exit meeting with Vice President Bush, who came down for the inauguration of his successor, and I noted that even Stephanie Von Reigersburg, who was our Spanish language head translator and very expert person, was baffled by President Suazo Córdova. She couldn’t figure out what he was saying. Once he started talking about *Aguacate*, which in this case referred to a military base from which the *Contras* had been resupplied, and there was a marvelous dialogue of the deaf which ensued because Von Reigersburg translated *Aguacate* as ‘avocado,’ which is as it should be. She said something about “the soldiers out there in avocado.” And Bush said, “Oh, you mean they’re all dressed in green. Like the tanks.” And Von Reigersburg translated that back in to Spanish, and the president said, “Wes, yes.” And the conversation just became totally unintelligible for a while. So anyway, he was running the country. Everybody looked forward to the day when Honduras would have a slightly more dignified president, but while he was there, he was our guy.

The military had given up power formally, but behind the scenes, before I got there, from ‘81 to ‘84, roughly, there was a general named Álvarez, who ran the military and the police, in effect, national security and internal security, with a very firm hand, and there were a lot of allegations of human rights violations, to the point where we - the United States - were accused of being associated with these forces of repression in Honduras because we were training the Honduran military and allegedly training even the people that were in the special forces battalions that went out and picked up suspected political deviants and insurgents and interrogated them in unpleasant ways. First of all, when I was serving in Honduras, the military commander-in-chief had been succeeded by the air force commander, whose name was Walter López and who, in my estimation, was very enlightened and honest, a straightforward general who wouldn’t tolerate that kind of activity and probably didn’t, unless it was being done behind his back by the army. Once when we were talking about drug trafficking, I remember somebody brought up the question of Noriega: “You know, General Noriega is involved in drugs in Panama.” And López said, “Wes, I know that Noriega, and he is involved in drugs, but I’m not, and we’re not, and I’m

clean.” And I think people tended to believe that, that López was a clean and honest armed forces commander in chief in Honduras. So I didn’t have the feeling that human rights violations were going on behind our back. Heaven knows, there probably were some isolated cases, but we had enough information in the embassy to know there was no “pattern” while I was there.

*Q: Were we having any of the problems that certainly were occurring in El Salvador about the military going out and not only raping and killing nuns and doing other dastardly things - I mean, was this going on?*

WILKINSON: Certainly not. There was no insurgency to speak of in Honduras. There were dissidents in the country, and there may have been a few small armed groups somewhere in the countryside. First of all, there was a relatively democratic government in the country, and second, it’s a lot larger geographically than Salvador or perhaps even Guatemala, so it’s harder to control a remote countryside, and it may well be that in addition to the Nicaraguan Contras there were other insurgents somewhere in the countryside in Honduras, but we never got any reports of violent repression of either dissidents or the existence of any significant armed insurgency anywhere in Honduras.

*Q: Indians?*

WILKINSON: There are some Miskito Indian populations along the coast.

*Q: But I mean this wasn’t a significant.*

WILKINSON: No, it wasn’t a problem. The only area in Honduras where there are really any ethnic minorities is along the Atlantic coast, on the east side, where the Miskitos live (as they do as well in Nicaragua). They are pretty primitive but seemed to have enough autonomy to be satisfied in Honduras. Honduras also has four or five very attractive tourist resort bay islands, which are big enough to sustain substantial populations. And out there, there are a lot of redheads descended from British pirates, and their language is English, and they’re also ethnically distinct. They like to be left alone, and central governments in Honduras have usually done that, with the result, of course, that they’re hotbeds of smuggling and all kinds of probably illegal activities. But at least when I was there the drug trade had not yet become a major problem in the Bay Islands. We used to go out to the islands quite a bit. Xenia had commercial contacts there - lobster exporters, hotel owners, etc. - and I learned SCUBA there.

*Q: How good were relations with Guatemala at the time?*

WILKINSON: Relations between Honduras and Guatemala were perfectly amicable. The Hondurans would have liked to see peace in Central America. They were uncomfortable being seen in the role of a client state, if you will, of the United States. They would have much preferred to see the whole armed struggle in neighbor countries. To the point where they really looked at the *Contra* revolution as something that had nothing to do with them. It was a matter between the Nicaraguans and their government and the United States to the extent that we were helping the *Contras*, but it was not something they wanted to get involved in, and there were no issues between Honduras and Guatemala.

Q: *Or in Nicaragua? I mean, how about with Nicaragua*

WILKINSON: Well, with Nicaragua, the Nicaraguans, of course, argued that Honduras shouldn't be allowing this insurgency to be pursued on their territory. I guess I neglected to mention the bases of the *Contras* that were in the southern "parrot's beak," if you will, of Honduras. There is a little outcropping of Honduran territory about in the middle of the southern frontier that extends southwards into Nicaragua, and it's from that area where the Nicaraguans were encamped, that they would launch operations in Nicaragua. Now at Easter time, in 1986, it was the Friday before Easter, the Nicaraguans retaliated in force. They'd made some incursions across the border from time to time in the past, but there was a major one then to try to destroy the Contra camps. At that point, John Ferch was the ambassador. Negroponte had left. Ferch was away, and Shepard Lowman was the deputy chief of mission. And I was I guess acting as the DCM. And so immediately... Washington knew about this incursion even before Honduras did, because we had intercepted communications that showed what was going on. So I'm arriving at the embassy Friday morning and I started getting phone calls from Washington saying, "What are the Hondurans going to do to repel this Nicaraguan invasion of their territory?" Calls from Elliott Abrams, no less; he was the assistant secretary at the time. And so John Ferch was in Washington and knew nothing of this. I called him up and told him about it, and Shep went in to try to reach the Honduran foreign minister, Carlos López Contreras, who said, well, you know, he'd get to it when he got to the office, but he wasn't going to be in the office that day. The newly elected president, José Azcona, had gone to the beach for the weekend. In fact, the whole country was asleep, and Washington wanted them to wake up and throw these Nicaraguans out who were attacking the poor, innocent *Contras* - throw them out of the country, or at least issue some public declarations about how their territory had been invaded. And the Honduran reaction was Ho-hum, this is not our business, as I mentioned before.

It got to the point where Abrams said, "I'm coming down on Easter Sunday, and on Monday I want to organize an effective Honduran resistance, and we'll give them a new aid package in order to get this operation started." There was linkage, at least in Abrams's proposals. And so Washington was going to send a plane down, and somebody was coming from the CIA and they would have somebody from the White House, and a whole team was going to go. And I said, "Well, the ambassador is in Washington. Put him on the plane." And they said, "No, we don't have space for him." That was the first clear sign that John Ferch was in trouble in the eyes of the home team, although there had been some other straws in the wind before then. But when they said we can't put him in the plane, or I think the words were, "it won't be necessary." I thought what a slap that was. The ambassador (who had a terrible case of the flu at the time) had to fly back commercially separately, and got there, I think, Monday night. And Washington was very disappointed with the reaction of the Hondurans, blamed it on Ferch and on the embassy, all of us, for not having mobilized the dramatic Honduran reaction that seemed to Abrams and company to be warranted. I mention all the rest because Ferch was dismissed from his job as ambassador a couple of months later.

Q: *Why, do you know?*

WILKINSON: I think for several reasons. One, because during the earlier visit, when Vice President Bush, as I mentioned earlier, had come down for the inauguration of the new president, Azcona, several things took place that displeased the vice president and his principal national security advisor, Don Gregg (who subsequently became ambassador to Korea). Gregg told me later that out of 80 trips that the vice president had made abroad while he was vice president, there were only two bad ones, and Honduras was one of the bad ones. It was bad because the inauguration ceremonies ended early, and the vice president and U.S. delegation came up to the residence. There were 80 people standing on the patio. I was talking to Claiborne Pell, I remember, and all of a sudden we saw the vice president in the corner eating lunch. Nobody else was being offered lunch. And apparently, the ambassador had said, "Why don't you have a sandwich over here," and sat him down there. Bush thought everybody else was going to be fed lunch and they weren't, and he was embarrassed because he was being given lunch alone, and that's not Bush's style. John and Sue Ferch weren't very sensitive to his reactions.

On the other hand, it wasn't Ferch's fault. The White House advance had insisted that there be no lunch for anyone. All would be served on the plane. They hadn't reckoned on the inauguration ending early.

Beyond that, Ferch got into trouble with the White House even before this because he insisted that wives be invited to a dinner the night before with the vice president, who had come stag, but all the Central American presidents were going to have a dinner at the residence, and the Ferches thought it would be rude if their wives, who were also in town as guests, weren't invited, so John told the White House that the wives should be invited even though Bush would be alone. And they argued about it. This alone may seem petty, but after a series of incidents that happened over six months, the White House got progressively more annoyed with Ferch, and they finally just removed him.

*Q: What happened to this invasion, so called?*

WILKINSON: Well, the Nicaraguans came in; they shot up the *Contra* camps, and they left. And that was it. They didn't eliminate the *Contras*. The *Contras* resisted, and there were some casualties, but it wasn't the end of the war. But Washington wanted to play it for all it was worth, and they couldn't get enough propaganda blood out of it, so they were unhappy.

*Q: Did you get the feeling that Honduras was sort of the playground of the NSC and the CIA? I mean, at least they were running rather roughshod dealing with it.*

WILKINSON: Absolutely. Not as much at the time as I realize in retrospect what was going on, because activities were being organized through the CIA and even through Ollie North without the station in Honduras knowing what was going on and that the support to the *Contras* was coming by air through El Salvador and by sea from Miami in ways that the embassy wouldn't even know about. These were all attempts to evade the restrictions that had been imposed by Congress on assistance to the *Contras*.

*Q: How did the Hondurans view the Sandinista government in Nicaragua?*

WILKINSON: I don't think they saw them as representatives of the Evil Empire. I remember the late Harry Bergold was our ambassador in Managua and came over to Honduras once. Harry was an intelligent guy. I'd worked with him before in the Pentagon. We went out to lunch. And he started talking about the Communists in Managua. And I said, "What Communists?" He said, "I'm talking about the government." I said, "But when did they become Communists?" To me they were Sandinistas, not that I professed to know exactly what their political leanings were, but I hadn't recalled that they had been labeled as Communists. And Harry said, "Well, that's what we're calling them these days." That was the party line. The Hondurans did not see them in that same light. They saw them as Central Americans. They weren't ideologically attuned to the Sandinista revolution, but they didn't see it as an alien cancer in Central America the way the Reagan Administration did.

Now one thing I didn't talk about and that I wanted to talk about was the election of 1985, which led to the change in administration in Honduras and the departure of this man I mentioned earlier, Roberto Suazo Córdova. The Hondurans have a system, an interesting electoral system, which is almost *sui generis* - although the same system exists in Uruguay, they claim - whereby a party can have more than one presidential candidate. There were, in fact, two factions within the Liberal Party to succeed Suazo Córdova, and only one candidate on the part of the Nationalist Party. But at the end of the election, you count up all the ballots, and the winner of the election is not the one who has the most votes, but rather the party that has the most votes. So if within the Liberal Party there are two candidates, and they collectively have more votes than the Nationalist candidate, then the leading Liberal wins. And that's what happened. The vote actually went to José Azcona, who was a - I wouldn't want to call him a "maverick," but more of an idealist than his other party candidate within the Liberal Party, who got maybe a third of the votes cast and Azcona got two-thirds, but collectively they had about a million votes. And the candidate for the Nationalists, Rafael Caldera, had about 750,000 votes, so according to their system, Azcona was elected. Well, this led to a serious debate within our embassy, because the chargé at that time, Shep Lowman, thought that Azcona would not be particularly friendly to the *Contras* and his winning the election would cause problems for our policy in Honduras. And Shep, a veteran of Vietnam, was a Cold Warrior of the old school, a wonderful guy and a great friend, but I did not see eye to eye with him politically. I said, "Well, we have to respect this election. The system may be crazy, but it's their system, and the guy who won is Azcona, under their system." Lowman was in favor of somehow reinterpreting the electoral rules so that Caldera would be declared the winner and that we should attempt to influence the electoral commission to declare this alteration or that somehow the constitution had to be interpreted in such a way that Caldera would be declared the winner. I said, "We can't do this. There would be hemispheric reverberations if the United States got involved in trying to insert ourselves in this electoral process and come up with a different result." And we didn't. Shep's idea was put aside. Five years later Caldera was elected, and his government, which was in power from 1990 to 1995 turned out to be about as corrupt as anything even Honduras had seen.

*Q: Did Jesse Helms weigh in at all while you were there, because he had taken an interest in how Latin Americans were handling Central America, or not?*

WILKINSON: Yes, but he was not as much of a problem in Honduras as he was in Salvador. In Salvador, he and his staff, in particular... Deborah De Moss.

Q: *Through marriage.*

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Q: *Today is the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1999. Ted, as I mentioned before, why don't we talk about the economy of Honduras. I mean, one always thinks of bananas and the United Fruit, and all that, but what was the situation. By the way, what were the dates that you were there?*

WILKINSON: Yes, she eventually married a Honduran, a national guardsman, I believe. In those days, I actually got to know her a little bit, lent her a book or two that I hoped would help modify her extreme views. I didn't succeed. She and Helms' staff were intervening in El Salvador on behalf of D'Aubuisson and company, some of the anti-democratic right to a dangerous extent. They even were dealing with people that had been party to a plot to assassinate Tom Pickering when he was ambassador there. Helms and his staff were very troublesome in Salvador. In Honduras, I don't recall that we had any problems with Helms.

WILKINSON: I was there from 1984 to 1986, and what you think about when you think about Honduras - bananas - is about what there is in terms of the economy. The principal export products are fruit, and while I was there my wife served as the commercial attaché and was trying, through the Caribbean Basin Initiative, to encourage the Hondurans to develop more export products, more diversified products, so they would be less reliant on sugar, pineapple, and bananas. And they were beginning to get into what's sometimes called "primer" vegetables, vegetables that come out in the winter before our market is producing them, so that they can sell in the United States, but they hadn't yet had a great deal of success. A now, of course, Hurricane Mitch, which hit them in the fall of 1998 has taken them back 15 or 20 years, destroyed all the infrastructure that they had. So the little that they had then was supplemented a little bit perhaps by American presence and by American aid. We were giving a great deal of military assistance, which I mentioned earlier related to but was never directly linked to their tolerance of the *Contras*. And a considerable amount of economic support, which totaled over \$100 million a year to Honduras. Of course, this has dried up substantially or had dried up before Mitch because of the decline of strategic interest in Honduras. Apart from humanitarian aid, there was and remains very little aid. These days, the region is no longer and perhaps never was a strategic threat, but is no longer perceived to be one.

Q: *Well, what about U.S. commercial interests there and labor, and how was this all fitting together during the '84-86 period?*

WILKINSON: The labor market is rather thin. Unemployment was not a great problem because so much of the economy is below the labor market. It's in the sort of informal sector, where the extended families are taken care of largely by one member that's earning wages, and maybe another two or three are selling products on the street, so that statistics on labor were never particularly realistic or indicative of the situation in the country. It was not an uplifting place to be. It may be the poorest country in Central America. I think it was the poorest in the Americas when I was there, except for Haiti. Now Nicaragua may have sunk to that level. But at any rate, it still remains extremely poor. Columbus, when he sailed away from Honduras, said, "*Gracias a*



*dios que hemos dejado estas Honduras,” meaning, “Thank God we’ve left these Honduras.”* Whatever he meant by *Honduras* was never clear. It may have been these hills and valleys, or these deeps off the coast, but he was glad to go, and nobody has been in a rush since then to settle there. It also has traditionally been a place where politics was a little cynical and a little bit corrupt. We had a very good friend named “Picho” Goldstein, who subsequently became the chief of staff for the Nationalist government from ‘90 to ‘95, and from reports that I heard had been making a great deal of money on concessions for imports and exports and building a mansion in the middle of town. What a pity - he had a great sense of humor and no need to raid the treasury.

*Q: Were you feeling any influence of American commercial interests there to, say, keep the laborers down or keep labor unions from bothering us or something? Were they doing anything?*

WILKINSON: I didn’t get the sense that our... I think the Honduran Government and the Honduran establishment were well enough aware of the importance of Standard Fruit and the American commercial interests to cooperate in making sure that there were no outbreaks of serious labor unrest. The laborers on the banana plantations were pretty well paid. They were a relatively paternalistic system. People who got jobs there tended to be fairly satisfied, I think.

Now I mentioned the one aspect of corruption was after we left Honduras the airport at which we often travel in and out of had a terrible tragedy. A plane coming in and trying to land... You had to come over a mountain and then fly down over the slope of the far side of the mountain in order to land the airplane. And one plane came in too low and simply ran into the mountain, killing one of the local employees who worked in my section. But this was because the airport... It had supposedly been going to move ten years earlier to a place outside of Tegucigalpa which was much safer, but knowing it was going to move, the Nationalist businessmen all bought up the land around it, figuring that they would sell it to the government; and then they lost the election. The liberals were elected, and they said No way are we going to buy back the land from these corrupt businessmen that speculated on the land, so the airport never moved. That was the kind of business that one ran into.

**JOHN A. FERCH**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1985-1986)**

*Ambassador John A. Ferch was born in Toledo, Ohio on February 6, 1936. He received his BA from Princeton University in 1958 and his MA from the University of Michigan in 1964. As a member of the Foreign Service, he served in countries including Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba, and Honduras. Ambassador Ferch was interviewed by William E. Knight on September 27, 1991.*

FERCH: I went to Honduras in August, 1985. Coincidentally, Oliver North, Elliott Abrams and other people were just beginning the illegal program of supporting the Contras. We were at that

time operating under the Bohlen Amendment which has been amply discussed everywhere, which at that time (it had several incarnations) allowed us only to accept intelligence from the Contras. We could relate to the Contras and hear what they had to say about troop movements, etc., but we didn't plan their war, we didn't supply them.

*Q: Now was this all absolutely clear to you in the field?*

FERCH: You mean before I went down?

*Q: Well, before you went down and when you went down.*

FERCH: Just before I went down Congress approved a package of \$27 million for so-called humanitarian assistance, non-lethal assistance. The Contras could use that to buy beans, shoes, and things like that. The modalities of that had not been worked out.

I was not told, "John this is what you can and should do with the Contras, this is what you can't do."

*Q: Who would have told you that if somebody had told you that?*

FERCH: Elliott Abrams. But remember he at this time was also participating with North and working up something that became known as the "Enterprise", or whatever they called it. He did not tell me, nor did anyone else. I was partly to blame here. If I had not been so naive as I had been all through my career in areas that were less important, I would have demanded in writing up front before I went down there what is my responsibility. As it was I went down there thinking that my responsibility was to keep my hands off the Contras in every way, shape and form and that the Station Chief would perform the function of taking their information. I could meet them but I understood I had no reason to meet them. I understood that I had no operational role towards the Contras.

*Q: Did you have any contact with the NSC or the White House staff before you went down?*

FERCH: I was told before going down to go and call on Ollie North, which I did. I didn't know who North was. I went over there and Fawn Hall was there, Ollie was late. We talked and then Ollie came and went into his office. You could not fail to observe Fawn Hall. So I said something and Ollie said, "Yes, and she can type too." It turned out she could also shred. Anyway we had a chat. I didn't know why I was calling on this guy. It was all very vague why I was supposed to meet him. We didn't talk about much of anything. He said something to the effect that he was the man responsible for the Contras in the US Government. I will never forget because in the context of that part of the conversation he said, "And I am walking very close to the edge of the law." Now I thought it was unusual for him to tell a stranger something like that. Anyway, there was nothing else.

So I go down there to Honduras. I had that conversation with Abrams saying I was going to build up an image, change the Pro Consul image of the mission, and I set about consciously to do that.

We visited Peace Corps projects, AID projects, got involved in things like that and made sure that our PAO was getting it into the papers.

*Q: Let me ask another question, had you wanted to do so could the legal boys have given you a sort of legal officers view of what was permitted under the law?*

FERCH: I certainly wish now that I had done that. I was not smart enough to do that. Whether they could give me that, I can't answer, because I didn't try. I didn't realize, you see, how important the "open" Contra program was and certainly didn't understand anything of how important this "covert" Contra program was. I didn't realize it was the center of our policy in Central America. I thought, for instance, that our involvement in Honduras, we had a military base there in Palmarola of about 1500 people at any one time, was primarily there to support our effort in El Salvador. We were doing a lot of things that were supportive of the Salvadoran armed forces from the base in Honduras.

*Q: Do you think the country director was unaware of these distinctions also? He could have given you guidance I should think.*

FERCH: He could have. He didn't.

*Q: Do you think he knew what was legal and what wasn't, etc.?*

FERCH: I don't know. I can't answer that. And once again, I didn't put him on the spot. He didn't volunteer anything to me. This is my fault that I didn't sense that here was something so sensitive and so important. But bear in mind that I was totally unaware until well after the fact that there was a secret part to this program. Dealing with the open part where you have a liaison function, it didn't seem that complicated to me. Then, as I said, the humanitarian assistance had just been approved. The modalities had not been worked out and I didn't know what my relations to that would be, but I assumed I would be told once the modalities were worked out. There was no reason to pin anyone down on that at the moment because they couldn't be pinned down. And initially when the modalities were worked out it was that the Contras bought the goods in the States and on their own were to get the stuff down to Honduras. So we, the mission, had no involvement with the Contras taking the goods that they bought using our money down to Honduras. So I was not concerned about that either, even when it got started, until they screwed it up, which is another part of the story.

I go down there and create this image of openness. And within days I am invited by the President of Honduras, a man by the name of Roberto Suazo Cordova, a medical doctor, to a private dinner. It was hosted by a former Minister of Government. There were four of us there. I didn't know in advance what this was about. But what it was about was that the President of Honduras was feeling me out on my views about the Honduran political scene. "Isn't it terrible, isn't the instability bad and the coming election is complicating matters, etc." It became very clear about a third of the way into the evening that what he wanted to feel me out on was his intention to stay in office. There were elections scheduled and eventually held in November. Here he was feeling me out and I am replying early in the evening, that we think the political situation is pretty good, that the coming elections are pretty important to maintain that stability, that the transfer of power

from one president to another will only strengthen your government and will strengthen our policy. He keeps going on, thinking, I suppose, "Doesn't this gringo hear what I am saying?", and getting blunter and blunter. By the end of the evening I said, "Mr. President, let me be as clear as I possibly can. We support the electoral process. We are very desirous that these elections come off and I will do everything in my power to insure that these elections come off." He mumbled a lot and that was the end of the evening. That was also the end of my productive relationship with the President of Honduras.

Subsequently, their Congress goes into recess. He tries to convene a surprise session. The head of the Congress calls me up one day in early October. A man with the strange name of Bu Siron. He said he had to see me. He comes over to the Embassy and says the President is calling a surprise session of Congress that afternoon. That he is going to propose that the elections be postponed for two years and that he would stay in power during these two years. Bu Siron said that I have to stop it. I said, "Wait a minute, this is your country. The United States doesn't dictate what goes on in these countries anymore. This is your problem, not our problem. Our policy is that we want the elections, but I don't intervene."

However, as I was saying this, which was the appropriate thing to say for the record, I realized I had to implement our policy, which was that we wanted those elections held. So after he left I called the PAO to get the press in and to tell them the questions I wanted them to ask me. They came and interviewed me and I said, "Ask me what we think about the electoral process." So they went live on the air and I said, "The United States is strongly in support of the electoral process and therefore we believe the scheduled elections are very important for Honduran democratic development."

Then Bu Siron called me back and said that Suazo was still going through with it and could I come and sit in the Congressional gallery while this was going on. So I trot down there just to lend my physical presence in the gallery. There are some people in front of the Congress milling around. They had heard what was happening. It was a very small demonstration, it wasn't much.

*Q: Was this all communicated and discussed with Washington?*

FERCH: Well, before going on the air I called up Washington and talked to the fellow who took the job Abrams wanted me to have, Bill Walker, now Ambassador in El Salvador. And I said, "Look, this is what is going on and this is what I propose doing." Walker in his...I do not regard him highly, but I will not use snide remarks or anything... He said something to the effect, "Well, just be very careful, don't screw up. If there is going to be a coup we want to be with the new government too."

*Q: Not real guidance.*

FERCH: It wasn't guidance at all.

Anyway, I go ahead with the press conference and then I subsequently go down to the Congress at the president of Congress' request. There were people just milling around and Suazo wasn't pushing to get the meeting going on time. The press was down there. They asked me my opinion

about what was going to happen with this vote. I said that I couldn't express an opinion on an internal matter like that. That was certainly up to the Honduran people, the Honduran Congress. We cannot intervene in that matter, those days are past. However...and I said something that they cartooned me saying..."I am a professional observer. All my career I have been looking at foreign developments closely on the scene just like a reporter. Therefore I think I am a pretty good observer of what is going on." I said, "From all this demonstration down there"...I am saying this from the balcony..."and what I have seen, it seems to me that the Honduran people really want this electoral process to go forward. The view of the Honduran people is, in my humble opinion, that they want these elections to come off." So that gets out over television.

The session just kind of degenerates and never comes to a vote. President Suazo Cordova has even a lower opinion of John Ferch by this time.

Now this may seem irrelevant, but it is not. The next event is the Contras come into Honduras with their first load of beans, or whatever it is, and in their own fumbling style they invited the US press on their plane. They land in Tegucigalpa, pull up to the military side of the airport. The press jumps out and starts filming the Contras on unloading their beans in Tegucigalpa. An Honduran officer in charge looks at this and says, "Gee, what is going on here?" The Hondurans always maintained that the Contras weren't even there. So he rushes out and stops the whole procedure and takes control of the goods.

Now, the Hondurans are sitting on the goods, the Contras want them and the United States Government is very agitated. But it is still legal.

I am told to go in and persuade Suazo Cordova to give the beans to the Contras. Now, just remember how Suazo thinks about John Ferch, who was just instrumental in thwarting his extralegal presidential ambitions. He thinks he finally has something on me. He has got some leverage that maybe he can use. So he mumbles when I call on him and doesn't act. He says that all the military are pressuring him. I said, "Look, I can guarantee that the Contras won't do this again. They will be more discreet in the future. We have talked to the Contras in Washington and I am told that they will manage this better."

Nothing happens. Washington is getting more and more agitated. President Suazo Cordova is getting more and more conniving. He thinks he has something here.

Then, coincidentally at the same time, we do not disburse the bulk of our foreign assistance because the Hondurans didn't meet the conditions precedent...the details are important. He needed the money and we weren't releasing that. So now he needed two things from us. He wanted the money released without complying with the conditions...they were all economic conditions, nothing to do with the Contras...and of course he wanted to stay in office. He had the lever he thought would do it, which was Contra aid.

Washington sent me back, I don't know how many times, to try to persuade him. Now here is the guy who cut off his aid, in his mind...because I was the Ambassador on the spot when the aid was cut off and I am the guy who did stand up and express those views about the electoral process. He is not budging an inch.

So Ollie North flies down to try to persuade him. He doesn't budge him. Around this time I am beginning to get rumors that Ferch is screwing up down there. He can't keep his country in line. He can't get anything moving.

Poindexter comes down with a cast of thousands. He can't sway him. Suazo is still sitting there. He has this one trump and the election is coming closer and closer. At the very end of the process he did something else again to try to stop the election.

Anyway the elections are held and Suazo knows his days as President are now numbered. Washington still doesn't have the beans going to the Contras. And we can't do anything with Suazo. Washington finally realizes that they are going to have to just wait this thing out. Nevertheless, Washington in the form of Elliott Abrams, I guess, and a lot of other people are teed off at me now because this had happened on my watch and I somehow hadn't been able to break the log jam notwithstanding that Poindexter and company couldn't do it either.

*Q: Were you hitting them at both ends? Was Washington hitting the Honduran Ambassador in Washington at the same time?*

FERCH: I don't know about that. I suppose so. Even at this time I was so worried to hear about these rumors about myself that I wrote a letter to North because he had something to do with the Contras...he had told me he was the point man. I said, "Look, you couldn't do it, I couldn't do it, yet I hear these rumors." Whitehead, the Under Secretary, came down and relayed the message that they understood that it was not my doing. But, in fact, Elliott was very upset. He was mad. It seemed irrational, but that was the case.

The election is in late November. The process is really strange. It was a primary and final election together. Both parties were split into factions. The president came from the party that got the most votes, and the individual who got the most votes among the candidates of that party would be the man who became president. So Azcona won, who was the next President, with less votes...his faction of the Liberal Party received less votes than the leading faction of the Conservative Party. So his election was legal but perceptively blemished.

We had to deal with this man, so I immediately after the election went over and congratulated him. There was no question of getting instructions from Washington on this because he was the new President under their law. I also in the interim period arranged for him to be briefed by Jack Galvin, who is now NATO Commander, to build up our relationship. I proposed that I could break the economic log jam if he would commit himself to work with me to create a meaningful economic program...I cleared this with Washington earlier, obviously...when he became President, we would disperse half of the money. And when the program was worked up with signatures on it, we would give him the other half.

I was building the ground for a good relationship with Azcona, and achieved it. But Washington was more concerned with another fact...two facts...that legal Contra aid was not flowing and that the illegal program was underway and they would have to get me on board.

*Q: Did Washington really want Suazo to continue in power even though it meant that the elections would be postponed?*

FERCH: No, I don't think they wanted him in power. But they wanted to be with the winner.

As I said, the legal program is snarled and Abrams is mad, as well as other people, I assume, and the illegal program is getting started. By illegal program I mean North's operation run by Secord.

*Q: This did not yet involve anything in Honduras at that point.*

FERCH: No. But they knew it would and they knew that when it did the American Ambassador would know about it and therefore would have to be brought on board.

I am just conjecturing what I am about to say, but I think you and those who read this will agree that the conjecture hangs together. I was informed by Walker to come to Washington in December, without an explanation other than that Elliott wanted to talk to me. I was feeling pretty proud of myself by this time, feeling pretty good. We had kept the electoral process going, we were off to a good start with Azcona, I felt my public relations program was paying dividends.

*Q: Was the press treating you okay?*

FERCH: Oh, beautifully.

*Q: Is it a free press?*

FERCH: Yes, pretty much.

So I didn't know what Abrams was up to but I wasn't concerned about anything. I figured it was working with the new Administration or something. So I fly up to Washington. It was my father's birthday, coincidentally. He was going to be 89. So I took my wife with me. Sue and I both went up and saw him first and then went to Washington.

It was December 9...obviously these things are very clear in my memory because, as you will see, they were very traumatic. I had an appointment with Elliott late in the evening. It was dark outside at that time of year. I walk in on Elliott in his office. He is alone. Walker is not there. I said, "Well, what do you want to talk about, Elliott?" And right off without any preamble he said, "There is a perception in this town that you don't support us." [All this is written down. I wrote it up subsequently for the Foreign Service Journal.] I was taken aback. I said, "What do you mean there is a perception that I don't support you? Who?" He said, "There is just a perception." I couldn't pin him down. We went around and around on why or who. I was getting more and more emotionally agitated. I remember the thought crossed my mind that I was being McCarthyized here. I said, "Well, Elliott, do you share that perception?" He said, "If you say you support us, I will believe you." I said, "I am a career officer. I support the Administration. I have supported all Administrations." He said, "I am having a meeting tomorrow and you come to it."

We were staying with friends in Bethesda and I go out there. Sue could see that I was up tight. She asked me what it was. I said that I had been subjected to McCarthyite treatment and I told her that I could not understand what was going on. It was extraordinary.

The next day I go to the meeting. It was what I subsequently learned was the RIGlet, the Restrictive Interdepartment Group, but the small version. There were in Elliott's office, Ollie North, Alan Fiers who was from this building and somebody else. The talk was about the Contras in Honduras and how we needed better control of the Contras, that we had to have the Contras more on board. I could see as the conversation bounced around that I was being put on the spot. I was supposed to respond to this conversation somehow. I didn't know what to say. I found this very puzzling. So I probably mumbled a little, I really don't remember.

I went back to Tegucigalpa and wondered what I was going to do. I had been put on the spot. They wanted me to take control of the Contras and do something with them. Who do I get advice from? I can't get advice from my boss, Elliott Abrams, who is the guy that put me on the spot. I can't get advice from the guy who said he was responsible for the Contras because he put me on the spot...Ollie North. I didn't know Fiers very well at all.

Finally it came to me that if they could say this in writing, it was probably okay. I realize that is a very bureaucratic approach to this problem, but it seemed to me if I could get my instruction in writing I could be confident that it was legitimate. So I wrote Elliott a cable and sent it back channel.

*Q: Now, they at this point had not asked you to do anything specific?*

FERCH: Nothing specific.

*Q: It is all totally vague?*

FERCH: "Somebody has to have responsibility." "We need to have tighter control." That type of conversation. It was very vague. Not that we are starting this program and are going to start air dropping in these supplies. None of that stuff. It was vague. But it was clear that I was being put on the spot. But it is also clear, if you think about it, that they, until I was signed on board, couldn't speak about specifics to me. Elliott had softened me up the night before about not being with them. Now I was suppose to commit myself, and I didn't.

So I send him this telegram in which I said, "I am the American Ambassador and am therefore responsible for all government programs in Honduras and therefore will be responsible for this program. But I will be much more comfortable if you will provide me with my instructions in writing and I will respond in kind."

Knowing what we learned afterward and what happened in the development of this program, you can imagine what Elliott Abrams thought when he got that telegram. He is going to put this in writing? I never get an answer. But I do start hearing all sorts of reports that people are dissatisfied with me. A reporter tells me this.



The inauguration of Azcona comes off and I consider it to be a great success. The Vice President comes down. I get word back that the Vice President is totally irritated by the visit...it is no good. I have my DCM check with the advance man who planned everything and he said it was a great visit. He didn't know what they were talking about. They were building a case.

After Azcona was inaugurated, I tell him that the Honduran Government had held up Contra aid because the Contras had had the press on the plane. I guaranteed that they will not do that again, that it will be handled discreetly. I would like him to help me out of this. Without hesitation Azcona said, "Yes." The aid starts flowing, the legitimate aid.

Washington didn't acknowledge that at all. In fact Elliott was mad that I had dispersed the economic aid to Azcona. I had an AID telegram authorizing me to disperse the aid. Once again he was building a case. He said I should have checked with him. I did not take my orders from AID.

I had received enough of these complaints that I was beginning to be concerned. So I sent him a letter saying, "Look, I am hearing all of these things. I think I am being discredited. I do not know what is going on here. I want to come up and talk to you. I am going to be in Washington in mid-March and want to talk to you and find out what is going on here. I can't function if I am being undermined like this." I tried to come to grips with him.

When I get up there he has Walker in the room with him. He won't talk about it. I said finally, "I want to talk about that letter." He said, "You talk to Bill." And he walked out. He refused to talk to me about the issues that I had raised concerning reports that he was dissatisfied with me. And Walker professed not to know anything about most of those issues. So there was nothing.

That week, coincidentally, was when the first vote was held on the \$100 million on so-called lethal assistance for the Contras and it was rejected by Congress, which was a surprise. Elliott gets it into his head that Hondurans are very upset that the vote was rejected. I hear Thursday, the vote was on Wednesday, that he is going to fly down to Honduras on Friday to reassure them. Although I was getting the flu at that time, I said that I would go down with him, but he said that I should go down on my own, he would handle this.

Now this was kind of strange. I fly back commercially, sick as a dog; he flew down on a government flight without me and met the Hondurans...only my DCM was there. According to my DCM, Abrams said to Azcona that he knew the Hondurans were very nervous because we didn't get the money for the Contras. [To my knowledge the Hondurans had never expressed their view about the vote that failed to get the money, one way or the other.] Therefore we are going to give you your economic assistance up front. That will help you out and we will give you some more military assistance.

*Q: Had they asked for military assistance?*

FERCH: No. This is all Abrams' initiative. But he had forgotten that the economic aid had already been given. That was the ironic part of it. He leaves a man down in Tegucigalpa to work up a wish list for military aid. Coincidentally, that next Sunday morning there is fighting on the

border. The Sandinistas actually pursued some Contras back into Honduras and the Hondurans were very concerned. They didn't know what was going to happen. Whether this was going to evolve into a bigger fighting.

*Q: Up to this time the Contras had been supporting themselves with their own resources in Honduras with the Hondurans tacit agreement. Was that right?*

FERCH: Yes.

Anyway, the Hondurans are very antsy about the fighting. This incursion is coincidental, you see, with the vote and Elliott's trip. The incursion offers us an opportunity in that it publicizes the Sandinistas' threat. It makes it possible, in Washington's mind, for the Hondurans to ask for the military assistance. So the Embassy gets instructions to tell the Hondurans to formally ask for the assistance that Elliott had promised on Friday. Azcona said, "No." I was in bed with the flu and not at the meeting. My DCM did the demarche. Azcona had said no because he thought it would be an admission, in some convoluted way, that somehow the Contras were there.

Washington, and when I say Washington it is basically Abrams now, gets very antsy. Here he is out on a limb offering money and they won't ask for it. I think probably that he found out that he needed them to ask for it legally. But anyway, he really wanted them to ask for the money he had promised for military assistance.

It gets into the press and Washington is depicted as agitated and the Hondurans appear calm. It even got out in the press erroneously that the Honduran Government went on vacation, as everyone does in Latin America on Holy Week.

Monday and Tuesday went by and more agitation. I realized that I had to get off my sick bed and call in some more chips. This was just getting too much. So Tuesday morning I called on the President and said, "Mr. President, let me speak as a friend. I think you are in over your head here. I don't think you have any choice. I think you have to ask for this money. It is my judgment of the political dynamics of the situation...as a friend of yours and a professional here, I think you have to request it, you don't have an option." He took my advise and said, "Okay." He took out some paper and wrote a letter. I got it off in a cable and that was the end of that.

Abrams subsequently blamed me that somehow the Embassy was not able to function well. He argued that we should function in a way that made the Hondurans snap to immediately. He acknowledged that I was home in bed, but said if I had been running a good Embassy, the Embassy would have been able to persuade Azcona immediately, rather than go through that embarrassing delay of several days. He ignored totally the fact that he had offered the money and the Hondurans were totally bemused by this.

There were a few more incidents that happened that laid a few more bricks on the case, but I won't go into them.

At the end of June, there is another vote in our Congress and the \$100 million of legal assistance passes, so now the Contras are going to get guns as well as beans. Two days after the vote, Elliott

calls me up on the secure phone and says, "The Secretary wants you out of there. He is removing you." I said, "Why?" He said, "You know, there is bad morale in the Embassy and it is going to be very tense now that the war is going to heat up and we need someone to calm down the Embassy." I said, "What do you mean bad morale?" He said, "We have talked about that." That is not true. He mentioned the last time I had seen him that there was a report that some of the junior officers were unhappy about something. I had actually followed up on it and my DCM looked into it and wrote Elliott about the situation. He, Elliott, dismissed that. It was the only explanation he would give me. He said, "When are you going to pack your bags?" I said, "Look, Elliott, I am going to stay through the 4th of July"--I knew at that point my career was over. "I am going to tell Azcona myself, I don't want you to do it." [He said, "Okay," but he called up Azcona himself before I was able to get to him. I subsequently heard that Azcona said to somebody that Elliott's call was the cruelest thing he had ever heard of.] "I am going out with my head held high. I am going to take all my leave and will come back and pack up in September."

Well, he couldn't argue with that. They didn't have a replacement for me. My family was up in Canada at that time. That was the year we built the cabin. So that is what I did. I wrote Secretary Shultz that it was his right to remove me but I felt I deserved an explanation. By this time the press was filled with the story of my removal. This was a real hot spot at the time. And people in Washington, like Bill Walker, in their own very gentle way said that I was screwing up down there. Really I was slandered. In the normal course of events, if this was not government service I could have sued for slander.

The Secretary wrote apologizing that he had nothing to do with it. I should go on my leave, calm down and not give up on the Foreign Service to which I had given too many years of good service.

*Q: Who do you think drafted that letter for the Secretary?*

FERCH: He did. The style was George Shultz'. He said to see Mike Armacost when I got back from leave and he would tell me what happened. He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

*Q: Did the Secretary know do you think?*

FERCH: Elliott had built a case and presented all these things that I have just related in a twisted form to the Secretary. Such things like...he didn't hold his country in line over the first shipment (beans); he screwed up the Vice President's visit during the inauguration; he didn't break the log jam quickly enough when the Sandinistas were coming across to get the Contras; and a few other things. He built this case on the flimsiest of evidence.

In September I called on Armacost and he related all these things to me. He said that this is what Elliott told the Secretary and the Secretary acted upon it. I listen to him, hearing these things for the first time in an articulated form. I responded to Mike saying, "Hey listen, that's not what happened!" He asked, "Weren't you ever counseled by Elliott about these things?" I said, "Absolutely not. No one has ever told me anything. When I tried to deal with him he refused to talk." Then I gave him my version of the events. He said, "Well it is too late now." I said, "Well, I am going to have to quit. My career is at an end." He said, "No, don't do that hastily. You are

going to go up to Brown." They had to do something with me and I was going up to Brown as Diplomat in Residence...George Vest, the Director General, was very good about arranging that. I remember he was first going to send me to some other place but I wanted to be close to a good airport, knowing that if I was going to be looking for a job I would be traveling a lot.

This was in late September, 1986. The timing is important because I would go directly to Brown in Providence. You can imagine that this development is very shattering to us. A week after we arrived at Brown, Secord's Contra plane was shot down by the Sandinistas, but one man to survived. He talked about the Enterprise, and the scandal began to unfold.

*Q: Before that you had not known about the illegal shipments?*

FERCH: Nothing at all.

Almost immediately upon my reaching Brown the scandal begins to unfold. I was now able to piece together the scandal and what had happened to me. When I was removed, after Mike gave me Elliott's story, I still didn't know why he was lying. But as the scandal unfolded, I went back over my memory and said, "Hey, I was put on the spot, 'You don't support the Administration.' And then they want me to take responsibility for the Contras. They were at that time building these airports." You can piece it together like this, what was going on.

During the course of the scandal I saw Mike Armacost again and George Vest quite a few times because he was holding my hand. George said, "Well, you have been stabbed in the back by Elliott but you just have to wait this out." But Mike at some point in the course of the unfolding scandal said, "Really, don't give up. There will be another Administration." In effect he said I would be persona grata, that I had handled myself well and that the story was now coming out.

This second conversation with Mike occurred towards the end of the academic year. I had not yet located a job. Replying to Mike I said, "You know that is good advice." I thought I was being vindicated. I had done the right thing. Whatever Administration comes on board will probably view it that way and will want people like myself whose hands were evidently clean. So I decided to stay in the Service until the elections. But my emotions were too raw to wait out the period in State. So I told Mike, I'm just too mad at this building to want to work here. So I will get myself a job and you pay for it." I called up some friends on the Hill and said I wanted to work up there. So George crafted a program for me and got me lined up with Bill Bradley.

After the election and the Bush victory, I approached Larry Eagleburger, the new Deputy Secretary, and asked him to find out if I was persona grata with the new White House. One of his aides called me back and said, "No, they won't give you anything."

So I decided to retire and sent my letter in. There was no future for me, a man has to have a little pride. I was not going to stick around just to have a job. Fortunately I had enough years in so I could retire.

I retired effective in May. I took the 3-months job search program the Department has and started looking for a job again. The best offer came from the Agency and that is how I ended up

here at the National Intelligence Council. To my surprise my reputation with the Agency was very, very high. Over the years I had developed quite a reputation out here and they offered me this job. Some people might find a little bit of irony in that, but so be it. It is a good job and I am doing economic work on issues of global significance.

**ROBERT S. PASTORINO**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Tegucigalpa (1986-1988)**

*Robert S. Pastorino was born in San Francisco in 1949. His career included positions in Caracas, Lisbon, Colombia, Nicaragua, Mexico, and an ambassadorship to Santo Domingo. Ambassador Pastorino was interviewed by David Fischer and Charles Stuart Kennedy in March 1998.*

PASTORINO: Let's talk about the assignment and our transition to Honduras, Tegucigalpa, in 1986. In about May, 1986, I received a call from the Department asking me if I'd like to go to Tegucigalpa as Deputy Chief of Mission, working for John Ferch. It didn't take me long to say yes. John and I were friends. I had supported John when he was in Mexico as DCM and I was on the Desk. John was an Economic Officer. The only thing Fran and I worried about was how to bring up two kids in Tegucigalpa. But I found out the schools were minimally acceptable and the living conditions fairly adequate, although clearly it would not be like Paris or Mexico City. I had some qualms about going to a banana republic after having served in a country like Mexico.

I did not have any qualms about the US policy of supporting the Contras, the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance, in Honduras, even after a possible difficulty for my career was pointed out to me by John Gavin, who obviously knew more at that time than I did about what was going on. The main issue in Honduras for the US would be the location and support of the Contras and the effort to train and equip them to reenter Nicaragua to fight the Marxist Sandinista Government which was threatening the interests of their neighbors and of the US.

Ambassador Gavin had just come back from Washington and told me very frankly about the controversy then raging in the Capital over Contra policy. He noted it could be great for me, would be a very interesting job, but it could also harm my career, given the controversy. People were looking at this whole program through a microscope. They would be looking for scapegoats. The hundred million dollars which was voted by Congress to legally support the Contra operation had been approved, but Speaker Tip O'Neill, all by himself, was holding up the appropriation for as long as he could. Ambassador Gavin suggested I think very carefully whether I wanted to get into something so controversial which might adversely affect my career. I thought about it and believed in the policy. Therefore, I said let's go for it. As usual the family was supportive. And, to this day I very much appreciate John Gavin's concern.

*Q: Did anyone ask you if you believed in the Contra operation?*

PASTORINO: No. Only Ambassador Gavin seemed to be concerned about my career or my real views on the issue.

*Q: Did they know it?*

PASTORINO: Did they know whether I did or didn't support the policy? No, I don't believe they did. Certainly Personnel didn't, and I doubt that it should have been an assignment issue. After all, Foreign Service Officers are paid to carry out instructions, and follow policies. But, I still appreciated the Ambassador's concern.

*Q: Were you ever asked in your career, as part of an assignment process, we'd like to have you down here but do you believe in our policy?*

PASTORINO: No, not that I remember. My personal feelings should not have had an impact. On the other hand, there is a point that Personnel ought to know and tell you what you're getting into. But, since my views of the whole State Personnel operation are not flattering, it did not surprise me. Unfortunately, some of the people in the assignments section were marking time until they could get their own good, follow-on assignment. I have long considered that Personnel is the one place where Foreign Service Officers should not be assigned; rather those assignments should be left to professional human resources types.

Anyway, I thought about it for one night and then went back to the Department and said yes.

So, it began as a normal transition. We were scheduled to leave Mexico in about two months, get some home leave, and arrive in Tegucigalpa in August. Out of the blue, I received a telephone call from Washington, from I believe Elliot Abrams, maybe on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June saying the Department was thinking of removing John Ferch, and that we should go right now. I was shocked. The family was shocked. We were living very well in Mexico City. Then, shortly thereafter, I received another call telling me it was imperative that I arrive almost instantly because John Ferch would be removed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July.

*Q: What were the reasons?*

PASTORINO: No reasons were given to me at that moment over the phone, but that I would be briefed upon arriving in Washington for consultations. Fine. So the timing allowed us to have but one week in Washington in which I did all my consultations. I had only been to Honduras once. But Fran and the family arranged everything for the move. We moved. The children were already out of school and Shannon would not be going with us. The DCM's house was empty in Honduras so that was no problem. Somehow, our furniture was packed in Mexico and the physical move was actually pretty smooth.

About three days before our departure from Washington, I had breakfast with Elliot Abrams. I consider Elliot Abrams a gentleman, a foreign policy expert, and a wonderful boss. He is a nice man and has been seriously wronged by criticism from the foreign policy community. He had come from the Hill and had great experience with Congress. Some in the State Department saw him as an outsider and not very diplomatic but he was the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin

American Affairs, and a very good one. He was good at it, making tough decisions, and being aggressive within the US Government.

Now, given that I was going to Honduras as Chargé d’Affaires (with Ferch’s imminent departure), I went to Elliot offering the position back to him, should he feel more comfortable with someone else filling it. It now had become the key position in Honduras, with control and responsibility for the policy in Honduras and the rest of Central America, and he didn’t even know me. He said he knew my background, and given that I was a professional, he was sure I could do the job. It was a great vote of confidence. And, that is why we appoint Deputy Chiefs of Mission, so that they can take over in the absence of the Ambassador. And this, unfortunately for John’s sake, would be a permanent absence. I did feel a little ill at ease, making acting number one because of the circumstances of John’s removal, but that was neither my fault nor my decision. And the US needed someone in country. Ferch’s DCM, who should have served as Chargé for a little while at least, was allowed to leave the day after Ferch on a normal reassignment.

Then Elliott went into what became the official explanation for the removal. There was a serious morale problem. Mrs. Ferch has gotten on the wrong side of the Embassy Staff and on the wrong side of the staff of Vice President Bush. The Vice President had been in Honduras recently and she had rebuffed requests of the staff and the Secret Service. I knew Sue Ferch and I thought she was a wonderful person. I had stayed with the Ferches in the DCM’s house in Mexico City more than once when he was DCM. She had always treated me wonderfully. I thought she was a great representative of the United States. People later told me I didn’t see the real Mrs. Ferch.

I believed what I saw of her but others obviously had different perceptions. There were claims by Embassy staff that she had used general administrative funds assigned to Embassy housing for beautification of the Embassy residence, instead of for a water truck to deliver potable water to Embassy housing.

Elliott alluded to but did not detail other reasons for the removal. He said he would visit Honduras in the near future to personally brief President Azcona for the reasons for the change. He didn’t think I had to know more at that time; that my job was to get on top of the situation and run the Embassy and the programs. Remember, I was a friend of John Ferch’s and everyone knew it. I was satisfied to know what the US policy was, and indeed I had a lot to do. I sure didn’t have the time to investigate. And, I was assured that USG policy or US-Honduran relations were not seriously affected by anything John had done. And, I never saw anything in Honduras that led me to believe that John was not carrying out that policy.

Elliott did tell me that John was perceived in Washington as being not totally supportive of the Contra policy. There were questions by many people about how the Contra policy would affect US-Honduran relations; perhaps the bilateral relationship would be damaged and perhaps that relationship should have priority over Contra policy.

Now, to get into the substance of the policy, Honduras was already the site for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance groups. There were probably already seventeen thousand Nicaraguan fighters, rebels, Contras, whatever you want to call them, in training and refugee camps within

thirty or forty miles of the Nicaraguan/Honduran border. They had had some semblance of training, first from Argentine intelligence units, and then from the U.S. agencies. Geographically, the border is the Rio Coco, it's dense tropical jungle, it's hilly, and there were very few passable roads, none paved into the area of the camps. This was the Danli Province of Honduras.

There were three or four camps in which the Contras actually lived in mud huts and wooden shacks. They had training grounds in a couple of them. All of these were within thirty or forty miles of the river, which was the border. This is where the bulk of the seventeen thousand fighters worked and trained within the same valley. There was the training ground, an obstacle course, helicopter pads, the intelligence operations, the food warehouses, the armory, the communications buildings, housing for families of the resistance fighters; all these were there at Yamales. There were some other small camps where Contras lived on the outskirts of this valley, and in other parts of Honduras.

At Aguacate, in Central Honduras, there was a landing field for airplanes and a hospital facility. This had been built by the US and the Honduran Government. One of the first visits I made, probably on my second day in Honduras, was to the hospital at Aguacate. There must have been twenty doctors there, on a rotating basis, many of whom were volunteers from the United States. That hospital was later supported by the legal, Congressionally appropriated one hundred million dollars, but at that time the funding came from rich, private benefactors who cared deeply for the Contra cause and were anti-Sandinista because of their Marxist policies. Some of the doctors were Cuban Americans. Aguacate also served as a re-supply depot where small shipments of goods were being flown into Nicaragua by the Contras, being air dropped into the mountains for the very small resistance bands. I learned how to load the pallets for transport and airdrop, the first of many lessons I would learn over the next year about military affairs and low intensity warfare. I also learned a lot about the misguided policies of the Sandinistas.

There were a couple of other Democratic Resistance sites in Honduras. There was the headquarters of the Resistance in Tegucigalpa. There was another training site outside of Tegucigalpa. Then there were Mosquito Indian Resistance sites. The Mosquito Indians are a tribe of Indians that live in the Nicaraguan-Honduran border area. They don't recognize any borders. They cross back and forth. Some of the Mosquitos were fighters, unfortunately not very good ones, but they were fighters and they had to be supplied. So there was another little landing strip there.

This was all somewhat haphazard, but it was a whole complex of sites. The Honduran Government and most Hondurans were very amenable, on a policy basis, to the Contras. Honduras was threatened by the Sandinistas and their Marxist policies, and the Contras provided some protection and a viable force to help change Sandinista policy, thus ultimately alleviating the threat. Also the support for the Contras entailed some sums of money being spent in the Honduran economy. And most Hondurans were conservative and opposed to Communism. The Honduran military was involved in supplying the Contras; the Contras had permission from the Government of Honduras to establish the camps, which were also refugees camps for Nicaraguans having to flee the Sandinista dictatorship, a fact the UNHCR refused to recognize.



But, Honduras was really being dragged into the vortex of this international controversy. The scope of the Contras in Honduras was much larger than anything in Salvador, where there were only supply shipments out of the airport in San Salvador, or larger than they were in Costa Rica, where there were much smaller camps. When I arrived in Honduras, there were about 17,000 fighters or more; when I left more than 15,000 were in Nicaragua fighting for their freedom.

*Q: So you arrive down there, I want to stress again for the listeners, this is a legal operation. You have a hundred million dollars appropriated by Congress and you've got no questions as to rogue operations or whatever. This is all approved.*

PASTORINO: That's right. So for my part, I had no qualms carrying this out. I was totally in favor of the ultimate objective and of the policy. All of the actors in Honduras with whom I was dealing were aware of the policy and supportive. I had the responsibility of seeing that there were no violations of human rights and that there were no rogue operations. With \$100 million dollars, there was no need for rogue operations. There had been some small Contra operations in Honduras already for four or five years. As noted above they were originally started by Argentines.

*Q: You arrived in Honduras as Chargé, DCM, running an operation that was huge and growing. To what extent were you the tail of the CIA and Defense Department dog? Who was there in terms of agencies and the numbers of people involved?*

PASTORINO: First of all, let's put this into context. I was no one's tail. I thought I had three basic jobs. One, as Chargé d'Affaires, I was the US Government's official representative to the Honduran Government and President Jose Azcona. In that context, the US Government had a whole series of programs with Honduras, such as AID, the Peace Corps, USIA [United States Information Agency], the DEA, intelligence agencies, in fact, all the regular Embassy programs that would have been there whether the Contras did or did not exist. In fact, Honduras had always been a large AID recipient, as were the other Central American countries. Honduras had been an important AID target during the Alliance for Progress.

Those programs were all growing because Honduras was becoming much more important. For instance, the Public Affairs Office operation had three or four officers in it. Why? Because the international press was there. It was interesting in that I never presented my credentials to President Azcona because I did not have an Ambassadorial appointment and thus did not have the necessary rank. Whenever, the diplomatic community was assembled by the Honduran Government, the US Chargé was at the end of the line. In fact, I believe a special letter was sent by Secretary of State Shultz to President Azcona introducing me and advising him of my status, since both Ferch and the DCM departed before my arrival.

As part of that task with the Honduran government, there was the responsibility to maintain the Honduran Government's support for Contra operations. Now, the two entities (the Government of Honduras and the Contras) were basically mutually supportive. They were both intensely ideologically against the Sandinista government. They saw the Sandinistas as a threat from the South. President Azcona was a conservative civil engineer, who had been democratically elected;

the military still had a very, very large role in running the Honduran government. The Honduran military was very conservative.

Legally the Hondurans had permitted the Contras to be in Honduras; legally we were providing support. But there were many, many everyday issues about the Contra operations and I had to deal with those issues with the Honduran Government; for instance, who should make public announcements? the Honduran Government?, the Contras?, or the Embassy? How should policies be justified simultaneously? Who should visit the Camps? Who should deal with the political aspects of the Democratic Resistance? How should possible disputes between the Contras and Hondurans be handled? So there was a lot to do in the context of bilateral relations. There were the large, normal US government programs in a developing country, and then this issue of maintaining Honduran Government support for and cooperation with the Contras. My second job was managing and operating the US Embassy, with all of its traditional State Department sections, as well as managing and supervising all of the many agencies which were there, some of them growing by leaps and bounds. Embassy Tegucigalpa became one of the largest Embassy complexes that we had in Latin America. Running it effectively was a major task of systems management, financial and resource protection, morale, policy-making and implementation, and the hundred other tasks large and small which make an Embassy function effectively and efficiently, always within the glare of lots of publicity. Strange as it seems, when I arrived there was no Ambassador, no DCM, no Political Counselor, and several other positions were vacant. Rather than worry I decided it was my job to fill as many of them as possible. Luckily, I had experience in most of those areas, although not in the Honduran context.

And there was my third task: to oversee the program to outfit, train, equip, and prepare the Contras to reenter Nicaragua and carry the fight to the Sandinistas; and a tough fight it would be, given the equipment, personnel and support the Sandinistas had from the Soviet and Cubans allies. Under the law appropriating the hundred million dollars, the CIA and the DOD (Department of Defense) were to supply and train the Contras, to provide their supplies, to provide their intelligence, and to provide guidance. There was a provision to detail officials of one agency to others in order to carry out the program approved by Congress and signed by the President.

*Q: Were there restrictions on what the agency could do?*

PASTORINO: The law was written very tightly. The provision of intelligence was key to the fighters when they returned to Nicaragua; intelligence about Nicaraguan military dispositions, the location and activity of Cuban and Soviet military components, the location of equipment such as the huge Russian Hind helicopters, the locations of targets, etc. Of course, the Contra fighters when inside collected and transmitted large amounts of intelligence to Yamales for analysis and the Agency helped to coordinate these efforts.

US Government officials were forbidden from crossing into Nicaragua under any circumstances; they could not cross the river. They could provide all the uniforms, food, medicine, ammunition, guns, and training that the \$100 million could buy. They could support the hospital and landing strip, and all of the communications operations so necessary to manage a military operation over great distances.

The regular Military Group in the Embassy was in Honduras supplying regular, normal, routine supplies and training to the Honduran military, as well as participating in joint defense maneuvers. I had to see to it that this group was not at all involved with the Contras. In fact, I had to send one Attaché home because he wouldn't stay out of the Contra program; it was too bad, because he was a great Cuban-American patriot who had fought at the Bay of Pigs, but the law was the law.

With regard to my third task, liaison with the Contras, some people thought I should be the Pro-Consul, giving the orders, carrying out the battle plans. Of course, I couldn't do that because I did not have the experience and we had people well-trained and efficient who could work on those issues. That was their job. Mine was to make sure that the guidelines for the use of the hundred million dollars was followed: to make sure that their relations with the Honduran Government were smooth so that the Contras could operate in Honduras and not upset the Hondurans too much; to worry about the human rights aspects of what the Contras were doing; as best as it was humanely possible in Honduras, to keep all of the factions of the Contras working together. At the same time, the Contras had their own relationships with the civilian side of the Honduran government as well as with the military part of the Honduran government. So I tried to keep on top of that as best I could.

In sum, as Chargé d'Affaires, I tried to coordinate all aspects of the US Government, through the Embassy, in carrying out as what I saw were my three tasks: run a large, complex Embassy, liaison with the Contras, and deal bilaterally with the Honduran government.

*Q: What was the Honduran government's interest in all this operation?*

PASTORINO: As I noted above, the Honduran government was ideologically opposed to the Sandinista, Marxists-Leninist dictatorship in Managua and felt threatened by it, that was interest number one.

Interest number two, they were going to make money out of this situation, if at all possible. There were aspects of corruption in the Honduran government, including the military, and they wanted to make money. They also wanted to get as much US assistance as possible for their own Honduran development programs.

They also had an interest in making sure the Contras didn't draw too much on the resources of Honduras. They had to make sure the Contra operation didn't destabilize Honduras. There were some in Honduras that worried that this major effort would impact negatively on Honduras if it wasn't controlled. I myself often thought of how the operation would change the country in many ways, modernizing it in some, changing the society in others.

So that's situation when I arrived. As far as I could tell, the coordination of all the U.S. agencies was efficient. Most of the credit goes to the agencies; they and all of people in the Embassy had the same goal and the same objective. We had a hundred million dollars, to help the Contras take back their homeland from the Sandinistas, who were massively supported by the Cubans and the Soviets, and who were threatening their neighbors as well as us.

How were they threatening the US? For one thing, the Russians were building a massive air base in Managua. The Managua airbase became so big it was two miles long so that Russian Bear Bombers and intelligence planes could fly all the way up to California to carry out espionage activities off the coast of the United States, an unfriendly act. It was not far fetched, people don't like to believe this, to see the Sandinistas as a potential staging area for a threat to the United States. It was reality for those who could open their eyes to it. So we all had the same goal in mind. Also, the Sandinistas were threatening their other neighbors in Central America, countries which were our friends.

I made it pretty clear at the first staff meeting that I was there charged with running the whole U.S. government presence. I obviously wasn't going to get into the minutia of operations but I wanted to know what was going on. I was not going to micro manage operations. I had enough to do with all the programs of the Embassy. I saw my big job as making sure everyone worked together, that the guidelines vis-à-vis the Contras, were carried out.

I got to know all the Embassy people there very quickly. Those were twelve and fourteen hour days the first couple months. I visited all the operations. Early on I learned that the best way to learn about something is to call five minutes before my arrival to say I was on the way. With respect to the Contra camps, I would get the helicopter without advance notice to take me to Yamales or Aguacate. But again, most of the credit for the cooperation goes to the US Government personnel; we all had the same goal and they were very competent, dedicated people.

I didn't detect any friction and I believed all guidelines were being followed. Before I was later confirmed as Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, the US Iran-Contra Special Prosecutor provided a letter to Senator Dodd saying that I had never been and was not either a subject or a target of any investigation for anything that happened during that one year that I was in Honduras, especially the eight months when I was in charge. In fact, I talked several times to the investigators while I was still in Honduras.

There were a couple incidents that did happen and I fixed them. One I found out about later: under the guidelines we could not transport Democratic Resistance fighters in our helicopters; even badly wounded Contras could not be carried in U.S. helicopters, even from the border to the hospital. That was only the last fifteen miles, after the fighters had probably walked or ridden hundreds of miles from deep within Nicaragua. In one instance, two fighters coming into Honduras, literally bleeding to death, were carried by a helicopter to the hospital. The person who did that, who arranged that, was later punished.

The guidelines were strict. I knew what they were. I had State Department calling me making sure I was checking. But, the basic point is that we had a hundred million dollars, nobody had to cheat. We were awash in funds, energy and personnel.

Accurate and timely intelligence was obviously all-important. I think we had a successful intelligence operation. For instance, I used to fly every six to eight days, sometimes more often, to the camps in Yamales by helicopter. On normal days it was a forty-five minutes flight. That

part of Honduras was rolling, jungle covered hills. The weather was often bad, foggy and rainy, so we'd have to land down in one valley or another to await atmospheric clearing over the next ridge. But I was always confident because we had experienced pilots, and we maintained the helicopters. Once we landed before reaching Yamales and then had to return to Tegucigalpa because intelligence indicated that some Sandinista military units had infiltrated into Honduras, with shoulder to air missiles (SAMs), an obvious target being our helicopters. We flew back to Tegucigalpa rather than take the chance. It would have been embarrassing to have the American Chargé shot out of the air. Normally, the pilots flew at treetop level because they thought the SAMs could not reach and damage a chopper at such a low-level.

Another time, the Contra scouts posted around the Yamales bases discovered a relatively large infiltration of Sandinistas; hundreds of troops coming across the river into Honduras. This was obviously illegal; but not unexpected by the Hondurans, who feared a Nicaraguan invasion to knock out the Contra camps. Several people thought this large force of several hundred might be the first wave of the invasion. I used to go to the Embassy at six thirty in the morning. The first place I would go was to the war room, look at the maps, with all the pins locating the Contra units and any enemy units. This one morning there was lots of Sandinista pins on the Honduran side of the border, all moving towards Yamales and the camps. Washington was informed and we informed the Honduran military. We had a commitment to the Hondurans to support them in case of an invasion from Nicaragua. After the message went to Washington, there were expressions of support from Washington to the Honduran Government. There was a major leased U.S. base which we shared with the Hondurans at Palmerola, so it would have been easy to fly in a large contingent of troops and supplies.

Later during that day, we got word that several large Russian Hind helicopters had been blown up on their pads at a Sandinista army base in northern Nicaragua. The base was clearly inside Nicaragua, at a place called Wiwili, maybe forty or fifty miles south of the border. The Nicaraguan government of course raised their voice in protest; everyone assumed right away that the U.S. had carried out the action. I remember getting a call from the highest levels of the Honduran government, I believe it might have been from the President, asking about the situation. I told him it was not a US action, although I was glad it was successful. In fact, it turned out that the Honduran Military, led by General Humberto Regalado, who was Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, had carried out the operation. Whatever the exact details, we began to immediately see the pins on the map turn tail and head back south to Nicaragua. Clearly the Nicaraguan Government thought it was the US and they got worried.

These Hind helicopters were so large, had such range, and they could carry so many missiles, that they could decimate a Contra patrol instantly; which they did frequently in Nicaragua. They were a key weapon in the guerrilla war. It wasn't until the Contras got SAMs that these helicopters became vulnerable and they became less of a threat. It turned out that Honduran bombs had knocked out the helicopters and the airplane returned safely. And, most, if not all the Nicaraguan infiltrators as far as we could tell from our intelligence quickly returned back to Nicaragua.

Ultimately, I'm going to get the question of whether the Contra support by the US was a waste of US time and effort. Of course, we usually hear that it was unsuccessful. Well that is pretty

clearly wrong. The whole effort, in this first stage, by the Contras was to destabilize the Sandinista regime and stop it from subverting its neighbors, or at the least keep the Sandinistas from consolidating their regime without holding elections, which is what Castro did in Cuba. Well, let's look at history. The *pericuaco* (Sandinista) thugs were not able to consolidate and were forced to have elections. And we all know the result; they were thrown out of power. As an aside, that is probably why Castro has refused to hold a Presidential election in forty years. I'm not saying the Contras by themselves defeated the Sandinistas; that was never the plan; but they certainly were a factor in keeping them from consolidating their Marxist authoritarian rule. Apologists for the Sandinistas of course dispute this, but let them also read history.

*Q: How good were these guys as fighters? I mean were they dedicated? You talked earlier about having seventeen year old kids off some farm somewhere in northern Nicaragua.*

PASTORINO: They were very dedicated and became good guerrilla fighters. They carried the fight to the Sandinistas all over Nicaragua, and within one year they were able to win *de facto* control over large parts of Northern Nicaragua. They were untrained in the beginning. Contrary to popular belief, most of them were young, illiterate kids, not former National Guardsmen. They were fighting to get their lands back, after having had it expropriated by the Government. Some were eight or ten years old when Somoza was overthrown so they couldn't have been Somoza henchmen as they are portrayed.

Even, Colonel Enrique Bermudez, who led the Contras, was out of the country in exile when Somoza was overthrown. These young fighters had basically turned against the Communists in Managua. (For those who don't want to believe the Sandinistas were Communists, just read their materials.) Yes, they were good fighters, and patriots. They got basic military training at Yamales over several weeks; most important they received weapons, ammunition and communications gear. They had a command structure and they had leadership. Some of the trainers had been in the Nicaraguan military, like the man who was in charge of all training. Most importantly, they were fighting for something and morale was high. And when they returned to Nicaragua they had the support of the rural people. They must have done something right because they had the Sandinistas worried within a year.

*Q: You're running an operation out of Honduras. But of course there was a very famous guy in terms of the Contras, Eden Pastora, and he was operating out of Costa Rica.*

PASTORINO: I never met Eden Pastora. I would have liked to give our similar names. No, I never met him. My only ties with his operation was that there was cooperation between the units. But, by my time in Honduras, Pastora had lost a lot of power. He was after all an opportunist who changed sides several times. I think Pastora's group was pretty weak the year I was in Honduras although his people might have collaborated when the Contras cut the main road between Managua and the Caribbean in Southern Nicaragua, close to Costa Rica, meaning that the Russian and Cuban supplies could not then get to Managua where the military could utilize them.

There is a point here when you mention Pastora. The anti-Sandinista operation was always very factionalized. Perhaps less so in Honduras, than in other places, and especially after the \$100

million appropriation. But there were factions even in Honduras. Certain groups of fighters were getting support from certain exile resistance political groups. There were those who were loyal to Bermudez, *Comandante 69*, because he was the National Guard guy. There were other guys who were more loyal to their own *Comandantes*, men with whom they had gone into Nicaragua on operations.

But the greatest factionalization was in Miami. That was the headquarters of the Contra Directorate, the Contra bureaucracy, and the Contra political movement. In Honduras, I only saw the ramifications of this from afar. It was not until later when I went to Washington, when I had to get involved in holding hands with some of these factions in order to keep them together, that I saw the internal disputes. In Tegucigalpa, I had to know which Directors supported which groups, and I would take them to the camps for visits. There were many factions, from liberal to conservative. Of course, that just perfectly mirrored the situation in Nicaragua before the Sandinistas. People don't like to believe it, but there were more political parties in Nicaragua under Somoza than under Daniel Ortega. Often your political affiliation depended upon what part of the country you were from, Granada, Leon or Managua, or from your family background. These rivalries persisted in Miami. But, they all agreed on the main objective: that they had to get rid of the Ortega brothers, Tomas Borge, the butcher, and the rest of the Marxists.

In addition to the factions that I just described, there were the Mosquito Indians; they didn't listen to anyone as far as I could tell. But they did collaborate with the Contras in some cases. But, even the Nicaraguan and Honduran Governments could never control the Mosquitos for any great length of time. I knew many of them in Tegucigalpa. They were often included in political discussions, but they never got along with the Honduran Government.

I never forget the first time they came to my house to call their headquarters in Washington to discuss some issue they considered important. My eight year old daughter Susan offered to hide under the bed to listen to their conversation. We considered that but then broke up laughing when we realized they were going to talk in Mosquito. The leaders were such people as Brooklyn Rivera and Steadman Faggoth, interesting guys, but not very effective fighters. In fact, we had to sanction Faggoth severely because he had a poor human rights record.

Much of factional problems came down on the plate of *Comandante* Bermudez, who was trying to run a combined military operation. I don't think he'd ever been a field commander. The Nicaraguan army under Somoza didn't fight very well against the Sandinistas. Bermudez was somewhat acceptable to us. One, because a lot of people followed him. He was there on the spot in Honduras and he was dedicated and hard working. He was also a leader, in the sense of getting people to work together. He had been in exile for some time. He'd been the Military Attaché in Washington. Washington people knew him. He escaped some of the taint of *Somocismo* because he had been out of the country during some of the worst Somoza excesses. Anyway, Bermudez in Yamales, the Miami Directorate, Washington, and us in Tegucigalpa to a certain extent, had to sort of merge all this. It was a complicated political problem. I didn't realize when I was in Honduras, actually, how complicated it was. I got deeply involved in the factional disputes when I got assigned to the National Security Council.

I remember one time when I went to Yamales on some assignment. The Contra meeting headquarters was in a long, wooden hut, with a long table, the walls covered with maps. Beer was served, and we sometimes ate meat, although most of the time it was rice and beans. More than once we had horse meat for lunch. Anyway, on this particular visit, all of a sudden, a Nicaraguan civilian, who had clearly just come down from Miami, started talking and giving orders. I didn't know who this guy was. I had to ask. It turned out he was some minor Contra official in Miami who thought he could come to Central America and win the war with his suggestions. He was given short shrift by Bermudez and his staff, even though he had contributed some funds.

*Q: I've got to ask you a question. Were you ever in the military?*

PASTORINO: No.

*Q: And did you find that a handicap, never having served in the military?*

PASTORINO: A little bit. But not so much from the tactical, strategic point of view because that's not what I did. I didn't go down there and say attack this place or that. I had trouble in the beginning understanding the tactics because I wanted to know all the details about what was going on and why. I think in the beginning I might have had a little less credibility than I wanted to have among the military and the Agency people. But I did not try to tell them how to target or what weapons to use. I think I gained the necessary credibility fairly quickly.

This question of my being at a disadvantage not having been in the military was not really so important. There was a lot one can learn quickly. Since I was interested in knowing as much as possible, I asked and received lots of help. For instance, I wanted to know about the air resupply and how it was carried out from Honduras. I went up to Aguacate, where they loaded the supplies on palettes on planes to be dropped in Nicaragua. I asked how do you do this? Someone took me through it. For three hours, I helped load guns and whatever else was in there, foodstuffs, radios, uniforms on the pallets. They showed me how to load them on the pallets, how to load them on the plane. Then they showed me how to push them off the skids. How the back door opened. That doesn't take a genius to figure out once you've seen it. I did not go on the flights.

*Q: Who was flying the planes, Americans?*

PASTORINO: No. The resupply operations from Honduras were flown by Nicaraguan pilots.

*Q: When was Hasenfuss arrested? This was the American that was shot down?*

PASTORINO: Eugene Hasenfuss was arrested during my time in Honduras. It's probably one of the times I was most nervous. By coincidence, that day I was having lunch for all of the foreign and Honduran correspondents in Tegucigalpa. The Public Affairs Officer had set it up. Lunch was going wonderfully well. Suddenly, I got a call; it was Elliott Abrams. He said something had happened in Nicaragua. A plane's gone down, we don't know whose it is; we're not sure what the circumstances are. It did not fly out of Honduras. You'll be asked right away and that's what you're to say.



As I went back to the table, the reporters had found out also. Elliott saved me, in that I knew exactly what to say. Did I believe myself that instant, that's what had happened? I didn't have much time to think about it. They asked the questions and I gave the answers I was supposed to give. Well it turned out that most of the answer was true. It did not come out of Honduras. The Hassenfuss plane flew out of San Salvador. Yes it was sponsored by the U.S. government. It was a government operation. We're talking about real time. It was noon in Tegucigalpa when we were having lunch and the plane had been shot down at ten thirty. So, maybe Elliott didn't have all the details. That was the end of my dealing with the Hassenfuss incident except when the press asked me. If we had more information I told them. The Honduran Government of course was most interested in knowing the details so it would know what, if anything, to say.

*Q: You mentioned earlier the name of a man who was widely associated with the whole Contra operation and that's Colonel Oliver North? At this period, was North involved? Did you know him? Was he taking charge of Contra activities?*

PASTORINO: I had met Ollie North once before at a regional Central American meeting when I was serving in Mexico. During my time in Honduras, Ollie was at the National Security Council. He was still heavily involved although he was on his way out. Again, I don't know that he had to do anything illegal at that time since he had a hundred million dollar appropriation. As far as I know, he never came to Honduras. He certainly never came to the Embassy. I knew who he was. I later had meetings with him in the context of a large Ambassadorial meeting or other policy meetings. I went up to Miami once during my Tegucigalpa time and was with him in a large meeting.

People ask me what do I think of Ollie North. He was very capable. He was a military guy. I thought his heart was in the right place. He may have taken advantage at the National Security Council of other people who should have been checks and balances, but either were not as knowledgeable or as hard working as Ollie. Some people maybe didn't want to get too deeply involved. Ollie went right up to the limit of his instructions, but he was following the policy of the US Government, to stop the Sandinistas. Being a good military man, I don't think Ollie very often superseded his instructions. And remember, he worked at the third level of the NSC, for the Deputy National Security Advisor, and the National Security Advisor. I knew exactly where he worked because I later took over part of his portfolio at the NSC.

*Q: Which in those days was who, Poindexter?*

PASTORINO: Poindexter or McFarlane. They were military people. I don't think North was as rogue as he was made out to be. I'm pretty sure he was always under instruction. He might have come up with creative ideas, but someone had to accept them and say go do it. He was very creative. It turns out most of his criminal convictions were later overturned. As far as I know the only thing he's ever been found guilty of is taking a free garage door to provide security to his house in Northern Virginia, something the Government should have provided given his controversial position and persona, and the number of policy experts in Washington that double as intellectual terrorists.

Having said all that, I am not an intimate of Ollie North. I did replace him later at the NSC in the sense that I had the responsibility for what had been his Central American portfolio. But all his files were gone, taken over by whomever investigated him. So I can't say that I could tell from his files what he did or didn't do. Since it took dozens of investigations and prosecutors and everyone else to find out what they think he did, I sure would never have had the time to do it. And, I do know he did not come to Honduras to visit the Contras when I was in charge, either in his name or under any alias.

*Q: Now, you were Chargé for half a year, and then Briggs was named Ambassador?*

PASTORINO: Yes. For the first two or three months I didn't know who was going to replace Ferch as Ambassador. I knew I would not be appointed, even after having done the job for several months, and I didn't expect to be named. It was not a bad situation to a certain extent because I really was my own boss, at least temporarily. In a personal sense, I could wait for my own Ambassadorial appointment; it didn't have to be immediate. On the other hand, I was a caretaker to a certain extent, but didn't know for whom so I couldn't really take the next Ambassador into consideration as to his preferences and style on how to run the Embassy.

As soon as I found out it was Ted Briggs, it was wonderful. I had worked for him twice. I knew what he wanted. I knew how he ran the Embassy. I knew what his ideology was. I knew I could always talk to him. I didn't have a lot of contact with him for the next three months. I think I was in Miami with him when he received a call from President Reagan asking him to be Ambassador. He may have been the Deputy Assistant Secretary at that time. Anyway, I felt comfortable in that the way I was running the Embassy would be the way he would want it to run.

The transition was very easy. Going from Chargé back to DCM was not that difficult. As Chargé, I turned over the Embassy to him. I met him at the airport, I hosted the receptions to introduce him. I took him to see President Azcona, who he probably already knew. He was a better diplomat than I was. He had far more experience. He was a Deputy Assistant Secretary and he knew what was going on in Washington. It was a very easy transition. I will admit, in some ways, I was not that unhappy to relinquish some of the burden of the responsibility. Ted being Ted never treated me like number two. I continued to do much of what I was doing.

For instance, when we began to consider using Swan Island, he allowed me to go out there on one of the first flights. In fact, it was so primitive we had to signal the Honduran caretaker of the island so he could chase the sheep and cattle off the dirt runway. We toured the facilities which had been built by the US Government many years before as a weather station when we had sovereignty over the island. It was amazing. There were calendars from the 1950s and the radios were the old cathode tube size, many of the tubes being a foot long. Most of the machinery had been removed but the caretaker, in reality a Honduran rancher, had maintained some of the services. Swan Island had a wonderful little harbor and a pretty beach but was not much more than a sand spit. But, it's location was important. That was a day when we went back in time.

I remember only once he overruled something I had done. A plan had been developed with the Hondurans to seize and then turn over to us, Enrique Ballesteros, who was a Honduran and major drug trafficker. He was part of the Colombian Mexican cartel. As far as I was concerned, he was

one of the worst because he had been one of the perpetrators of the kidnaping, torture, and killing of Kiki Camarena, the DEA Agent, in Guadalajara. We had a plan which I had approved and discussed with the Honduran Government, with the President as I remember. The Hondurans were going to capture him as he went jogging one morning. Ballesteros was a tough target. When the heat was on him, he moved into the penitentiary in downtown Tegucigalpa and had all the protection in the world. We could not do very much to get him out of the penitentiary. The Hondurans were not going to release the guy to us. A lot of Hondurans, especially the ones that he had bribed, were supporting him.

So as long as he was in the penitentiary, there was no getting him we thought. But he had ten or twelve homes in Tegucigalpa, one of which we found out to our horror the Embassy was renting, and we had an employee living there. In fact, he owned a whole series of homes in one cul-de-sac. I got this young officer out of there in about two hours, bag and baggage, and we found a new residence for him.

The plan was within a week of being implemented when Ted arrived as Ambassador. He was very cautious and probably as he should have done, he stopped the plan so he could consider it. Within the next few days, circumstances changed so that we couldn't carry it out. I was a little disappointed, after the work that had been put into it. I'd really gone over it in all of its aspects. Was this legal? Ethical? Who might get hurt? The plan would have worked. It did in fact work later, six months after I was gone. To this day Ballesteros sits in a Miami jail, out of the drug trafficking business. Of course, that punishment is much less than he deserves. On the other hand, it is better, from our point of view, than were he to be sitting in a Colombian jail, where he could still be running his drug operations.

*Q: Bob where did we leave off?*

PASTORINO: We left off with me about to leave Honduras. I got a telephone call from Rich Armitage from the Pentagon, who was an Assistant Secretary for Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. A great patriot, Nestor Sanchez, was about to retire as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Latin America and Armitage asked if I would be interested in replacing Nestor. I was kind of taken aback because I had never thought about going to another agency, least of all to the Pentagon. As a youngster I didn't have the highest appreciation of the military, although I was never out there protesting against it.

I also didn't know what State Department would think about it. I would have been relatively satisfied to stay in Honduras now that Ambassador Ted Briggs was on board. The State Department said fine if you want to make the move and DOD wants you. So I went up and interviewed with Fred Ickle, who was the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Affairs and a well-known, well-respected Conservative and anti-Communist. People had told me a lot about Ickle, that he was very conservative, not a nice guy. I found out he was a gentleman, which was contrary to the opinion of many, most of whom did not know him. His conservative ideology was more conservative than mine, but that didn't seem to get in my way. After a one hour interview with Fred, I went down to see Rich Armitage. I'm not even sure I remember that

interview; Rich had already made up his mind. Within one month we were packing our bags, leaving Honduras. I went to the Pentagon on a detail.

*Q: Let me stop here and ask you. You'd been DCM in Honduras, were you angling at this stage of your career for Ambassadorial assignment? Did you think that was realistic? Did you do anything to promote that idea?*

PASTORINO: No, and in fact, I later heard the real story of my appointment. It had its basis in Honduras, ten days after I had arrived. Armitage, Ickle, Sanchez, and a high-level delegation of a dozen came to Tegucigalpa to meet with President Azcona to discuss the Contra cooperative program. I took them to visit the President and then held a major luncheon for President Azcona at the Ambassador's residence.

Later, I took the group to Yamales, and arranged for meeting there with the Contra leadership, and then a large open meeting with thousands of the Contra fighters. The Washington delegation addressed the whole group, with me doing some of the interpreting, adding the appropriate messages of support here and there. I remember I referred to the Sandinistas by some of the derogatory names they had earned, and this brought a standing ovation.

Evidently, at some point, Armitage had asked how long Pastorino had been in Tegucigalpa since he appeared to know everything and everyone. An Embassy person told him the story of my recent arrival and Rich evidently was impressed. Ten months later he remembered it. Of course, most of the arrangements for the visit were made by the staff but I received much of the credit. It does pay to be in the right place at the right time, but on the other hand I had visited every site and met every leader within those first ten days.

**WARD BARMON**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Tegucigalpa (1988-1992)**

*Ward Barmon was born in Huntington, Long Island in 1943. He graduated with a double major in American and Chinese history from Yale University and then studied at the University of Madrid for a year before coming into the Foreign Service in 1967. In 1992 he served as Director of the Narcotics Affairs section in Bogota, Colombia. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Belize, Taiwan, Thailand, El Salvador, and Honduras. Mr. Barmon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.*

*Q: You were in Honduras from when to when?*

BARMON: 1988 to 1992.

*Q: What was your job?*

BARMON: Economic counselor. Same job that I had in El Salvador but a much more important job than in El Salvador. There was a greater focus on economic development.

*Q: We talked about it somewhat, but when you arrived in Honduras in 1988, how would describe the political situation and structure?*

BARMON: Well, much of the focus within Honduras was on the Contras, the border. A lot of attention was spent on this at the embassy. The Honduran government forced a certain amount of attention upon it because the Contras were such a presence and the threat of a Nicaraguan invasion was always hanging over the country. As a matter of fact, there were a couple of incursions by the Sandinistas that made everybody nervous. We and the Hondurans reacted as though they were a real threat. A lot of focus was paid to Nicaragua, the Contras, and the Sandinistas. Also, there was a significant focus on the Honduran economy, and political system. There was an attempt to make it more transparent, more democratic, reduce corruption, and foster economic development, education, and health. Honduras has always been the least developed of all Central American countries. So, there was a great deal of focus on the effort to help Honduras develop economically, and make the economy less vulnerable to internal and external subversion.

*Q: What type of government did Honduras have at that time?*

BARMON: Quote, a democratically elected government. There was a great deal of "machine politics." But since the early 1980s, the governments were democratically elected. The government was not very efficient. The people were a little bit lower there (in relation to the rest of Central America) in terms of education. There was a great deal of focus in this area by the Inter-American Development Bank and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There was room for a lot of volunteer agencies, including the Peace Corps, which of course we did not have in El Salvador at the time. This was because there was not an internal civil war as in Honduras as El Salvador. So, there was great deal of focus on trying to help the Honduran people help themselves.

*Q: I have never served there, but I always wondered, how were the Indian population and Spanish population? Were the Indians kind of the lower class, and the Spanish blood the runners of the business and government?*

BARMON: By and large. What was interesting to me was to discover how very different the Latin American countries were (and still are). I always assumed that Honduras and El Salvador were very much alike, being next door neighbors. They are not. They are very different. In El Salvador, for example, the indigenous population was encouraged to leave El Salvador during the colonial period. A lot of them went to Guatemala because they found a more comfortable situation. Many of the mixed blood in Guatemala moved to El Salvador. There was a natural separation of populations.

El Salvador is a much more of a mixed country than Guatemala, even Honduras. Guatemala has the highest percentage of Mayan indigenous people. In Honduras, you have an interesting phenomenon. For whatever reason, Honduras attracted many Arab immigrants. This was

when the Ottoman Empire was still functioning but crumbling. In many cases Catholic Arabs left the Middle East and made their way to Venezuela and moved north. Some moved south to Chile. For whatever reason, a large population ended up in Honduras. People that were called "Turcos" because of their Turkish passports. They are not ethnically Turkish at all. Basically, they took over the economy - not the agricultural, but the rest of the economy. They ran commerce, manufacturing, banking, media, and politics. As a matter of fact, the current president is half Arab. His name is Carlos Roberto Flores Facusse. So, that is an interesting fact in Honduras. This population is not so present in El Salvador. There, the biggest foreign influence is Jewish. These are Jews that came from Panama and found El Salvador more hospitable than Honduras. Guatemala also has a fairly large Sephardic Jewish population and Arab population. However, they do not seem to dominate the way that they do in Honduras. Yes, you are basically correct. Most of the big landowners and businessmen tend to be the "lighter colored" Spanish, and less indigenous, in general.

*Q: Looking at Honduras, did you find that the indigenous population, what do they like to be called?*

BARMON: They do not like to be called indigenous. They like to be called Hondurans. They feel that they are the original people.

*Q: Fair enough. But did you find the ones from this background were difficult to get to move into the economic political life of the country?*

BARMON: You see the process most clearly in Guatemala. Many of them that are still pure Indian are slowly moving into the political system. They started out "getting the bug" in human rights movements. Per Capita, there are still very few involved. Economically, a little bit more. They still tend to be agriculturally based. But, in Honduras, you see a number of Indians, Indian black mixtures, mestizo, Creole, who have been trained by the banana companies. Now, they are pretty much spread throughout the economy. They are middle level managers, civil servants, professionals, and politicians.

*Q: What about the military in Honduras? Often times, the military is a place where poor young men can enter the mainstream and get their education, or (laughter) take over the government.*

BARMON: But always considered second class. Sure, I think that is true for all the countries where you do not need a college degree. You go in after high school and stay in as a career and work your way up. The more agile and clever ones eventually get to run the military, and in many cases, run the country either overtly or covertly.

*Q: What was the situation with the military when you were there?*

BARMON: In Honduras, they largely ran the country. The real power tended to be the commander in chief of the Army. The Army was the major power. The Army controlled the police. It depended on the strength (or weakness) of the democratically elected regime whether the general chose to exert power greater or equal to the president. It was always a

fact that you could not discount. With the war in the region the military even had more importance.

*Q: As economic counselor, how would you deal with the Honduran government?*

BARMON: The Honduran government was very open and very receptive. I dealt with everybody except the president and vice presidents. I dealt with almost all of the ministers and the head of the central bank. To a certain extent, it depended on what the ambassador wanted, whether he wanted to deal with some of those people himself. I did not go see the foreign minister alone. But, the economic minister, the finance minister, and some of the other ministers I saw almost on a weekly basis. They were very open and receptive.

*Q: How did you find in dealing with them? Were they running things, or was it a complex situation?*

BARMON: It was a complex situation. Some of them were more competent than others. In some cases, you wanted to go to the agency head directly involved, like the taxation bureau. It was more efficient to go directly to those people. Or, you could go down below the minister of the mainline ministries and talk to office chiefs. By and large, we had a very open and good relationship. Some of them, of course, had their hands out. They wanted training, money for their ministries, trips to the U.S.

*Q: Was there an effort on our part to try not to be over domineering as far as what we could do?*

BARMON: I understand what you are saying. The AID director was never shy. Some of us who were not in the AID part of the embassy, we backed off and gave the Hondurans the chance to make their own mistakes. But, we were such an overwhelming presence that it was very difficult to do.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

BARMON: It started out with Ted Briggs and ended up with Chris Arcos.

*Q: Briggs, how did he operate?*

BARMON: He was more a hands off ambassador. I think he preferred to let people do their own thing. He gave a lot of rein to John Penfold, the DCM, who was very good on the economic side. I found Briggs to be a congenial man. I think some of the people in the embassy did not like him. They felt he was a bit too elitist. He never bothered me. But then again, we played squash together.

*Q: How about Chris Arcos?*

BARMON: Totally different. Much more open, loved to talk and get directly involved. He was wonderful in the sense that if you took a problem him and he thought you made sense,

he would deal with it right away instead of asking you to write a memo. He was very much of an activist. He knew Honduras backwards and forwards. He was bilingual. He really got to know the Hondurans. This was a problem for the Hondurans because he knew them too well. Arcos had served in Honduras as counselor for public affairs (USIS) during the Negroponte era. By and large, he was extremely effective. The problem with the Briggs embassy was that it was so focused on the Contras, which was not so much a problem for the Arcos embassy years. This was because during the first year of Arcos, the problem kind of went away with the election of Chamorro. We were able to turn to more Honduran problems and relationships. During the last year that Ted was ambassador, much of what we did was focused on the Contra and Sandinista problem. I thought this was excessively so.

*Q: Let's talk about those earlier years. I am not sure of my exact timing. The whole mess that became known as the Iran-Contra affair, was that fairly out in the open and an issue?*

BARMON: I think so.

*Q: Correct me if I am wrong, but we were supporting the major military operation out of Honduras against Nicaragua. Were they using Nicaraguans?*

BARMON: They were using themselves. We provided a lot of moral, physical, economic, and psychological support to the Contras who were on the Honduran side. I am not sure that you would call it an army or a terribly well organized group. There were different groups, different camps that we set up and supported. They pretty much did their own thing as far as I am aware. Obviously, we also provided some intelligence. It was a little bit different from Tegucigalpa. The border was a few hours away, most of the Contras stayed in the border area. Only the commandants came in to Tegucigalpa where some of the people in the embassy used to meet with them. Some of them lived in Tegucigalpa, but you did not see them on an everyday basis walking around with weapons. They kept a very low profile in Tegucigalpa. If you went out into the border area, that was something different.

*Q: I am trying to pick up on the atmosphere in the embassy.*

BARMON: Well, the first year I was there, the atmosphere was of an overwhelming American military and non-military, but war-related people coming through on TDYs a few days a week, a month. There was not a limitation of the number of U.S. officials in Honduras the way there was in El Salvador, so there was a huge presence of North Americans. They took over the main hotel in town (The Maya). Finally it got to the point where something had to be done. Their presence was dramatically cut back. I think that went along with the war scaling down. It was fortuitous, because it was overwhelming and excessive. As I said, the whole focus of the embassy in 1988 was on the Contra problem. There were a lot of people, you did not know exactly what they were doing. They were wandering around with weapons in cases, even some of them in fatigues.

*Q: I spent a year and a half in Saigon. We had a real war there and we were involved. However, at the same time, we tend to have all sorts of agencies and everybody else (CIA in particular). When we get involved, we do tend to overwhelm it.*



BARMON: Well, I think we treated this as a real war. It was not in many respects, but certainly for the embassy under Briggs, it was a real war.

*Q: There were hearings concerning the Iran-Contra affair, did these impact at all on the embassy?*

BARMON: Not terribly. Again, I was not directly involved. I am sure they impacted adversely on our efforts to support the Contras. It did not really effect the economic section.

*Q: You were there from 1988, which was the end of the Reagan Administration. In 1989, the Bush Administration came in. Was there any change of feeling as to how you were looking at things?*

BARMON: Huge change.

*Q: Can you talk about that a little?*

BARMON: I think there was a change from the top down. The desire to get out of the middle of the problem. This also coincided fortuitously with Chamorro's election. But even before that, I think there was a determination to ease our way out of being so directly involved. So, when the new ambassador came in, there was a total change of atmosphere. It developed slowly. I think the new ambassador (Chris Arcos) came down with a mandate to withdraw slowly and scale down our support. This did not become obvious for a few months. Nevertheless, this was clearly his directive. He was successful at it.

*Q: Looking at the election of 1988, one of the charges against Bush was that he was involved in the Iran-Contra affair. I suppose this was a reflection. He wanted to get the hell away from having being so tainted with this quasi-illegal operation.*

BARMON: Absolutely. I think there is no doubt, at least in retrospect, that he wanted to try and reduce our presence. He certainly wanted to scale down the presence.

*Q: When was the Chamorro, the Sandinistas held an election, what was the feeling in our embassy in Tegucigalpa. Did we look at this as a real election?*

BARMON: Well, the hard-liners were very skeptical. The Sandinistas still controlled the military, police, the intelligence networks. Some of thought Chamorro was just going to be a figurehead. She turned out to be more than that. Most important of all, she survived. However, there were a great many skeptics, especially in the beginning.

*Q: What were you getting from your colleagues in the Honduran government about changes in Nicaragua? How did they feel about it all along?*

BARMON: I think the small groups in the government and the businessmen benefited from our involvement. I think the majority of the population and parts of the government that were

not directly involved were happy to see the potential threat from Nicaragua reduced. The Contras were being disbanded, so the threat that the Sandinistas would attack Honduras was gone. Second, there was the hope that things could get back to normal with trading and commerce. There was a great deal of this. There was a bit of smuggling, so some people made money smuggling goods. However, the cross border economy had almost come to a halt.

*Q: Was it the Contras and the Sandinistas who were doing the fighting?*

BARMON: Some of the border area, not all of it. In the Gulf of Fonseca, there was not much fighting. Certainly inland and the mountainous area, which was a main coffee growing area. It adversely affected Honduran coffee production. So, it did have a negative impact in a number of areas.

*Q: Were drugs at all a factor?*

BARMON: No. There was some smuggling. Who was that Honduran who was finally captured working with the Colombians? Mate Ballesteros, I believe. So, there were stories about smuggling offshore in the Caribbean. Drugs were dropped and picked up by boat, and then re-exported. There was a small internal consumption problem. There was a small amount of marijuana grown in Honduras, but it was not significant.

*Q: What about coffee? As economic counselor, what was the coffee situation and where did Honduras fit into it during these years?*

BARMON: Well, Honduras, again was an unusual country as a coffee producer. The majority of the coffee growers were small growers. Small, rural, in many cases indigenous, farmers who had a few acres. Not terribly high quality coffee because of the higher altitudes. Good coffee grown in the lower altitudes was then usually blended with the lower quality coffee before being exported. Nevertheless, I think this helped Honduras become a more quote, "democratic country," because the coffee growers, by and large, were small growers. They were the backbone of the Honduran economy, unlike the situation in El Salvador or Guatemala.

*Q: Did the United States play any role in world coffee prices? Did they have an impact in Honduras?*

BARMON: The U.S. government, no. The U.S. roasting companies, yes. They had a huge impact. It was the International Coffee Organization, in which we were a prominent member as a consumer. As a consuming country, we were a major player. In that sense, yes. It is not government; it is supposedly a private organization. The biggest players are the growers cartel on one side, and the roasters on the other. Now, among the growers, many of the major players are government. This includes Brazil, Colombia, Central America, Mexico, and a few African and Asian countries.

*Q: Were there any big fluctuations, or was it fairly steady while you were there?*

BARMON: Huge fluctuations. People would pray for a drought in Brazil because coffee prices would go up and Central America could export more and get double, triple the prices. So, sure, that was a big factor. They tried to form groups to control the amount that was exported to increase the quality, to monitor, but it was very difficult.

*Q: What was your wife doing at this time?*

BARMON: She was the Labor officer in the Political Section, which was very interesting. Often, we would be on “opposite sides” of an issue. She would be dealing with the strikers at United Fruit, and I would be dealing with management.

*Q: Sounds like a recipe not for domestic tranquility.*

BARMON: It was fascinating. Actually, it worked out very well, because she was able to influence me. She kept me more opened minded about the unions, and I vice versa. She started to deal with management largely because of my contacts. I also had some contacts with the unions, and I think it worked out to everybody’s benefit. It certainly made our jobs more interesting. For example, we would have receptions where we invited government, labor, and private sector representatives. Most unusual, at least for the U.S. embassy.

*Q: Can you talk about the dynamics of union and management/labor situation in Honduras? How were we involved?*

BARMON: We were involved because of the two major banana companies. United always seemed to have the more pressing problems in terms of the union problems, wages, and benefits. Dole had its share of problems, too, but United always seemed to receive more publicity. Frankly, United’s management seemed to be less enlightened, and took a more hard line position than Dole. So, it created more difficulties for the Honduran government. They tried to intervene several times. People came down from United’s headquarters in Cincinnati and would take a very tough line. It made our work very interesting trying to moderate the situation. We worked closely with the Honduran government, United, and Dole management. There was always something happening. The labor management area was interesting. You had a lot of criticism, particularly with non-American, foreign owned sewing sweatshops. Some were owned by Koreans, and ethnic Chinese that were treating their workers very badly. The unions would try and go in and unionize in the midst of abuses and intimidation. We tried to intervene to resolve some of those issues. I think we helped ameliorate several of the worst situations.

*Q: Did we have any card in the play if somebody was producing something using sweatshops where we could prohibit those goods from coming into the United States?*

BARMON: Well, we could threaten, but generally, we only limited the amount if the country’s quota exceeded a certain amount. There are other ways. You can work closely with the Honduran government to provide and take away concessions, visas. The easiest way to do it was just to talk to them. These people did not like adverse PR [public relations]. So, if

word circulated that a company was treating its workers badly, in most cases, they tended to respond positively. Some of them did not, and in some cases, action would be taken. I remember in particular in the case of a Korean firm that was terribly abusing its workers. They would have to stand in a corner if they violated the precepts. They would not let them go to the bathroom and other things like that. It was almost torture. Most of these people were women, of course. I think we were able in this case to use the Honduran government to put pressure on the owners, and use a certain amount of public media attention to force them to change their ways. It succeeded.

*Q: Could you talk about why some of the factories in Honduras were sensitive to American criticism?*

BARMON: Well, many of the factories, were actually owned by Hondurans. Many were of Arab descent. These people, even 10 years ago, many of them did not have that many ties to Honduras. Many of them had other passports, including U.S. passports, and had been educated in the States, sent their wives to give birth in the States, and many of them had their money in the States. So, they were very susceptible to U.S. pressure. Many of them dealt with U.S. companies, and their factories were under contract. Usually we did not have any problem dealing with those people at all. Some of the factories that were the worst were the foreign and Asian-owned. They were the real sweatshops.

*Q: Some of these factories were probably producing for wholesale companies in the United States.*

BARMON: Most of them. They were producing for the U.S. market. That was one reason we why we were involved.

*Q: If you told Sears that their foreign operation in Tegucigalpa was a sweatshop, I would have thought they would have been somewhat sensitive to this because it was beginning a movement in the United States about where clothes came from. For example, child labor, slave labor, unsafe labor. Was that a card that was used?*

BARMON: Sure. The other pressure came from a very strong, and active AFL-CIO office in Honduras. And a fairly strong local labor movement supported by the AFL-CIO, at least the non-extreme leftist unions, and the more moderate unions. The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which is the Latin American branch of the AFL-CIO was a very active player. The labor attaché in the embassy happened to be my wife at the time. She worked very closely with AFL to try and moderate and improve the conditions and support the union without, of course, supporting the union movement to an extreme where they were pushing for nationalization. In Honduras, they really did not push for that. They were more interested in better working conditions and higher salaries, which were legitimate issues. That is, except for a company like United, which did not want to hear any of that if they could avoid it.

*Q: You have been watching this over a period of time. United Fruit had developed such a bad name as being the devil as far as banana republic diplomacy. This goes way back. I*

*would have thought that they would have worked rather hard to change their outlook and ways over generations.*

BARMON: Yes, it was a little bit surprising. They did not put much effort into that area, at least while we were there. The local manager was a German who had come up through the ranks. Therefore you would have thought that he would have been interested in worker's benefits, etc. He was not at all. He was extremely hard line, a bit arrogant, and difficult to deal with. We often had to go over his head directly with management in Cincinnati to try and put pressure on him to work with the union and the government instead of taking such a hard line. We also worked with the other managers under him, but of course that was a little bit tricky. I think that he typified the management style, whereas Dole, the head American was a university graduate from the United States. He was extremely polished and sophisticated and worked well with the government.

*Q: He was a Honduran?*

BARMON: No, he was a North American. For example, the two had such contrasting styles; the head of Dole would be up in Tegucigalpa once a week. The German who ran United never came to Tegucigalpa if he could avoid it. Maybe once or twice a year. He never worked with the government. He had his man in Tegucigalpa that worked with the government, but the man there had little power. He was a Honduran. That just shows the contrast in styles. So, Dole had much more success and fewer problems.

*Q: If somebody were saying what business was it of ours to be interfering with how a Korean firm operated?*

BARMON: Well, in addition to the fact that we got involved in almost everything that was going on in the country, it was in our interest for several reasons. One, we wanted to see better economic development, but we also wanted to see more humane treatment of the workers. This was something that was part of U.S. government policy to a certain extent. Certainly there were a number of NGOs working in this area. So there was a certain amount of pressure in the embassy, to which we responded positively, certainly from the Labor attaché point of view. Selfishly speaking in terms of the economic interests, almost all of these factories were exporting to the United States. I think that was an excellent reason to get involved, if no other.

*Q: Well, it represents a change in attitude on the part of the United States government. We were taking more of an active role. I think there had always been concern because you go back to the muckraking times and things like this would come about foreign or domestic labor. But now, we were really not letting this go by.*

BARMON: Well, I think there was a certain amount of altruism, too. For example, my wife got involved in a problem in Honduras where the lobster fishing boat owners were abusing the Indians. My wife made it into a bit of a public scandal in an effort to force these people to improve the conditions of these Caribbean Indians who were being forced to dive repeatedly without adequate time intervals, going too deep without adequate equipment. They were

becoming paralyzed, or dying because of this. Okay, most of the lobsters were exported to the United States, but I think the Labor attaché got involved because she was interested in trying to help these Indians, who were often their own worst enemies. They could make an awful lot of money doing this diving even though they imperiled their health. This was an instance where we did not have a great deal of reason to get involved, but she made it a bit of a campaign.

*Q: Ward, you wanted to say something that will insert back about your first year in Honduras.*

BARMON: This was about the end of 1988, probably the beginning of 1989. This was my first year in the embassy in Tegucigalpa. The ambassador decided to call together a group of senior officers in the embassy, and some of the other officers of the political and economic sections as well to talk about our policy towards the Contras. A roundtable discussion was held at the DCM's house. Particularly what we might do to force the Sandinistas out of power. I was a little bit astonished, although perhaps I shouldn't have been. Almost everyone at this meeting was extremely aggressive against the Sandinistas. This was all in house and nothing formal. I was a little taken aback. Everybody except for two people, myself, and another person who was working for me in the Economic Section. We were the only two that advocated a more moderate course, perhaps doing some negotiating with the Sandinistas. All the rest of them took a hard line position, advocating invasion, bombing, embargoes, sanctions. It was quite an interesting discussion. I do not think anything came of it in terms of formal recommendations to Washington. There were a couple of articles produced for The Foreign Service Journal. Anyway, the fellow who worked for me and I were somewhat dismayed. We then became the embassy "Pincos." It was a revealing session.

*Q: It is interesting. Do you think this is posturing because of the political situation back at home, or was this heart felt belief?*

BARMON: I think some of it was heart-felt belief. I think a lot of the other people in the embassy there at that time self selected themselves to Tegucigalpa. They were natural hard-liners, political officers, the military, the CIA, even the PAO. We did not have anybody there from AID or the Administrative Section of the Consular Section. But, just about everybody else took a very hard line. Again, I think it was part self-selection, and part saying what the ambassador and DCM wanted to hear. It was an interesting experience for me

*Q: In the Foreign Service as a whole, and I am speaking from absolute lack of knowledge. From instinct, I would say we were rather dubious about this whole Nicaraguan thing up to a point. I mean they saw it as a dangerous situation. I think Ronald Reagan was felt to be a little bit far off about the threat to Brownsville, Texas. It seemed almost out of left field, and more in right field.*

BARMON: Well, I was a little taken aback, too, with the positions that most people took. Again, I think it was self-selection, people who worked in the Central American area and worked in ARA. After all, the assistant secretary was Elliot Abrams, and before that, Tony Motley. They were pretty tough, I guess they had to be on the whole issue. Particularly,

Abrams. So, I guess it followed suit. Ambassadors to those countries generally took a hard line position.

*Q: The ambassador again was?*

BARMON: Ted Briggs.

**RONALD F. VENEZIA**  
**Director, Contra Task Force, USAID**  
**Honduras (1989-1990)**

*Ronald F. Venezia was born in Tuxedo, New York on January 15, 1940. He received his BS in 1963 from Kent State University and his MPA from Harvard University in 1972. As part of USAID, he held positions in countries including Guatemala, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras. Mr. Venezia was interviewed by W. Haven North on January 31, 1996.*

VENEZIA: Then I met Ted Morris. Ted had come looking for me and Ted said, "Hi Ron." I knew Ted. I said, "Hi Ted." I said, "What do you want?" He said, "You know what I want," and I knew what he wanted. He was running the Contra Task Force in Washington. He had headed it up on the Washington side and it had two branches in Central America. The major one was in Honduras and there was a small one on the Costa Rican front. But the one in Honduras which was set up as an independent operation needed a director. A director of field operations and nobody wanted that job. Nobody, and here I was. I spoke practically fluent Spanish. I'd had enormous experience in Central America. I was going off for a year, nothing to do and here he was sitting on a priority program where he was meeting every morning with Secretary of State Shultz. Secretary of State Shultz started his day, every day with a fifteen minute briefing on the Contra Operation.

This was when AID was running it. I have no idea what happened before AID was running it because you had a situation where the CIA was running it first, and they got pulled out. We'll get into this probably next session. It was given to the State Department and they screwed up and finally gave it to AID because there was nobody else to do it and that's another story. I sat next to Congressman Bonior on the plane coming back from Asia, and I asked him, "Why did you do this to AID?" He said that nobody else would take it. So here was Ted, and he could pick and choose. He had chosen me and he just started a campaign and Ray Love, the Counselor of AID called me. And he said, "Ron, now we're not going to insist that you do this, but it's very important to the Agency. You're one of the few people we think can do this job and you're available. Of course, we're not going to hold this against you but we really want you to take this job." So I had to think about it and I said to myself, philosophically I wasn't opposed, I had voted for Reagan. I was comfortable with policies we had in Central America. I was convinced that it was part of what we had to do and I've always been comfortable with AID's relationship to foreign policy.

I've always regarded AID as part of American foreign policy. I've never been uncomfortable with the fact that I was promoting U.S. foreign policy with AID funds, U.S. foreign objectives which may or may not have developmental objectives. I've always felt that was the rationale. How could we think that we were sitting out on an ice flow somewhere? You're part of the U.S. Government establishment. I've always felt that this current administration started out with the feeling that they were going to go off on an ice flow for a little bit, and they were hauled back pretty quickly by Haiti and Bosnia, but it was too late. So I could not say to myself, look, I couldn't do a Bill Clinton, you know, I don't believe in this war and so therefore I will not do this.. I couldn't say that. Philosophically I knew it's what has to be done and I agree. Then the question became whether I could actually do it, if it meant giving up my year. It was a hard decision and I thought about it for a day and I came home and I talked to Burgess and I said, look, you know life's full of choices. You've got to make a choice somewhere along the line. Most of my jobs in AID had just appeared and I've never had a job I didn't like and I think this will be exciting, so I took it. Gave up my year off.

*Q: Were they mad at the Senior Seminar?*

ENEZIA: They actually denied the Agency a candidate the next year because of it, my picture was in the book.

*Q: How long were you in Honduras?*

ENEZIA: One year.

Honduras was, I'm not sure what to call it, an adventure, an episode, it was a crazy situation. The Contras had been fighting for several years, this would be 1989 now. The Costa Ricans, the Sandinistas and the U.S. Government on one side, and the Cubans and Soviets on the other side, had fought to a stand still. In effect, it was quite clear that neither side could win. The elections were coming; Reagan was going out of office and I think Jim Baker who was (as far as anybody could tell, and I don't have any insights on it) the master politician.

*Q: Jim Baker was the Secretary of State.*

ENEZIA: The decision was made that this had gone on long enough. It was highly divisive, as you can imagine, with the body of politics in the United States. Reagan had been handed a budget - I forget what year it was, probably 1986 - in which the entire budget was given to him in one fell swoop. It had one last article in it just before his signature and that was denying assistance to Contra. He was invited to veto the entire budget on that issue. He did not. The question became, what to do with the Contras? There are a lot of people who are going to write this history and I don't intend to, but when I came along clearly the decision had been reached that something had to give. The emphasis switched over to elections in Nicaragua and the entire focus of the U.S. Government then shifted to trying to create the conditions for elections, that meant a cease fire. A cease fire was put into effect but the Contras then retreated out of Nicaragua to Honduras and set up camp in what was one of their original camps, a place called Yamales.



Yamales was a valley about 10 kilometers from the border, in the jungle basically. There were a couple of camps further up the line towards the north coast of Honduras, and there were 18,000 armed troops, some of whom were still in Nicaragua at the time and there were 40,000 family members who had followed their troops out and were living in town. Basically they weren't living so much in the valley, though some were in the valley, but many were in the towns just outside the valley. The Contras were clearly not encouraged to continue a very aggressive campaign in Nicaragua. The peace process was obviously going to take some time, so something had to be done. The background is now pretty much a part of history. The CIA had started their support to them and had run afoul with Congress. I don't think Congress could actually cut off support to the Contras so the job was turned over to the State Department. The State Department did it for a few years and it also ran afoul of the auditors. The job had to go to somebody, it was quite clear that State couldn't handle it.

I remember coming back (this was before I knew I was going down there) from one of my trips to the Far East and we stopped in Detroit, Michigan and David Bonior got on the plane and sat next to me. I was in business class, at that time we could fly business class for long trips. He sat down and ordered two double scotches or maybe it was bourbon, I'm not sure but he was going back to Washington and he was there so we talked. He was an approachable guy, a quiet guy, and we were talking and I said "How could you have given AID this job of taking care of the Contras?" he said "Because nobody else could do it and there wasn't anybody who would take it, and we had to give it to somebody. So AID got stuck with it." That was basically the answer.

When it happened, AID formed a task force, Ted Morris was called up. Ted probably still has the reputation of getting anything done against impossible odds and Bob Meegan was called in as his Deputy, who was a lawyer, a very, very creative lawyer. They were told to put together a team, so they put together a team and they started what was referred to as the Task Force for Humanitarian Assistance for Nicaragua Resistance. It had two fronts, to the north of Nicaragua which would be Honduras and then on the Costa Rican side. The Costa Rican front was a much, much smaller operation. They set up shop in Honduras in the Embassy as a task force. They were not connected to the AID program there at all, there was no connection there in terms of communication. The AID program in Honduras looked at this like, well, I won't even mention what that was. [laughter] John Sanbrailo was the Mission Director at the time. John was just appalled that this was going to be in his backyard, and of course, didn't want anything to do with it. They had to set up a whole separate arrangement, a parallel aid mission in the country but based in the Embassy and it was very, very minimum quarters. We're talking about small rooms, two or three people to a room. That went on for a couple of years, the truce held and they were trying to get the elections going. The then Director of Field Operations said he wanted to move on. I'm not sure that he was seen as being all that effective. They obviously needed somebody, so there I went. It was obvious that this thing was entering a final phase. I went down, I left Burgess in the house. Our son and daughter had just come back from a stint of school and they were looking for a house in the area so they moved into the house, so that side of the equation became a lot easier. Then Burgess decided to join me for periods of time and then come back. We started this operation, I went down and decided that "If you get lemons, you make lemonade." This was my first real opportunity to manage a field operation. It was the equivalent of a Mission Directorship, but it wasn't really, it wasn't a mission. But I had 250 people and a fifty million dollar program.

*Q: They were Americans?*

VENEZIA: Well, let's see. There were ten direct hires, then there were approximately 20 PSCs, and we had institutional contractors doing a whole host of things. We had an institutional contractor doing training out in the valley. We did an enormous amount in training for the Contras. We had an institution contractor on health and then we had 50 auditors. There were 50 Price Waterhouse auditors, most of them were Hondurans connected to the Price Waterhouse Operation in Honduras. The GAO had set up their own connection here. The GAO sat in on my staff meetings. A very cooperative operation, I can tell you. Everyone was going to make this work. General Beckington, AID's Inspector General, was the second person they talked to in AID when AID got the phone call from State and Congress, he was also on board. The Agency had to protect itself, so we were super careful. The GAO was down there and the RIG (Regional Inspector General) had their offices in Honduras. There was a RIG auditor who sat in on my staff meetings and he also had complete access. So you added all of these things up and it was a big operation. It was the strangest thing I had ever been involved with in my life. I don't know what story to tell you, they were all different and fascinating.

*Q: Well, what was the overall mission? What were you really trying to accomplish?*

VENEZIA: Our job was to keep the Contras happy. That meant that they not fight or at least keep them from waging open warfare. There were skirmishes still going on in Nicaragua, but they would only fight if they were attacked. We were to keep them happy, keep them fed, educate them, keep them healthy and not let them get sick and do it in such a way that it was entirely accountable. I can't tell you how much paper we generated, but I'll give you some hints. We had a warehouse in Tegucigalpa where we would assemble the food, and I'm talking food here, we were the biggest buyers in Honduras. We controlled the price of beans, we controlled the price of rice, when we bought, people shuddered.

*Q: You bought it locally, rather than import it?*

VENEZIA: We bought it all locally, but there were other things we brought in. We would import medicines for example. But the food was all purchased locally. We were feeding 18,000 troops and 40,000 family members. The 40,000 family members were not getting a full ration, they would get a food stamp type of ration, which was meant to supplement their food, because many of them were working in local economies around the area or helping each other out, or had some money of their own. The troops got a full ration. We had a nutritionist, we were calculating diets, and we were watched by the auditors. Meaning that every time a truck left the warehouse it had an auditor on it and the idea was that the truck would not stop on the way and pick up arms. There was a time when the bananas that we were buying were being passed through a metal detector by the auditors, it was paranoia. We had paper on everything except for one thing which I'll get to later on. I'm trying to think of where I can start, there was the food and there was the whole medical side of the arrangement, and the training. When I got there, there was a hospital and two rehabilitation centers where the wounded were taken care of. The Contra had it's own medical corps and we were supplying them with medical supplies and drugs. We had two helicopters under contract from Louisiana, they were civilian helicopters. We had two airplanes,

they were small planes with a back ramp that we could do drops with and we would do jungle drops. There was one guy who was in charge of assembling packages, packing the parachutes, and putting the parachutes on these things and they would take off and do air drops.

*Q: The area was quite inaccessible?*

VENEZIA: Well, there's a picture right over here. I'd go out and watch from my helicopter and see that it was done correctly.

*Q: You couldn't drive into the area?*

VENEZIA: It was an area where a road would not go; we were in the jungle. Most of them were down in the Yamales Valley though and that was accessible. This program had enormous flexibility. We had a non-withstanding clause and with Bob Meegan as our guy with regard to what was legal (and he would make a legal determination on the spot, he was wonderful in that sense) we did some interesting things. There was a river that would flood occasionally, and it would wipe out the road. Well, the decision was that if we were going to feed these people, we had to be able to get food in there, so we built a bridge. A big cement bridge, still there today I presume. We did it and there was no problem at all. One of the training courses we had was road maintenance, we had the Contras out there repairing their own roads. Every day when I went to work, I had absolutely no idea of what was going to happen.

We had a lot of people looking over our shoulders, including Congress. It kind of tapered off, but in the beginning we had quite a few Congressional visitors mostly from the House side, but Senator Warner came down. The Contras had their own connections with Congress as you can imagine. The Republican side of the House and Senate were also very interested that we were taking good care of these guys and their families, so they would come down. It was kind of interesting, we made it quite clear that money appropriated by Congress was for the Contras, so if they wanted me to use our helicopters to take them out there they had to pay for it, because I couldn't use my money to take them out to the Contras. We had several occasions where we took people out and they had big parades, and I was sitting there thinking what the heck am I doing in this place.

*Q: What was the magnitude of the effort? How would you characterize that?*

VENEZIA: It was fifty million dollars.

*Q: Fifty million dollars a year, or one time?*

VENEZIA: I had 50 million dollars for my year. The entire program was in the neighborhood of 140 - 150 million dollars. By the time I got there, we were in the shank end so I had only 50 million. We were buying five million dollars worth of groceries a month. Plus paying all of the fees for the contractors, which were enormous. Plus all of the fees for the auditors which were also enormous. Also facing unique situations where we would simply have to decide what we had to do.

The Honduran Army was guarding the old hospital. The old staging area north of Tegucigalpa was a grass strip and that had been the staging area for the CIA. They had closed it down in terms of it being an air strip and they had actually buried planes there. When you flew over you could see the places where they had taken a bulldozer and destroyed the planes and buried them rather than turning them over to the Hondurans. There was still a hospital there and it was used mostly for taking care of the sick. When the war was very active the task force was literally waiting on one side of the river, which was the border and the wounded would come floating across the river and they would be gathered up in the helicopters and taken to the hospital for treatment; they were war wounded. That part was over with, we were dealing largely with normal sickness, but also with a lot of rehabilitation of wounded people.

The Hondurans were guarding that with their Army and they demanded that we feed these guys, a little bit of a rake off to protect it, and the answer from the lawyers was that we couldn't do that. We can't give money to the Honduran Army. They said you've got to close down. The one meeting that I had with the head of the Honduran Secret Service, I went in and I said "Okay, do you mind if I move it?" and he said "No." He thought we were bluffing. So I went back to the office called together the staff and I said, "We have to move a 100 bed hospital with two operating rooms. We have one month to do it. Let's go." I had a wonderful staff, literally they were all volunteers, just push a button and they would leap. Because they were all having a marvelous time doing this stuff, it was all very unusual and in some ways a lot of fun. So, we went out to the valley, we selected a place and we said, "See this place here, we need to have a hospital here. A 100 bed hospital with two operating rooms in one month, let's build it." So we built it. Made of wood and it had some cinder block sides. We had to build a bridge across the river to get to the site, that was interesting in itself. We took some trees down and built a road. When it was almost done I called together the staff and I said, "Has anyone ever moved a hospital?" and they said, "No" and I said, "Well, if you need to move something, normally you call a moving company." So we called the Honduran moving company that moved the Embassy goods in and out of the country. I went over and had a meeting with the head and I said, "Have you ever moved a hospital?" and he said, "No, but it can't be that difficult." So we helicoptered them up there to do an estimate. We said, "We're not going to leave a thing for the Hondurans, take it all. Leave the building, but take it all." They gave us an estimate and it seemed fair. The trucks headed out and they loaded up a 100 bed hospital, they took the wire out of the walls of the building, they took out the lamp posts that were around and all of the public lighting, they took the generator, and they dug out the fuel tank. We cleaned the thing out down to the bone and simply moved it about 150 miles.

*Q: What happened to the patients?*

VENEZIA: The patients were moved. None of them were all that serious, we're talking about sick kids. There was a separate center called the Rehabilitation Center which was much closer to Tegucigalpa where the war wounded, the paraplegics and these kinds of things were, and they were in rehabilitation or just being taken care of. The real serious cases were there. We set this new hospital up and I have to presume the Nicaraguans must have thought that we were crazy. Here we were in the last year of the peace process and we were acting as if we were going to be there for the next 20 years.

*Q: Did the Honduran Government ever try to intercede?*

VENEZIA: The Honduran Government never really did anything. They just wanted us out of where we were, so we said okay fine we'll go over there. Which I imagine they thought was a good idea, it'll keep everybody in one place. I'm sure they saw what we were doing and they didn't seem to mind. They probably thought that they were going to get what was left over, so whatever we did was fine with them. So we built the hospital. Yamales was a funny place, there were 28 battalions in the valley and they each had their own particular area. Another part of the operation was the food. When I got there, there was always a problem thinking about what if the river rose, even if this bridge was put in, what if it went out? How can we assure that we will always have food for 18,000 people, we couldn't let 18,000 people starve. I decided that we should build a warehouse in the valley and move a months supply of food there and keep it as reserve. Simply turn it over. In other words, use it as a stock, but we would always have a months supply of food available on the other side of the river. So we did that, we built a big temporary warehouse. It was a wood structure with a canvas covering.

We then had to worry about some of the Contras that were still inside of Nicaragua, and the program said "Fine, they're Contras, so you have to support them." We couldn't send food in so we sent money in. We had a game with the Nicaraguan Government, we would be buying Cordobas from suppliers that would go down to the Nicaraguan border and they would buy Cordobas and they would bring them into the Embassy and we would buy them in the Embassy, pack them up in garbage bags by battalion and fly them down to Yamales and we would have once a month a distribution ceremony. You can't imagine the paperwork here, the paperwork was exquisite and extensive. We knew exactly where all of the money was going. The money would go out to the battalions and then the battalions would send messengers into Nicaragua with this money. As economic conditions worsened in Nicaragua the money got to be worth less and less and less. The idea was that they were trying to put out new money so that the old money would disappear. They would put out new money and we'd buy it. The amount of money going into Nicaragua was not all that much. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was a nice cash flow. Then I would go to Miami, FL occasionally, because we had an operation in Miami where the officers of the Contra and their families were on a payroll. It was the old CIA payroll, but it was part of the family support system so we had a place in Miami which had an accountant and I visited a couple of times and saw the distribution. They actually distributed money to the people of Miami, it wasn't a lot of money, but it was something. I'm trying to give you an idea of the scope of this thing.

Then we had the family feeding in the areas, where the food would have to go out to the various towns and there would be distribution centers where the families would come in. We had established a ration card system, 50 Price Waterhouse people working full time. There were identity cards, there was cross checking, checking to make sure that you weren't selling the food, this was all going on at the same time. Then there was the medical side of it for drugs which eventually got the program into trouble. Then there was the training program, we were training people in shoe making, training people in carpentry, sewing, and we trained 8,000 literacy teachers, then we started a civics program which was a prelude to the elections. This was done with people from INCAE and they would teach civics, democracy. They were supposed to go

back in and use their literacy teaching tools and the civics materials given to them, to extend themselves by teaching Nicaraguans as a prelude to the elections that they should vote.

It was a very strange operation, very varied. Then there were the Cuban exiled doctors that were flying in on weekends from Miami. We would meet them on Tocontin airport late Friday afternoon and helicopter them directly down into Yamales and they would don their operating gear and go into those two operating rooms and operate for 48 hours, free of charge. And they paid all of their own expenses coming down. They were specialists, mostly orthopedics and eye doctors. This rural hospital had the most sophisticated equipment that you could imagine. We were taking out shrapnel from eyes, they had these very high powered microscopic machines and they were resetting bones. They worked 48 hours, straight through. They went from one operating room to the next, back and forth. Then I would fly them back to Tocontin on Monday morning and they would take the plane out, and went back to their practices.

*Q: Amazing.*

VENEZIA: We had a contract with the Seventh Day Adventist hospital just outside of Tegucigalpa to work with children. There were a lot of children that had been hit by mines and had war wounds. It was a hospital that was very underutilized and they leaped at the opportunity to provide this kind of service, and they had good facilities. They were doing rehabilitation of children. Then there was the operation run by the PVO to make prosthetics. We had a prosthetics factory in Honduras that was manufacturing artificial limbs for the Contras. It went on and on and on.

*Q: How would you characterize the accomplishment of the overall mission?*

VENEZIA: We kept them happy. I had to make some tough calls. I decided to be both tough and kind. I demonstrated a lot of interest in them, which I think a couple of my predecessors had not. They had been dragooned into this thing and they let their feelings show, I think. But I was sincerely interested in their welfare, I really felt that they had gotten themselves into a circumstance, a lot of which was not of their making. They had trusted the U.S. Government and I was in many ways part of the U.S. Government to them. I always tried to demonstrate human concern for their human problems. At the same time we had to be careful, because some of these guys were the biggest crooks in the world. I have a souvenir branding iron which says "AID", I think there are only a few left in the world, and we branded the cattle just to make sure that we wouldn't be buying back the same cattle that we gave them. It was very interesting.

*Q: Was this just a temporary affair just to keep them happy for a short time?*

VENEZIA: The whole idea was to keep them happy during the peace process that was aiming at forcing the Sandinistas to hold elections, which were going to be held in 1990. There were a few bumps along the road, the biggest bump was when there was a Presidential summit in San Jose, Costa Rica. I'd been there about six months and President Bush came down and President Ortega went over dressed in what George Bush called his cowboy suit which was the fatigues, the bandanna, the red and the black. I think he was so frustrated at (I personalize this in the sense that this would be my perspective and I'm not sure it's absolutely true because I was looking at it

from my own side of the fence) he was so frustrated that we were doing such a good job in keeping the Contras from disbanding, they were certainly not going to disband, if they weren't gaining weight they were certainly not losing any weight under our programs. We had these far flung new enterprises. We built a brand new hospital, ten kilometers from the Nicaraguan border in the middle of the jungle, as if we were going to be there forever. He went to this conference and I'm not sure what the motivation was but I think it was partly from our side, blew his cool. And said in effect that he was calling off the truce and was threatening to go back to war. We believed him, we really did because there had been several occasions where they had done some incursions from Nicaragua into Honduras and so we took them very seriously.

Once he announced that, I got my staff together and I said "Well, let's prepare." So the first thing we had to do was to disperse the food, we were ten kilometers from the border, and it was an easy shot. They could have come up the valley and down the road, I think the Contras would have defended the place but a well mounted incursion into the area would have been serious. Especially if they came in with helicopters, even though the Contras had Stingers or Red Eyes, I'm not sure which, I never saw one and I never wanted to see one. So we said okay, let's disburse the food. And again, a wonderful machine, I could push a button and people did what they had to do. People were used to having a great responsibility, and they would go out and just work. Within 24 hours we had disbursed a whole months supply of food throughout all of the battalion areas. I'm not sure what we did with the hospital. We did a whole series of defensive operations. I was down in the valley at least once a week, sometimes twice a week and we maintained a Toyota down there. I was driving through the valley, down a road that was maintained by the Contras (perfect shape by the way) over culverts that were put in and I had the radio on. I was listening to Radio Nicaragua and President Ortega was sitting in Managua (this was live) ranting and raving about the program that I was directing and I was driving listening to him. He never used my name, he talked about the Humanitarian Program. I said to myself this is insane.

Anyway, it was that kind of a program. I'm sure that a lot of other experiences in AID were similar to this. A lot of the refugee stuff is I'm sure, highly similar to this. One felt that you were standing in the eye of the storm with the Congressional debates and the elections and whatever else. We approached the elections, elections were held and it was quite clear that the U.S. Government was going to make a decision. Jack Sullivan who was the head of the Central American Desk for State and had spent his early career in Brazil and consequently spoke Spanish with the most horrible Portuguese accent, not unintelligible, but a painful [laughter] kind of Spanish. Spanish with a Portuguese accent is just terrible. He spoke good Spanish but it was heavily accented. He came down to deliver the bad news, and the bad news was (this is before the elections) there was going to be elections and the U.S. Government was going to abide by them. Whichever way they go, if they go to the Sandinistas we will live with it. But there will be elections, we support them.

Meanwhile, in Washington Ted Morris had shifted his attention, he had been a real pain in the butt to my predecessors. Ted is a nit-picker, he is very much detail oriented, he's very good by the way but he had a reputation for being all over his staff. He's a little controversial like that in the Agency. He had been all over my predecessors like a cheap suit, which may have accounted for some of their attitudes. By the time I came in the election issue had become the major issue

of all of his meetings in Washington, and all of his conversations and all of his attention and energy was directed toward the Nicaraguan elections, because that had its own dynamic. Jim Baker was looking for money and he wanted to raid the program, they had to make different kinds of interpretations on what we could spend and how would the money get into Nicaragua and who would handle it. Ted was the master of those details, and he began to focus largely on that. There was a lot of latitude for me to do simply what made sense. Did it make sense, will it work, and will it make a difference? Those seemed to apply with a vengeance. Then you have to ask is it legal? I eventually found myself with a lot of latitude and able to do a lot of things, which eventually got me into trouble.

About two thirds of the way through the year, I got a call from the IG Inspector for the IG. He was in charge of the inspection side. I'd met him and I knew him. He was a Texan, a very easy guy to get along with. He called me up and said "Ron can you come over to my office?" I said "Sure." So I went over, it was late in the day about 5:30 and he said "Ron, I think I have to tell you that tomorrow Don Enos, your Deputy is going to plead guilty to two counts of bribery." I looked at him and I was literally dumbstruck. I remember to this day being dumbstruck and saying "Bribery, by whom?" I couldn't even imagine by whom. And he mentioned the name of Bill Crowse and it hit me like a ton of bricks. Bill Crowse was the head of a contract team that had been subcontracted under a larger contract for health services which had been given to a PVO that in my view was having difficulty performing when I got there. Especially in terms of getting things done, the people they were fielding were okay for medicine distribution, once we went into the phase of having to build this famous hospital I talked about and having to move these people, they literally didn't have any kind of agility at all. Bill Crowse was a friend of mine from 20 years before that I had known in Guatemala when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer and just joined AID. So I knew Bill, he showed up and Don Enos my Deputy, who had been there through all of my predecessors and thought a lot of himself. He thought he was really good and operationally he was. Don had convinced me, kept putting in front of me the fact that Bill Crowse's operation was first class and that they could deliver. So the more that the health program got into trouble, the more it became obvious that we needed help, so we asked them for a proposal. They made a proposal and to save time we proposed them as a subcontractor to the PVO. Don handled pretty much all of the negotiations. I okayed them, but Don handled the negotiations. I found out later that he kind of rammed them down the PVO's throat. In effect saying that if you don't take this then we will fire you. Well they did. And Crowse's people did an excellent job, they did a first class job, except we had a couple of problems later on with the IG, trying to figure out how much money had been spent on a drug purchase in Costa Rica. It taught me by the way, that buying drugs is the most devious business in the world, because even the IG couldn't figure it out. I'm involved with it now at the World Bank and I counsel everybody that there's nothing worse in the world than trying to procure pharmaceuticals through a competitive process. Anyway, Don had taken kickbacks, not only in this program but had taken kickbacks in the Salvador program with Crowse. The IG had been tracking him for three or four years. I was dumbstruck. He gave me an outline on what had happened, very brief but made it quite clear that it was very serious. They had called Don to Washington on the pretext of an interview and when he got up there Ted had said "Look, the IG wants to talk to you for a second." and they took him over across the river and they walked in and sat down and Ted said "Well, I'll see ya." and he left. Then they turned on the videotape, and Don watched about a minute and a half of the videotape and turned to the Inspector and said "Does this mean I'm



going to lose my job?" and the Inspector said "Mr. Enos, you're in far worse trouble than that." Don was watching a videotape of a meeting that had been set up in a hotel room, including Bill Crowse and Don Enos and it was all on tape. They had scammed Bill Crowse through his driver, I won't tell you how because it's personal but they scammed Bill Crowse through his driver and nailed him and they said to him "Look, we don't want you, we want Mr. Enos. Now you have a choice here, you can go to a place where we can pump in air and light, you'll be so far underground that nobody will find you for 20 or 30 years or we can talk." and Bill said "What would you like to talk about?" And he told them everything. And everything was in effect, that Don was skimming off of contracts that he arranged with this firm. I think Crowse, being largely the one saying "I'll do this for you" and Don just simply being unable to resist it. Don had terrible money problems. He was always owing money. I counseled him several times because there were always people coming in and saying "Don won't pay me what he owes me." I would counsel him. I would say "Pay your bills for God's sake." But he got himself into a situation where he was laying out money on properties that he had bought that he thought he could rent. One in Panama and Noriega came in and it was sitting there empty, he married a Panamanian and his wife and family moved into their house in Virginia and wouldn't pay him any rent. He had about a 4,500 to 5,000 dollar outflow that he couldn't cover, and he just needed the cash. They caught Don on tape, I remember the night that they did. Looking back, we had a lot of TGIF's, there was nothing else to do there so Don had a couple of drinks, he drank a little bit and he was high and I won't go into details, but it was one of those things that teaches you a lesson. Bill was being controlled by camera and by the phone, Don was arguing with him on the amounts and Bill was trying to tell him that "no, there were different amounts" because Bill had not told everything to the IG and Don was telling him more than he had told the IG. Don offered to go out to the car and get the records that he kept in the trunk, and Bill said it was not necessary. The phone would ring and the IG on the phone would say to Bill, "Tell him to get the book," and Crowse would be sitting on the phone saying "Oh dinner, dinner at 8:30, sure." It was wild, it was a view of AID that I had never seen before. But they nailed him.

I left the IG's office in a daze, had spent six to eight months being absolutely imbued that AID was going to do everything in the world to keep this program whistle clean and we had done it, and on my watch this guy was going to get indicted for Christ's sake, for thousands of dollars of money from the program. I went home and I hugged Burgess and I didn't know what to say, and I'll always remember that night. I sat there in bed and watched the clock change. I couldn't sleep. I just sat there and thought about it all. I got up the next morning and called the IG guy and told him that I had to come and see him, so I went into his office and I said "I have to tell my staff, they can't hear this on the radio, or in a cable or from the Ambassador, they've got to hear it from me." He was sitting there listening and I broke down. I literally broke down emotionally and he jumped up and closed the door and he said "Geez, what's wrong?" and I said "I'm sorry, I'm just overwhelmed by this." It was a full 24 hours before I could talk about it without literally breaking into sobs. I called Ted and he was a blubber face also, we were a thousand miles away from each other and blubbering at each other on the phone, it was awful. We felt so strongly about this program, he more than I, because he dedicated more of his life to it than I had. We were dumbstruck. The Agency handled it well, Don plea bargained, entered his plea on a Friday morning at 10:00 so it hit the papers on Saturday and then disappeared, it was picked up a little bit but disappeared. The General who obviously knew about this was not out crowing, everybody understood what was at stake. And what was at stake was AID and everybody understood that it

was a victim. I was never held personally responsible, the subcontract, Ted had never even seen it because it was a subcontract and it was in my authority. Ted never held it against me that I'm aware of. It was just one of those things. We wanted to get something done so we did it. It was a mistake.

The program survived, and the elections were held. Jack Sullivan came down and they called in the commanders and there was this big meeting in this big headquarters tent, there was Sullivan sitting at a desk faced with about 100 -125 very rough, tough looking guys, all carrying AK-47's and dressed in khakis. Many had come out of Nicaragua just for this meeting. Supposedly in an Army, but you wondered how good this one was. And he gave them the bad news, a tough job. He did it well with his horrible Portuguese accent and the news was that the elections were going to be held, our objective is to have elections and we will live with the outcome. If you lose, we will try to do our best to take care of you, but we have to move this into a democratic environment somehow. Where the Nicaraguans have a chance to choose what they want. Once this became known, the Contras began to plan to go back into Nicaragua. I could see it myself and I reported it, but they were making plans. One day just before the elections they left and they left behind their families and their kids and their wounded and their maimed and their old. The fighters left. We kind of knew what was happening and we didn't say anything to stop them. They took some of the drugs with them, they left behind some of their medical corps. From one day to the next the operation shifted from feeding 18,000 troops and 40,000 family members to taking care of about 20,000 kids and mothers.

The elections were held, and the Sandinistas lost, to everyone's immense surprise including theirs, and things began to come apart pretty quickly. The Hondurans then said this is an elected government and we want this thing out of here. So the planning shifted to how to wind this thing down completely and that meant how do we take care of the kids? My staff put together a plan and the plan was to turn this over to the UNHCR. That was decided at a higher level, but we provided the recommendation, plan and all of the information necessary and we made it clear that this was the time table. The UNHCR regarded this as what AID regarded it as earlier. They were literally bludgeoned into taking this, so I worked with a UNHCR guy in Honduras who was going to take this over. They sent some people in and we literally devised a strategy on how to do this, which was sign everything off. We donated everything to the UNHCR, we donated the food that was left over, the vehicles, anything that we had bought was donated with some exceptions. The medical corps of the Contra said "Look, this hospital equipment is pretty sophisticated and expensive stuff" so in a clandestine way we organized the helicopters. Right after the elections, the Hondurans put up a road block, they wanted to now control the road. They were obviously taking a look at what they had in there to see what they could grab. One weekend I called together the two helicopter pilots and the three helicopters and said let's do an air lift. We made about 50 trips, we would go down, load up the helicopters with as much as we could carry and bring it in and store it at the airport. The airport by the way was another interesting aspect of this thing. Once a week a military U.S. Army C-130 would land right in front of the main terminal.

*Q: This is in Honduras?*

ENEZIA: Yes in Honduras. And it would land in the morning when there were about four other airplanes all lined up to leave, so you would have this enormous glut of passengers leaving Honduras staring at this C-130 unloading military uniforms (we supplied a complete military uniform to everyone of the Contras), meals ready to eat sometimes and some other gear. We would load it onto trucks and take it to our warehouses, right in front of everybody. I could never understand how this was done, but it was. It was all organized before I got there in terms of the Hondurans. The Honduras secret service was deeply involved in this or they were aware of it anyway.

After the elections were held, I was told to wind it down. We donated everything to the UNHCR and the Hondurans then said what about all of these disabled? We had these centers for the disabled, and some of these people were paraplegics. I got the word from Jim Michel who was the LA Bureau AA as Ted had passed his responsibilities to the LA Bureau. Everything was shifting back to normal. So I was told you can't leave until you get these people back into Nicaragua and I thought "Oh my God, okay." I wanted to get out of there, I wanted to come home. Enough was enough. As I wrote in my EER, I will never again fly a single engine helicopter over a triple canopy jungle. I did that several times a week and I could just see myself going into a triple canopy jungle and never coming out again. The day I was supposed to go into Nicaragua to arrange the transfer of the disabled, the Sandinistas closed the airport. The unions struck. It was kind of a reprise back to Istanbul where I was going to go somewhere, I didn't care how I got there. They canceled the commercial flights and I couldn't take my own helicopters into Nicaragua because they weren't authorized to fly. So I called up the General who was in charge of the U.N. who was stationed in Honduras and (I'd done him a few favors) I told him that I had to get to Nicaragua. "It's connected with the disabled, I have a meeting set up, can you get me down there?" He had helicopters. Since the main Sandino airport was closed, we landed out at Mercedes which was a military training airport, small strip right outside of Managua. It was an old crop-dusting operation and the Sandinistas were using it to train their pilots. There was also a large warehouse from the Ministry of Interior and I suspect it held lots of stuff that was being sent to Salvador and other places. We landed and the guy dropped me off. I was with a young officer from the Honduran Embassy, who was the liaison with the Contras and he was coming down with me. We walked up to a Sandinista soldier and we told him that we would like to go to the American Embassy (this is in the middle of nowhere) his name was Robert Taylor. He was from the north coast of Nicaragua, the English speaking side and his name was Robert Taylor and he spoke English. He never asked us where in the hell we had come from, what we were doing there or anything. He arranged a car for us from this little business that was at the airport. The driver of the car never asked for anything, we drove through all kinds of check points between there and Managua and we were never stopped. He drove us up to the front gate of the American Embassy and I gave him a five dollar bill, he drove away and we walked into the Embassy. They knew we were supposed to come in commercially, but they couldn't figure out how we got there. I told them how we came in and then I gave them my passport and I asked them to figure out what to do with it. So they took it down to the Sandino airport and sparks flew forever. They said "How did these people get into this country?" and nobody would tell them. So they stamped my passport to show that I had entered the country.

I went and talked to the Red Cross, the Swiss had been working with the Sandinistas and they had their own prosthetic operation and they had their own rehabilitation center, so we went and

talked to them. Then I took a helicopter from Managua down to the Contras camp which they had set up in the southern part of Nicaragua, near the Coast Rican border. They had moved all the way down into that area and that's where the Command was. So I went down and saw the Commanders, I knew them all. I told them "Look, we're going to have to move your people out of Honduras. They're going to have to go somewhere and you've got to help." They were very unhappy, they thought that we were abandoning the people and I told them that we were not throwing them out, that it was the Hondurans. I went back and we in effect, set up a PVO operation in Managua to receive these people. We then shipped them in, we rented trucks and ambulances and literally shipped them into Nicaragua into these centers that were set up by the PVO. I remembered that we had this hospital equipment worth millions of dollars just sitting in our warehouse in Honduras so I packed it up and donated it to an organization in Nicaragua that was a joint commission between the church, the Contra leadership, and the government. The Hondurans never even knew that the equipment had left the country, we just shipped it in. Actually, we had moved all of the equipment from our warehouse, (I thought that our warehouse would be taken from us) and we stored at this moving company and they kept it for us and then packed it up, inventoried it, and then shipped it to Nicaragua. I have no idea what happened to it after that. My job was done and I went home.

Another memory of that time will also stay with me. I got a call from the back room of the Embassy that a SAHSA plane had just crashed on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, and could I take my helicopter to the site to assist in taking out the wounded. I was at the airport in twenty minutes, and we were airborne within the next ten, and so we arrived at the site about one hour after the crash. The plane had come down in the clouds too soon and hit a mountain with its tail, which broke off, and then skidded along to a stop. There was a shortage of aviation fuel in Honduras, so they had tanked up in Managua. A few people in the front of the plane got out, along with the crew, which were never held responsible for clear pilot error, before the whole plane went up in flames. When I arrived at the scene, there was this open clamshell of the plane with all the rows of seats still intact holding the completely charred remains of the passengers. Later, I literally walked down the aisle, still smoldering, and all I could think of was Kentucky Fried Chicken, that's what they looked like. Several AID employees were on that plane, a few who got out, the others died, I hope quickly. I thought I would have nightmares about that episode.

Fred Schieck had asked me if I would come back to Washington. Fred was the Deputy head of the Department and he told me that he wanted me to take over the LA/DR Operation and I told him that I had done that on the Asian side and that I wasn't sure that I wanted to go back to Washington, I had been in Washington for all of these years. He told me that he really wanted me to do this job, so I said okay. I didn't have any other offers. There was a Mission Directors meeting for Central America in Costa Rica and they told me to go to Costa Rica and sit in on the Mission Directors meeting. Because it would be good experience and I'd get to meet the Mission Directors (I knew most of them already) and I could get back into the swing of normal business. I went to San Jose, I got in late and walked into the hotel and I saw Jim Michel there and he said "Let's go have a drink." So we went into the bar and we were sitting there and he said "Look, we've had a change in people moving around and Carl Leonard is going to Bolivia, would you like to be Mission Director in San Jose?" and I tried to give this a millisecond of consideration and I said "Well, yes, I could probably do that, I should probably talk to my wife first." So I

came back home and made arrangements and then took off for Costa Rica and became the Mission Director for Costa Rica. Another circle closed.

**SARAH HORSEY-BARR**  
**Political Counselor/Regional Affairs**  
**Tegucigalpa (1990-1992)**

*Mrs. Horsey-Barr was born in Maryland into a Foreign Service family. She was raised in the Washington DC area and abroad and was educated at Georgetown University; and Loyola University in Rome, Italy. Her service with the State Department took her to several posts in Latin America dealing with both consular and political/management affairs. Her last assignments were with the Organization of American States, where she served in various senior capacities with the U.S. Mission. Mrs. Horsey-Barr was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: And you were in Honduras from 1990 to...*

HORSEY-BARR: ...to '92.

*Q: What were you doing?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, I had two jobs. The ambassador there at the time was a fellow, Chris Arcos, who was a USIA officer, had been public affairs officer when we were there the first time, and he had two senior jobs and could not fill them, and that's how he got out of Manila. One of the jobs was political counselor, and the other job was what they called regional affairs coordinator or such. Honduras was the only place in Central America that had not or was not experiencing civil war – Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua- and so a lot of the regional activities were based there. There were a lot of bilateral activities based there, too. He wanted me to be political counselor and my husband to be the regional affairs counselor because he, my husband, had worked with the Contras for many years, both in Honduras before as well as in Washington, and it made sense. Unfortunately the Department wouldn't let him do that because they were afraid of being sued by my husband, who was political officer and therefore rightly in their view should be the political counselor as opposed to me. But he didn't want to be political counselor. The Department would not assign us to the jobs we and the ambassador wanted to go to, so we went there assigned by the Department as the Department saw fit and then the ambassador detailed us into each other's jobs, and there is this obscure provision we found whereby an ambassador can do that for up to a year. So at the end of the first year we went on holiday and then he did it again, infuriating the Department but accomplishing his purposes, with which we were quite comfortable anyway. So in the beginning before we figured this out, I was the regional affairs person and then we switched over when we figured out the loophole.

*Q: Let's talk a little about Honduras in '90 to '92. What was the situation there government and American interests?*

HORSEY-BARR: They had their third or fourth elected president at that time. They were sort of a shining star in terms of democracy, a peaceful-transition democracy, and transition from one party to another and all that sort of thing. In fact it was skin deep and isn't much better now, but of course one has to do what the other countries would want it too. It was in fact much better. We had poured a lot of money into Honduras during the '80s, and I don't know to what extent that kept it stable, probably a fair amount, but Honduras doesn't have the great divisions, great social and economic divisions, that most of the other countries in Central America have. So, the really difficult part about Honduras in '90 to '92 was that it was rapidly vanishing from the scope. The embassy was drawing down. The money was dropping off. Peace was springing up in other countries in Central America. So Honduras was losing its interest to the United States, and I think for the ambassador that was a difficult process to manage because it is fairly easy to grow but it's only a big person that can be honest about cutting staff, resources and what have you when the political situation had changed. So it was reverting to being a backwater that it has been for most of its history. Most of the regional job had three aspects: one was the Contras, one was narcotics, and the third was refugees. The first and third were wind-up operations, and the narcotics was of course growing because Honduras hadn't had the conflict and didn't have the organization of the other countries and was missing the money that had been flowing in from the United States, was ripe for traffickers to use and was a growing transit point for narcotics. It was very different being there in those years than early in the '80s and kind of a disappointment because, of course, in the early '80s one was at the center of the foreign policy focus and certainly from '90 to '92 one wasn't. Honduras doesn't have that much to offer in terms of places to visit, things to do. It has always been sort of a backwater, backward water for the Spaniards, backwater in the 9th century, backwater in the 20th century. So if you don't have a really demanding job, it was sort of a challenge to find things to do to...

*Q: How did you work as a political officer? What did you do?*

HORSEY-BARR: We focused on human rights at that point. People were very open, very pro-American in Honduras, so there was absolutely no trouble finding people to talk to. That was a period of time in which the Department was very interested in Honduras. The military was, as we were, the Honduran military was downsizing, was being forced to downsize, and this was really the one element of potential instability. I mention it because the military was the source of most of the human rights violations there, and the police was part of the military. As the United States we were beginning to concentrate on human rights violations in Honduras, but it was difficult because, I think - and there are different points of view on this - my view is that they did exist in the '80s in a big way, and because we had other priorities, we in fact didn't pay attention to them, which happens a lot. What is the greater priority for the United States in situation X, Y, Z? Human rights in the '80s were not going to be the biggest priority.

*Q: Could you explain in the Honduran context what were the problems in human rights?*

HORSEY-BARR: Disappearances, indefinite jail tenures, torture, forced conscription; the military essentially was the law of the land. In many developing countries, at least in Latin America, in the absence of a strong civilian democratic government and not just presidency but regional representation, legislature and such, once one gets out of the capital, the only presence is

the military - taking people's land, raping women so as to buy their acquiescence, the military looking to agriculture, the military looking to banking.

*Q: How about Indians? One hears in Nicaragua of the Miskito Indians.*

HORSEY-BARR: Right, there are in Honduras, too, on the Caribbean coast border with Nicaragua, but in Honduras the population is much more mixed, it's a much browner population overall than in Nicaragua, Salvador, or Guatemala. In those countries where you had greater wealth you also have a much greater division between the whites and the browns. In Honduras there was no money and very few people other than of mixed race, I mean even in the Middle East Palestinians, Christians, they all were white, white, white. Everybody there was sort of different shades of brown. The military is an interesting institution because, while people who are focused on Central America consider mainly its limitations and shortcomings that we were talking about in terms of human rights, it also was the one vehicle for social advancements and economic advancements for the lower economic classes. Anybody could get into the military, and if you had the smarts, that was the way, that was upward mobility. Business was not, government was not. The military served an important function in that way. But Honduras again, as I said, doesn't have Indian population that the other countries do, but there are some, and the Garifunas in which are descendants of blacks from the West Indies who live along the coast.

*Q: Probably came over from Belize.*

HORSEY-BARR: They didn't come from Belize; they came from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and they live on the coast and they speak their own language. Some speak English; very few speak Spanish. And then, of course, the islands of Honduras are populated by former pirate-type people, and they are white but they're like the whites you find in the Chesapeake Bay, speak very interesting English, very interesting accent and vocabulary in English, and have absolutely nothing to do with the mainland of Honduras except they are part of the country. Many of them, most of them, speak Spanish, and most Hondurans don't speak English. Those sort of examples are really small in terms of the overall population.

*Q: Did you have missionaries and if so, how did they fit in from your perspective?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, we talked about deliberation theology business the other time. Most of them were doing missionary work, but I would say that the most significant religious operators were Protestant. In fact, the growth of the Protestant sects, if you will, in Central America was really very obvious in Honduras, and the Catholic Church just had not delivered, and what was not delivered to the people, the spiritual or personal support that they looked to, and the growth of Angelical movements in Honduras was phenomenal. I was always surprised to see the Mormons there, they were there in a big way, Protestants. Mennonites were there, but the big ones were the Evangelicals, and the population responded positively.

*Q: Did they have an agenda other than conversion?*

HORSEY-BARR: Not that I knew of.

*Q: So you weren't finding them sort of aligning themselves so there really wasn't the downtrodden that there might be in other places.*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, by our terms certainly would be downtrodden, but there wasn't the contrast between the downtrodden, those that have and those that don't have, and the contrast was much less significant because there just wasn't ever any money in Honduras. What money there was, was generally controlled by the American Banana Company. There were a number of people that had money, probably had millions of dollars, but it was only a handful as opposed to Nicaragua, Salvador and Guatemala. They don't have the wherewithal to make more money, or at least not the method we use.

*Q: How did you find the press there?*

HORSEY-BARR: Well, they called themselves independent but they were very party affiliated, and the difference between the political parties was sort of hard to discern. It was mainly based on family, family affiliation.

*Q: Are political interests relevant or diminishing?*

HORSEY-BARR: Stability. Keep 'em quiet.

*Q: Keep 'em quiet.*

HORSEY-BARR: Keep 'em quiet and pull out, and have them adjust quietly to our pull-out essentially.

**MARSHALL D. BROWN**  
**Director, USAID**  
**Honduras (1991-1995)**

*Marshall D. Brown was born and raised in California. He received his undergraduate and master's degrees in political science from Stanford University. Mr. Brown's service with USAID took him to Peru, Brazil, and Honduras. He was interviewed December 4, 1996 by W. Haven North.*

BROWN: I was assigned as director in Honduras in 1991. Unfortunately the Honduras program has reached it pinnacle about 1989, at around two hundred million dollars a year. By the time I got there we were down to around \$125 million. What I didn't realize at the time was the budget would fall drastically over the next four years. The strategic political objectives of the Central America Initiative had been achieved; we had peace and democracy throughout Central America. Large AID budgets were no longer needed; there were only development problem left, and the US could live with them as long as there was political stability in the region. So for four years I presided over the progressive downsizing of the mission.



*Q: What is involved in downsizing a mission while what you really want to be doing positive development?*

BROWN: I found it a thoroughly distasteful-and depressing-experience. You have to decide what programs to sacrifice and which ones you will only slice portions off of. Then you find you have to cut the staff, lower and lower each year.

*Q: Was this to phase out entirely?*

BROWN: No. Just to take it down to a level which reflected Honduras' importance to the United States in times of peace-that is, when there is no threat from the left in Central America. And that turned out to be not too important.

*Q: What scale are we talking about?*

BROWN: We went from around \$125 million of ESF, DA and PL 480 food assistance down to about \$25 million in DA plus some PL 480 my last year. Now, given that Honduras was a poor country with a per capital income around \$600 which was undertaking policy reform to stimulate growth and investment and making progress in raising the standard of living for the poor, we strongly argued the case that Honduras deserved more. But the AID budget was cut so deeply, the LAC Bureau couldn't afford more for us. The Bureau was on our side. They agreed we deserved twice as much, but just didn't have it to give. Of course top priority, and every loose nickel, was going to Haiti, to try to shore up President Clinton's ridiculous policy of "restoring democracy" to a country which had never had any in the first place.

In any case, we got all kinds of accolades from Washington for our imaginative and innovative proposals-which I could put in my EERs in lieu of achievements. I got praise from the Assistant Administrator for having the best PL 480 Title III proposal ever, but there wasn't any funding available. That was the unfortunate part about downsizing. We had a hard working committed staff. We had some excellent programs. We were effective in reaching low income people and raising standards of living, in attracting new investment and creating new jobs, in reducing infant mortality. But nobody seemed to care in Washington; the budget was cut so severely that our arguments just fell on deaf ears. One year for the country submission, I put together an analysis of how many people didn't benefit because of the cuts we had to take. This many people didn't get farmer to market access roads, this many didn't get jobs; this many didn't get credit; this many didn't get health services. I think we calculated something like 60,000 people would suffer because of AID/W cuts in our budget the previous year. Well, nobody cared. They said, "That's too bad." There was no argument one could make on development terms that would do any good. The bottom line was: we had lost our political priority. Honduras was not an unpopular country in Washington, and they had some friends on the Hill. Senator Leahy came down for a visit and to receive an award from the Honduran President. Leahy said what a wonderful country Honduras was, but he also said, "You know these are tough times, and I really can't do much for you."

*Q: What did you end up doing with the 25 million? What kind of strategy would you follow when there is such limited resources?*

BROWN: Well, the last year was complicated by the re-engineering insanity, which I fortunately was disengaging from. I turned over re-engineering to my Deputy and successor, Elena Brinnerman. I said, "You handle re-engineering. I'm going to manage what we have left."

We had been trying to put Honduras on a self-sustaining growth path and to improve the well being and incomes of the lower income groups. We had adopted four strategic objectives, and even though the program had been slimmed-down, we still pursued the same four objectives: raising incomes; protecting the environment; improving health; and promoting democracy. It was a condensation of our much larger program. With respect to increasing incomes, we had a highly successful small business program that had created 30,000 jobs over a period of years, and three quarters of the borrowers were women. We were assisting NGOs, cooperatives and other small farmer associations in producing and marketing nontraditional agricultural exports crops. We were assisting the government in the implementation of its far-reaching Agricultural Modernization Law, which involved the removal of price and trade controls, land titling, privatization of storage, and privatizing extension and rural credit services, among other things. AID had been instrumental in the drafting of this law, and I had used my ESF assistance my first year in Honduras to negotiate its adoption by the government. Because of our deep involvement in agriculture policy and the agriculture policy team we had created within the ministry, the World Bank had asked us to provide the technical and analytic base for their joint \$110 million agriculture sector loan with the IDB. That may have been a first for the World Bank. It certainly recognized our preeminence in the sector. Our primary education project had produced sharp increases in enrollments and graduation rates and similar decreases in drop out and repetition rates.

In the environmental area, we had a large program to develop sustainable forest management, including timber auctions at market prices; and we were carrying out a program to promote sustainable cultivation practices among the thousands of small farmers who farmed hillsides. We also launched two new programs: a program with the government to manage and protect the nation's nature reserve and park areas, and an endowment for a private environmental foundation to make grants to NGOs working to preserve the environment, as well as to enable them to become a major interest group or lobbyist for the protection of the environment within the private sector. In the health area, we had an ongoing Health Sector Program which had achieved significant decreases in infant mortality, giving low income Honduras a lower rate than all the other Central American countries, excepting Costa Rica. Our efforts in support of child vaccinations gave Honduras the best record of all the countries. In family planning we were making steady progress in the use of contraceptives. Working primarily through NGOs we had provided more than 250,000 rural dwellers with safe drinking water, through locally managed sustainable systems. Strengthening democracy and the justice system was also a major component. We had a great development program, and I'm sure at least three-quarters of it was a result of the work of my marvelous predecessor, John Sanbrailo. No one I knew in AID ever worked harder or more successfully or was more committed to achieving AID's objectives than John. Economic development was his passion-even after AID's current small-minded and vindictive leadership involuntarily retired him because they mistakenly thought he was a "closet Republican." A tremendous loss for the agency. John had an extraordinary conceptual ability, a love of the Latin culture-he is married to an Ecuadorian, and a talent for persuading his Latin

counterparts to undertake the innovative new approaches to problems that he was forever coming up with. Nevertheless, I had to cut this very effective program he had conceived in Honduras. I cut the last third of a highly successful rural roads program. I cut the Hillside Land Use project in half, down to about \$18 million. Among others, I terminated a very successful investment promotion project. And among others I terminated two projects which needed termination-a central bank assistance program which was not achieving its objectives and a private agribusiness assistance activity which had been taken over by corrupt leaders. Just about everything else was slimmed down, to a greater or lesser degree.

*Q: What were you trying to do in the democracy and justice area?*

BROWN: Well, I had inherited a large, overambitious program which I was very skeptical of when I arrived. I suspect it was the result of a Washington mandate in support of democracy combined with over-enthusiasm in the mission. The program had been designed by generalists who, following the then-conventional wisdom, thought the problems in the justice and legislative areas could be solve by strengthening the administration or management of the institutions involved. This particularly was the view of the generalist who was the democratic initiatives office director. It was a naive premise, and they were wrong. The fundamental problem of the justice system was corruption, not inefficiency. The basic problem of the legislature was that the representatives did not really take their responsibilities seriously. For the most part they were venal politicians out for what they could get for themselves. We completed the construction, equipping and staffing of a Congressional Reference Center, which had been undertaken naively thinking that lack of solid analysis was the key impediment to better legislation. After it was turned over to the legislature, the specialized research staff we had trained was replaced by political loyalists, and it became little more than a toy for the president of the legislature. However, after replacing the AID office director for democratic initiatives, and substantially changing the focus of the program, by the time I left Honduras I was of the opinion that it was probably our most significant program.

We specifically refocused the program on combating corruption in the judicial system and on strengthening municipal governments. With regard to the justice system, we targeted four essential objectives: Depoliticizing the courts and requiring the merit selection of judges; adoption of a new criminal procedures code; developing an effective Inspector General overseeing judicial decisions; and active prosecution by the new Public Ministry of criminal and corruption cases.

We benefitted enormously from the appointment by President Reina of a responsible politician-judge to be the new president of the Supreme Court, and the appointment of one of the few truly honest Hondurans as the new Public Prosecutor. Without their commitment and support, our effort would have had no chance of success.

The other essential ingredient that made our success possible was an extraordinary leader-manager-political operative named Mario Pita. Mario played a unique role in that he was both the AID office director and a kind of behind-the-scenes operator guiding and motivating the key Honduran players. Mario was a Cuban-American who had worked all of his career for Peter Kimm in the Latin America Housing Guarantee Program. He was trained as a lawyer in Cuba

and was a strategic and conceptual thinker. He had been managing the mission's Municipal Development Project, and after watching him for a year I decided to merge the municipal program with the democratic initiative and put him in charge of both.

Mario had a remarkable feel for municipal development and grass roots democracy and how to promote it. He was a very articulate, forceful leader, and Spanish was his first language. He identified the best local identified Honduran leaders and put the resources of our project behind them. But he also required performance. The mayors had to improve the budgeting and accounting of the municipality; hold regular town meetings-which was a first in Honduras-to get feedback from their constituents on priorities and on how the budget should be spent; increase the proportion of the budget going to investments rather than salary costs; and improve the quality and coverage of municipal services. To augment our project resources, we also had a large amount of local currency counterpart from ESF assistance which we allocated to water and sewerage and other infrastructure improvements in the towns which met the performance criteria. Our carrot was good-sized, but so was our stick. A couple of the majors turned out to have other agendas; and after trying to bring them back in line, Mario dropped them from the program and added new towns with honest mayors. I used to enjoy visiting some of these municipalities with Mario, to see him in action and to see the results we were getting. And in my view, we couldn't have done it without him. It was the force of his personality; his experience; his insight into the politics, and his vision and leadership ability that made it all happen. To this day, Honduras is recognized as having the best in municipal development program in Central America, despite the handicap of having to work in one of the least developed of the Central American countries.

*Q: This development was institutional or physical infrastructure?*

BROWN: It was both. We had the best municipal development law in Latin America, designed by and strongly supported by AID during my predecessor's tour; and we had another law which we actively supported which provided for the separate elections of mayors, so that the political party leaders could not just designate the candidates at the local level. Secretly, both major parties opposed this proposed law, but Mario worked behind-the-scenes helping to organize the media campaign of the Mayors' Association-a group he had revitalized-in support of the law. The campaign, which involved a number of public interest group, was so successful that ultimately the Honduran legislature passed the law. This had a significant effect on the development of grass roots political leaders, as opposed to loyal hacks named by party leaders. No longer were local politicians beholden to the party leaders; their power came from the people who elected them. Led by the Association of Mayors, they had become a national force in the country, arguing with the President about power sharing and other issues. This is a radical change from the past. The President of the country now sits down with the mayors annually to discuss their agenda. This is all due to Mario Pita's ingenious plan.

Mario had arranged for the Mayors' Association to sponsor the first ever meeting of all the mayors in Tegucigalpa, the capital of the country. I was on the program as a speaker at the national theater. When then-President Callejas heard about the meeting and realized that all the mayors would be there, he told the Association, "I want to speak to them." So he was added to the program as the keynote speaker. But the President had fallen into Mario's trap; he had

entered into a dialogue with the assembled mayors, and they demanded that it continue. He, of course, couldn't refuse, and so the process was institutionalized. The President meets the assembled mayors every year.

When Mario took over the Democratic Initiatives office, he renegotiated the program with the president of the Supreme Court and negotiated performance bench marks or targets for our new program with the newly-created Public Prosecutor's office. We financed the training of the highly qualified, specialized staff of new prosecutors which were hired. Just as in the case with the municipalities, our continued assistance would depend on performance on their part in terms of cleaning up and depoliticizing the judicial system and in actively prosecuting corruption. You need to understand that traditionally justice was only available to the wealthy; they simply paid for the verdict they wanted. If you couldn't pay, you would in all likelihood lose. Most of the judges were beholden to the two political parties, so party members were also taken care of,

The new president of the Supreme Court, a cautious but decent man, agreed that this should change. With our support the Court began replacing unqualified and corrupt judges with honest trained judges. Mario worked out a quiet deal between the Court and the Public Prosecutor to create a group of special prosecutors and judges to handle high profile cases of corruption which people had been afraid to touch. We financed staff support, equipment and office space. When they started going after some big fish, this created a shock wave in Tegucigalpa. The Public Prosecutor began to get death threats. With the Embassy's help we got his children in school in the US. The new Public Prosecutor, Edmundo Orellana, was a rabid reform monger—a rare Honduran breed—who wanted to go after human rights abusers, many of whom were in the military, and after corrupt judges. In a reasonably short period of time there had been a sea change in the justice system. Impunity for the wealthy and the powerful was no longer the case. The military were no longer above the law. An inspector general was examining decisions for evidence of corruption. And judges were being dismissed for cause, and sometimes prosecuted for corruption. Judges were being hired on merit rather than political patronage. Obviously, they still had a long way to go, but there had been a dramatic break with the past, and the pervasive corruption which has plagued the country is no longer seen as acceptable.

The success is largely the result of the commitment and zeal of the Public Prosecutor and the guidance, insight and moral and financial support provided by Mario Pita. It was Mario's idea to create the special courts with the best judges and link them with the best prosecutors, all funded quietly by AID. The president of the Court and the Public Prosecutor made it work. We also funded training for judges and prosecutors. Mario also brought in legal experts from other Latin countries to point out the need for a new criminal procedures code and penal code, and mobilized support among opinion leaders for the new laws. I believe that both Mario Pita and Edmundo Orellana were essential to what was achieved. Without either one, the other could not have achieved what they did working together. To me, this is a case of two unique individuals, two unique personalities with commitment, drive and vision, having a tangible impact on history. What we did in Honduras could be written up as a model for another country, but it would be very difficult to replicate. What made it work were these two remarkable people working together toward a shared objective.

*Q: Anything else about your Honduran experience that you want to add?*

BROWN: In my last two years I missed being a major player, being able to use ESF assistance in a policy dialogue to bring about policy change to promote growth. That was what I found to be the most satisfying and exciting part of the job-negotiating to make significant structural changes in a country-changes that were judged meaningful to the country's future progress and well-being. I was able to do some things in my first two years, when I had about \$40 million of ESF, but in the last two years we had no ESF, and a sharply declining DA budget.

There is one other thing I should mention, my efforts to strengthening the pluralism within Honduras, a country dominated historically by the central government, and the military. I placed a particular emphasis on creating or strengthening a network of nongovernment, not-for-profit institutions in the private sector to act as advocacy or interest groups, and to pressure and challenge the national government. We strengthened agricultural producer groups, cooperatives, small enterprise foundations and a major investment promotion and policy analysis organization. We endowed a new national environment foundation to raise environmental awareness and to make grants to other private environmental groups; we revitalized the Association of Mayors and turned them into a major player in the national political arena; we created a nonprofit technical advisory group to assist municipalities improve management of resources and services-a group the IDB and World Bank have both hired to assist them in urban programs. And we endowed a foundation for development and democracy, founded by the visionary former Honduran Ambassador in Washington, Jorge Ramon Hernandez-Alcerro. Jorge Ramon was without question the most impressive Honduran I met in my four years in the country. He would make an extraordinary president of Honduras. If there were just a major political party who wanted a selfless, visionary statesman for its candidate. In any case, he pulled together a group of the best and the brightest from the Honduran private sector, people who were honest, who cared about their society and where it was going, were concerned about corruption and abuse, and about strengthening the country's democratic base. When I left Honduras they were evolving into a combination think tank and political advocacy group, one which sponsored conferences on judicial reform and which spoke out publicly against corruption and civil and human rights abuses by the police and military. So I left behind a series of nongovernment institutions led by reasonably honest people who cared about the future of their country, and wanted make it a better place to live. Hopefully, these groups will endure and become positive influences on the direction and evolution of Honduran society. A small but, I hope, significant step on behalf of pluralism.

**WILLIAM T. PRYCE**  
**Ambassador**  
**Honduras (1993-1996)**

*Born in California and raised in Pennsylvania, Mr. Pryce was educated at Wesleyan University and the Fletcher School of Tufts University. After service in the US Navy he worked briefly for the Department of Commerce before joining the Foreign Service in 1958. Though primarily a Latin America specialist, Mr. Pryce also served in Moscow. His Latin America assignments include Mexico,*

*Panama, Guatemala, Bolivia and Honduras, where he was Ambassador from 1993-1996. Ambassador Pryce was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.*

*Q: You went out to Honduras when and how long were you there?*

PRYCE: I went out to Honduras in July of 1993 and stayed until August of 1996.

*Q: You had obviously been following Latin American affairs so when you went to Honduras in '93, what were you sort of carrying in your briefcase about how you felt relations were, U.S. interests, and what you wanted to accomplish?*

PRYCE: Of course you have the standard interests that every ambassador wants to accomplish: you are hoping to establish a good relationship with the government; you're hoping you'll get support for us in areas where we needed it; you hope that you can promote economic development; you hope that you can advance the democratic process; and you hope that you can get Washington to pay attention to the country to which you are assigned.

I think that the one area that I felt where I could possibly make the most difference would be in helping the Honduran civilian government establish a hegemony over the military, to change the civil-military balance where for a period for historic reasons the military had been inordinately influential in the circles of government. They operated sort of as a separate entity and they were not very responsive to the civilian mandates. That was one of the things that I tried, with the full backing of the State Department, to try to change. Frankly that's an area where we were quite successful. President Reina I think will go down in history as someone who did alter the basic relationship between the civilian and military to the advantage of the civilians. We were able to help him do that.

*Q: Before you went out there, was Senator Helms at all a figure that you had to be concerned about regarding our Central American policy?*

PRYCE: No, I don't think so. I think very frankly I had felt that the policy that Tom Enders and Elliott Abrams had followed in Latin America essentially worked. The policy was to support the Contras but to work for elections recognizing that the Contras were never going to win. They were never going to take over the government, but it was useful as a point of pressure to get the government to want to have honest elections. I knew people in Senator Helms' office. Though I worked very hard for the Panama Canal Treaties they accepted that I was a career officer who had democracy and economic development fully in mind. And that in the Nicaraguan elections, I had pushed very hard not to have the CIA involved. I think we talked about that, but they respected that, and I didn't have a problem with them.

*Q: First what about the embassy, how did you find the embassy when you arrived?*

PRYCE: I found an excellent embassy. It was well run. You had good people. We had a little bit of a situation where part of my job was to bring down the numbers in the embassy and that is always difficult. The embassy was I think probably at one point the largest embassy in the

hemisphere because of our involvement as sort of a staging ground for AID programs and other programs helping people involved in Nicaragua and El Salvador. We had a huge AID program which we brought down and tried to keep the most essential element but that is always difficult. We had very good people.

*Q: Could you talk about your relationship with the government?*

PRYCE: I admired many of the people in the government. I was able to establish personal rapport with a lot of them. I was able to get to know both presidents. The first president turned out to be corrupt, clearly seen as such, but he was probably the best politician in the country.

*Q: Who was this?*

PRYCE: This is Callejas who was president when I came. I had a very good relationship with him. On his 50th birthday at his private place he had a party for 50 people. I was one of them and one of the few that stayed at his house. We had a good personal relationship and we were able to help use that to get things done in terms of helping U.S. business, in terms of making sure that we got the right support at the UN, in terms of trying to build economic development, but there was not much in terms of civil-military relationship at that point. We had a very good relationship but we were also very cognizant of the fact that there was corruption in his government.

*Q: When you arrived was there still the problem of almost disassembling the supply apparatus for the Contras because I would have thought this would have brought an awful lot of money in?*

PRYCE: Well no, this had largely been done. There were sections in the embassy which I thought needed to be reduced and Washington certainly agreed with that so I made recommendations for reduction in various areas. It is hard. For one thing when you're down-sizing, I don't care whether it is a school system or a company or whatever it is, you have to be very careful about morale. I think that it worked out pretty well. There were problems in terms of reducing USAID, reducing the intelligence agencies, reducing the military attaché's office, reducing some of the administrative services people. I think we were able to maintain the services that we needed and to bring the embassy down to what was needed.

We had to bring down the size of the U.S. forces at our base at Comayagua. While I was there it was cut in half; the trick was to convince the commander of South-COM. People had been trying to bring that base down for years and there has always been resistance and it never happened. I remember a meeting at the NSC where it was decided that the U.S. presence at the Soto Cano military base would be reduced but it never came to pass. The way it was done was to make a rational case and convince the four star general, the commander of South-COM, that it was in our interest and in his interest to reduce the size of the base. We were successful in doing that and I admire Barry McCaffrey whom was the person that I worked with on it. We were able to cut the base in half. The reduction on the supply side for the Contras really had taken place before I got there so it was not a major problem. One of the problems was to maintain good relations with the Honduran military and at the same time get them to accept the fact that they needed a new role; that they should be proud to be a professional military, to accept a cutback in



their traditional roles and in their traditional purposes, and to change the basic structure. This took a long time to do, but certainly President Reina was very courageous in making moves to restrict the power of the military. He also worked with the president of congress. I worked also closely with the president of congress who is now the president of the country, Carlos Flores. We worked with the church and with business. We worked with a number of people to basically, without interfering, let it be known behind the scenes that we very much thought that President Reina was doing the right thing.

The head of the military was selected by the military and the president really had not very much to say in how this worked out. Three recommendations were made by the military with their choice to the congress and the congress ratified the selection. The president was not in the process of selecting his commander in chief of the armed forces. President Reina set in motion a movement to change that; to have the head of the armed forces be a civilian position which could be filled by either a civilian or a military person and who could be fired by the president. It was a fundamental change and this is something that I think President Reina will be recognized for.

We were behind the scenes I think very helpful in getting that to happen partly because the U.S. government was influential and partly also by having the military understand that we did respect them as professional military but that we felt that they needed to adapt with the times and to have them not fight the president; not fight him as hard as they otherwise would have fought him. Clearly there were many people in the military who did not want to change the system but we were able to help the president in getting it done.

*Q: What was your feeling at the time, again we are talking about the '93 to '96 period, about the influence of the School of the Americas? We're talking about the American military training Latin American military which has come under a great deal of criticism but I was wondering what effects you had when you are talking about the military?*

PRYCE: Frankly I always felt that the School of the Americas was a positive thing and that it became better as time went on. We never taught or encouraged in any way illegal tactics, torture, fratricide. As far as I knew the School of the Americas always emphasized democracy. It emphasized in earlier years efficiency in terms of being a professional military service. It always emphasized the need to be subject to civilian control but as these bad events in terms of military people being repressive, it became more and more evident that the School of the Americas took stronger steps to have human rights as part of their basic program. They never were taught against human rights as far as I know but they did emphasize in later years a positive recognition that you have to take human rights into consideration in everything you do.

I felt, and still feel, that the School of the Americas gets an unfair shot because people who graduated were in some cases people who did illegal actions when they were in positions of command. They didn't get that from the School of the Americas, they got that from their own institution and from the countries where they came from. They were never encouraged in that by the School of the Americas. It is almost like saying that the Wharton School is a school for crooks because Milken was a graduate and look at all the bad things he did.

*Q: He was a stock market manipulator.*

PRYCE: He was a stock market manipulator who went to jail for illegal activities. He didn't learn the ethics at the Wharton School. The Wharton School graduated thousands of ethical business people and I think that this is the situation at the School of the Americas.

*Q: I would have thought that having graduates in the School of the Americas would have made it a little easier to talk about professionalism because you are talking about the world's major professional army and having people exposed to that...*

PRYCE: I'm convinced of that. I must say that I think it was much better to have the School of the Americas to be at Fort Benning in the United States rather than to be in Panama. We tried to keep it in Panama. I was part of the process that tried to convince the Panamanians to let the school stay there but in all honesty that was our policy, I recommended against it. I executed it because I didn't feel that it was something that I had to resign over, but I felt that basically we were better off having the school moved.

We were forced to move to Fort Benning and I thought it was good for the United States and good for the other countries because the people who went to the school got a first class knowledge of what life was like in the United States which is very healthy. I think although there are people who later turned out to be repressive officers went to the School of the Americas, I don't think that they ever got repressive tendencies fortified at the School of the Americas. If anything I think they were diminished and the school was a positive influence all the way around.

*Q: I would have thought that one of the major things you were doing, and you've already alluded to it, would be to watch coups. You're talking about Central America and when you think of it you think of changing governments, usually military dictatorships. This would be something you would be monitoring.*

PRYCE: That is certainly true. I think the political development in Honduras had come to the point where a coup was not very likely. It would be unacceptable because not only the U.S. government, which was a key factor, but the business people would not have accepted a coup, the church would have been very much against the coup, and the body politic in general.

*Q: Including I might add by this time - correct me if I am wrong - all of Latin America. Coups were no longer an accepted thing. You couldn't get away with it the way you used to.*

PRYCE: That's right and the culture was such that you should not have a coup. It was not impossible. There was one possible coup that did not take place but by and large I think the atmosphere was such that coups were not acceptable. It doesn't mean that people didn't keep thinking about it, there were veteran coup plotters.

*Q: What else do you do.*

PRYCE: Yes, right. There was no coup. The perception was that this would be a very bad thing.

*Q: What about economic relations?*

PRYCE: We had very good economic relations. I think we made considerable strides in defending U.S. business and I spent a lot of time in working on helping U.S. business get contracts and contribute to the economic development of the country. I also got involved behind the scenes in trying to help solve labor disputes.

*Q: These would be disputes between American business and Honduran labor?*

PRYCE: Right. I think that during my period there, I don't claim credit for it, but we were able to help in terms of the United Fruit Company, the Chiquita brands. I think they had a more enlightened labor policy and decided that they would invest more in Honduras, invest in the plantations and invest in a more modern labor approach in their relations. It was working out but I'm so sorry about the devastation. I hope that they will go back and reinvest.

*Q: We are talking about Hurricane Mitch.*

PRYCE: Hurricane Mitch which was devastating to the agriculture, specifically bananas. During my time the relations between the banana companies and the workers improved. We were able to also help improve the investment climate, the confidence that the companies had by getting the government to remove illegal squatters from company land. The companies were worried about their investments if they were not able to use this one area of land that they had bought for the purposes for which they bought it.

They were able to convince the government to take a highly unpopular move of moving squatters off land and to do it in a way that nobody got hurt. Of course part of the way that you do that is if you are going to move squatters off land, what you do is you come in with irresistible force, not in terms of repression but in terms of numbers, and let it be known, okay, we are going to move everyone out peaceably but there is no question that this is going to happen. That is a difficult decision to come to. The government did come to that decision and I think that helped the company to increase their investment.

There were also questions of trying to make sure that legitimate contracts were respected and we were able to be helpful in that area. We also worked very hard with USAID to try to get the government to take fiscal measures which were necessary but very unpopular. President Reina when he came into office, talked about things that ought to be done to improve the economy and as he gained experience in office I think he became more convinced of what the right economic path was. He took steps that laid the base for economic development.

The USAID program was diminishing as it was supposed to and Honduras became less dependent on US aid but also the local businesses had moved up. A lot of this happened before I got there but AID was very successful in helping Honduras diversify; not to depend on bananas and coffee for the great preponderance of their exports. We helped develop shrimp fields. We helped develop fresh fruits and vegetables as an additional export for Honduras which would enable them to diversify their economy.

*Q: What about relations from your perspective with Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua? Any problems there particularly at that time?*

PRYCE: No. They were actually quite good. There were problems of jurisdiction with Nicaragua over fishing rights. Fishing rights cause problems between us and England, and Canada. There were problems and we always tried to work both with the military and I worked with Ambassador John Maisto, the U.S. ambassador in Nicaragua, to try to help dampen the problems that would come up. Sometimes fishing boats were shooting each other or more often one government or the other were seizing the fishing vessels; either Honduras seizing Nicaraguan vessels or Nicaragua seizing Honduran vessels. We tried to work it out in an amicable way. There were problems but there were not political problems. The presidents got along very, very well and I think with Belize it was also a good positive relationship.

**DAVID MICHAEL ADAMSON**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Tegucigalpa (1995-1998)**

*David M. Adamson was born in Connecticut and educated at Swarthmore College and Tufts University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, he first served in Vietnam, following which he served in a variety of foreign posts in France, Panama, Portugal and Honduras. During his several assignments in the US Mr. Adamson worked on matters of a political-military nature, including arms control, nuclear proliferation and Soviet issues. In 1998 He served as Faculty Member of the Inter-American Defense College. Mr. Adamson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Well, in 1995, whither?*

ADAMSON: In 1995, I went off to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as political counselor there.

*Q: From when to when?*

ADAMSON: 1995 to 1998.

*Q: What was the situation in Honduras then?*

ADAMSON: Honduras was at a much more basic level of consolidating its democracy than Portugal. Honduras had had a long period of military rule, which only ended in the 1980s. Even when I arrived in 1995, the military still retained very considerable political influence. They were still somewhat politicized, although the President of Honduras, Carlos Roberto Reina, was taking strong, and ultimately effective measures to reduce the political role of the military.

*Q: What was the situation in Central America at this time? There had been a period of tremendous concern to the U.S., and other places, because of the various left/right wars.*

ADAMSON: The situation in Central America had changed radically from when I was there from 1984 to 1987, when I was in Panama. We had, by this point, peace agreements in place, throughout the area. The Salvador/Nicaragua wars were over. The problem with Noriega was over. We had budding democracies, fraught with difficulties, but nevertheless budding democracies all over the region. The situation had changed quite dramatically. As elsewhere on the globe, one wouldn't have expected in the 1980s, that there would have been this favorable turn of events. The main problems at this juncture in Honduras and elsewhere in the region were in consolidating democratic institutions and then reducing poverty and achieving economic development. Here, the problem was very serious in Honduras, even more than in most of the other countries. Honduras and Nicaragua were lacking the most in terms of economic development.

*Q: Who was our ambassador?*

ADAMSON: Our ambassador was Bill Pryce, who had been my deputy chief of mission in Panama.

*Q: What were our main concerns there?*

ADAMSON: Our top concern was the relationship between the Honduran military and the Honduran civilians. Our effort was to buck up the civilians, strengthen their control over the political system, enhance the subordination of the military to the political leadership. We were active in bolstering the presidency of Carlos Roberto Reina. Secondly, economic development. We had a substantial USAID mission in Honduras. We were working very hard in that area as well.

*Q: What tools did you have to work on the democracy and the military?*

ADAMSON: We had some concrete resources. Primarily, I'm sad to say, through the Department of Defense, rather than through State. But we didn't have a whole lot in terms of concrete resources. We had some monies that could be used to train Honduran military, to take them to conferences, conduct military exercises in Honduras, and promote a kind of interaction with our military that we felt was beneficial, in terms of inculcating in them our view of how a military operates in a democracy. Above and beyond that, we had our own prestige and ultimately our own national power. Whenever the rumblings in the military got too loud, and we sensed any possibility that they would step out of their subordinate role, that they would either overthrow a president, or make some kind of an effort that would be inconsistent with our view of how a military should comport itself in a democracy, we were quick to advise them not to do this, or to warn them that there would be serious consequences. These consequences could include reduction or elimination of U.S. assistance, and a process of ostracizing them internationally.

It was through that kind of pressure that our influence was most important in making sure that Honduras stayed on track in terms of democratization. We were front and center, publicly supporting the elected, civilian president. We also had some assistance through the Department of Justice, and other channels to help the police there strengthen their role and to help civilian governance generally.

*Q: Did Cuba play any role, by this point?*

ADAMSON: Cuba did not play much of a role. Honduras did not have formal diplomatic relations with Cuba. We wanted to keep it that way. Occasionally, that issue would pop up. There would be rumors about full diplomatic relations with Cuba. We would jump in and discourage the Hondurans from doing this. There was talk of strengthening relations between Cuba and Honduras, but it never really took much shape during the period I was there.

*Q: What was Honduras' role in the OAS?*

ADAMSON: Honduras is a small player in multilateral institutions. They didn't play much of a role in the OAS, except on issues that were a direct concern to them, such as the delimitation of the border between Honduras and El Salvador, or the de-mining effort that the OAS was facilitating in Central America. Other than on issues of very direct interest to them, they didn't seem to play much of a role.

*Q: At this point, was Nicaragua much of a menace? They were basically a wealthier country.*

ADAMSON: Nicaragua and Honduras were the two poorest in the region. Honduras was probably doing better than Nicaragua, which was still feeling the effects of the civil war, the contras, and the Sandinista years. Honduras had problems with El Salvador in terms of implementing the decision that had been made by the World Court on the land border and on maritime borders in the Gulf of Fonseca, and there were unresolved maritime border issues in the Gulf and on the Atlantic side between Honduras and Nicaragua. The World Court basically ruled in favor of Honduras on the Gulf of Fonseca. The Salvadorans from the Honduran perspective were dragging their feet, in terms of delimiting the border according to the world court decision. There were also, from time to time, problems with Honduran fishing boats being seized by the Salvadorans and especially the Nicaraguans.

*Q: What was your impression of the civilian government in Honduras?*

ADAMSON: They had some good people. The president, while I was there, Carlos Roberto Reina, was an impressive man. The man who was elected to succeed him, and who was inaugurated at the close of my tour, Carlos Flores, was also an impressive man. They were capable men, U.S.-educated, and perceived by us to be generally honest, and wanting to take the country in the right direction. But, generally, Honduran political institutions were weak. The adherence to democratic norms was weak. They basically needed a lot of bucking up. They needed a lot of assistance to keep them pointed in the right direction. Our major effort at this stage was to improve their criminal justice system. We were having some success there. We had some instruments we could use to give aid, and to give training. That was bringing some results,

in terms of strengthening the judiciary, strengthening the police, strengthening the new investigative police, their FBI, if you will. Still, there was a long way to go.

*Q: Was there any residue involved there, from the contra war, particularly with the CIA operation?*

ADAMSON: At this juncture, there was not much of a residue. Much of that interaction had gone away. Washington no longer had an interest in Honduras in that context, since the war in Nicaragua had gone away, and the one in El Salvador had gone away. There was even talk of eliminating the CIA presence entirely. The Hondurans, however, had an internal residue in the sense that the alleged human rights violations committed by the Honduran military during the 1980s remained a controversial domestic political issue. The U.S. sometimes was brought into this because of declassified USG documents that were seen to shed light on this.

*Q: I'm not familiar with Honduras. Some of these Central American states, you talk about the top 30 families, and the top 20, was there a family oligarchy running around?*

ADAMSON: There was something of an oligarchy. There were a small number of families, but there was less of this phenomenon in Honduras, than elsewhere in Central America. Honduras had traditionally not had a large landowning or otherwise wealthy class. This was changing a bit in the years I was there because the president who had preceded Reina, Rafael Leonardo Callejas, had broken all the records, in terms of corruption. He had stolen blindly from the national treasury, and had created new bastions of wealth in society. Honduras was becoming more polarized on this wealth.

*Q: How did you find the embassy? Did one get around in social society?*

ADAMSON: Yes, one could get around. Honduran society was pretty permeable. The U.S. and the U.S. ambassador cut a pretty wide swath in Honduras, and the ambassador certainly moved in high society.

*Q: How did you find the military? If you were attaches, could you keep testing the pulse of the military?*

ADAMSON: Yes, through our attaches and so on, we had fairly good contact through the military. The military, during the time I was there, was still led by corrupt generals who weren't that professionally oriented, but rather were more oriented toward personal aggrandizement. The analogy that had been the case during my tour in Panama, and was made in Honduras too, was the military being a kind of mafia. That remained the case in the period I was there.

*Q: Was there much of immigration to the U.S.? I know there was almost daily people coming from El Salvador, but how about Honduras?*

ADAMSON: It was the same, with respect to Honduras. Perhaps a little less than El Salvador. Getting a visa to go to the U.S. was a priority for a lot of Hondurans. Emigrating legally, or otherwise, often otherwise, to the U.S. was an objective throughout their society. The U.S. was

seen as the land of economic opportunity. This was certainly an issue. The U.S. consulate had a lot to deal with.

*Q: Did you have a problem with being able to turn off your contacts when the subject of visas came up?*

ADAMSON: We had a procedure for interacting with the consular section on this. We had a lot of legitimate visa requests coming through in the political section. Some were less legitimate. It could be a nuisance, but it generally wasn't a big problem.

*Q: Were there any crises while you were there?*

ADAMSON: There really weren't any crises. Perhaps once or twice, there was a concern on our part that the Honduran military might take steps against the political leadership. We had to make some effort to quash that. Generally speaking, our problem was getting the Hondurans to break out of lethargy to do things we thought were useful in terms of improving their own democratic institutions or moving on an international front to sign agreements with us on anti-drug or other functional issues that were a concern to us.

*Q: Was drug trafficking going through Honduras?*

ADAMSON: There was some going through or around Honduras. Generally, we had good cooperation with the Hondurans, but resources were always an issue, and we had to provide them a lot.

*Q: What about the UN? Were you running with the usual laundry list?*

ADAMSON: Yes, we were running with the usual laundry list. It was difficult to get much out of the Hondurans, by way of a definitive reaction on issues. They were polite to us, but they were generally going to go the way of Latin America and the Third World. They were on the Security Council during the first year of my tour, and actually they tended to be quite helpful there. Generally, we had good access to the foreign ministry, though their lack of depth could be a problem. The ambassador talked to the foreign minister quite easily. I could talk with the deputy foreign minister, and the senior people at the foreign ministry, of whom there were really very few working the UN issues. They had one brilliant veteran diplomat, Policarpo Callejas, who was charming and professional and very experienced. We could generally get good access, and rely on the Hondurans to not do us any harm, although we couldn't rely on them to necessarily support us.

*Q: This was a time of considerable cutting of resources in the Foreign Service? Did this effect you at all?*

ADAMSON: Yes. I had found in Portugal, and to a greater extent in Honduras, that there was willy-nilly cutting, particularly of the substantive sections, political and economic. While I was in each of these posts, the political section was undergoing reduction. At the same time, the tasks we were being expected to undertake were growing because in addition to traditional portfolios,



we were being given new functional issue portfolios, international crime and international narcotics, and so on. We simply didn't have the support we needed, but in the time-honored Foreign Service way, we were supposed to be able to accomplish whatever we had to with whatever resources we had.

*Q: Was there any solution?*

ADAMSON: In Tegucigalpa the problem was mitigated in various ways, by delaying cuts and using other agency officers when possible, but these were palliatives. Ultimately performance was affected by the level of resources one could bring to bear. At one point the Department sent us a cable envisaging further, drastic cuts in the residual FSO presence at the Embassy, and the Ambassador sent back a strong message, more or less suggesting we might as well shut the embassy if we were going to cut back that much.

*Q: Was there much to gain in getting out and around in Honduras? Going to the towns and villages*

ADAMSON: There is always a certain advantage to be gained from that, in terms of getting a feel of the winds that are blowing in the political and economic arenas, developing and strengthening contacts, seeing people in their home environment, etc. But, in Honduras and elsewhere in my career, I found that that was one of the things that was first to go when you have limited resources. That took you out of the office and you couldn't do what you needed to do had you been in the office. I have to admit, though, that I met my future wife on an official trip to the north coast of Honduras.

*End of reader*