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Adios, pues, San Pedro Sula

My colleagues in the A-100 class at FSI were ostentatiously delighted that it was I who was assigned to the unknown jungle consulate at San Pedro Sula, not one of them. Those halcyon days of our first dip into Foreign Service life were brightened by their thoughtless banter inspired by the dismal Post Report, which branded the post a veritable career death trap. They consigned me to a smelly path of consular drudgery never to surface. So insignificant was this forgotten post that Ambassador Raymond Hare surprised us all, and condemned the post to oblivion when he asked the simplistic, pertinent, and yet to be answered question: “Just where is San Pedro Sula—Mr. Tinny?”

Surprise, surprise! In that august body of naive, budding diplomats only yours truly knew the answer. Alas, to know, to touch, is to be caught in the curse of the town’s cruel founder and brutal patron, the polite Conquistador, with the chestnut, *castaña*-colored hair, Don Pedro de Alvarado.

Actually, some of the fondest most vivid memories Josephine and I have of the Foreign Service are of San Pedro Sula. As I said to the relief of the flustered young lady, the personnel officer who mistakenly revealed the name of my first post to me, “Let us keep San Pedro Sula our secret.”

Despite the gloomy post report that branded San Pedro Sula as “boring, frustrating and monotonous,” Ambassador Hare knew

that every post is what you make it. He also knew that challenges and opportunities for all of us would come in many guises. Finally, if he did not know the latitude and longitude of San Pedro Sula, he did know it was not Samarkand. Unlike the Walrus he didn't talk of those things. FSI gave us a hint, through a glass darkly, of the stresses of Foreign Service life. We had to make our way along the golden, but narrow and uneven road to Samarkand.

The public and bloody birthing by the naked *mestizo* woman in front of me and the world on the fountain steps in the Plaza on my day six was, I now know, not extraordinary for the time and place. With that birth, and if the result of birth is death, then the murder of Jack Briscoe on day one gave me a hint as to "just where is San Pedro Sula?" The murders of Briscoe (Day One) and Leroy (circa Day 4015) were like bookends bracketing my search. How often had I witlessly, like a comedic antihero, escaped my own murder and the definitive answer to Ambassador Hare's conundrum? The great *pistolero* Lee Marston might not have died so abjectly when he did had I not blinked. To my eternal sorrow I was slow on the draw. Lee was fast, never blinked, and dodged death for ninety-seven years. At the intense, Wagnerian finale of the sad saga of Nazi Party leader Hans Mueller, what was my role? Was handsome, aloof Frieda, the *Valkyrie* who guarded his soul, innocent? Why didn't she want me to sign her visa? Her brother, a Wehrmacht general, last commander of the Afrika Korps, on Hitler's posthumous orders brought death and the ghost of Rommel to San Pedro Sula. We lived and died in the wake of Don Pedro's curse of cruel unconcern for human life.

The omnivorous, promiscuous ear of the Walrus has heard many things, but not all things. Granted, I must confess, Sanpedranos and we pseudo Sanpedranos have become a cynical, callous lot. We accept flying shoes and airships, sealing wax, cabbage palms, and if not kings, *los presidentes*, with equanimity. O. Henry told the story of consular life in his *opera-bouffe* novel *Cabbages and Kings*. His town of Coralio was comparable to my mid-twentieth-century San Pedro Sula. He brought in Thalia for comedy, whereas Melpomene for tragedy was my guardian angel. On the last day, as on the first, frantic frustration, bitter boredom, and mournful, monotonous death darkened my years in this unknown, unlamented, and God-forsaken hole.

In the long days and short years of our tour in San Pedro Sula, so often it came down to my wife in her basic black dress—she looks good in black—me in my new suit, and Charlie wearing his necktie, all following one coffin or another. When the native Honduran and Sanpedrano grandparents of our esteemed senior consular clerk, Aida, were literally hacked to pieces with machetes and their house ransacked by *banditos*, the police commented: “They were old.”

Four election officials, fellow Rotarians and community leaders, were shot dead on a muddy highway during my first coup d’état. Their obituaries offered condolences to the widows. Voters had a choice: eat the ballots of the wrong color or be shot. Sanpedrano voters chewed and swallowed hard.

The death and burial of Lee Marston, chief of police and mayor, whose guns sometimes brought a modicum of law and order to San Pedro Sula, might as well have taken place on the moon as far as Sanpedranos were concerned. Lee Marston and Lee Christmas, once local heroes, had lived and almost died here for two lifetimes, were lovers of the ladies, and friends of their blindsided cuckolded husbands. The *pistoleros* may have called themselves “Sanpedranos,” but they were not; they were, and would remain, *norteamericanos*, with the power and prestige that name bestowed. Marston left a woman who called herself his daughter and two little girls who were her daughters and possibly his granddaughters. Lee Christmas left a daughter. Machine Gun Guy Moloney left no one to regret his leaving or hail his return—except me and I am glad to do it.

Louis Ware, my 1930s boyhood neighbor—I talk about him later—and a forgotten fugitive from the law, revealed himself to me but left no forwarding address. Our meeting after a quarter century tells us we each live in a small world. I wondered about his bare legged sister Clare who looked good in shorts and with an impish smile in those long ago neighborly days.

What mark did I leave in San Pedro Sula? Rather, what deep crippling wounds did the detour to the town of de Alvarado carve into my hide? I can show you the scars.

Would any of my family and colleagues leave anyone to note we had come and gone? I doubt anyone in San Pedro Sula had heard of or read O. Henry’s account as vice consul in “Coralio,” and few

Americans have. Charlie, for one, did better on that score than the rest of us; he went back.

Twice married, twice divorced, Charlie courted and married Leonor Gavidia, daughter of a Sanpedrano physician. She was an American citizen by virtue of being born on one of her parents' visits to the United States. Charlie and Leonor had two beautiful daughters, innocent victims of de Alvarado's curse. Despite her passport, Leonor was a sanpedrana and her roots to blood and place were strong.

As for me, what would be my legacy? Suppose I had refused a visa to an applicant who felt he should have one or had pried too deeply into the history of a scared fugitive? Louis, whose history I knew, might have feared being reported by me. Men have died for less. Fugitives flee to Honduras to get lost not found by an overzealous but naive vice consul.

Our street with permanent ruts, usually hub deep in mud, had little through automobile traffic. It was a pedestrian path for Sanpedranos who lived in shacks and tiny farms up the first slopes behind the town. The short distance from the Consulate to my house was dark and desolate. I often wondered on the few times I carried my trusty .45 if I would have the guts to shoot first. For anyone who wanted to find me, where we lived was known. Would my obituary contain those ominous words "he died suddenly, one night on his usual walk home"? The voracious pi-dogs would destroy any clues.

More useful than the .45 was a solid stick, like a cudgel. It was good for keeping the yelping, ravenous, cowardly but aggressive feral pi-dogs at bay. There were hundreds of them, and they were a real threat. Howling started after dark on one side of town, traveled in a wave across town, faded into the distance on the other side, and then began again somewhere else. Spotting a lone walker, they circled ever closer, until several on opposite sides charged in simultaneously for the kill. One tense encounter with pi-dogs from which I got away unharmed taught me a lesson.

Complementing the pi-dogs were the *zopilotes*, vultures, who often roosted on the peak of our roof where they scratched around noisily with their vicious claws and beaks. When the *zopilotes* were there, and we always knew when they were, more than likely packs

of pi-dogs lurked nearby. Prey for the dogs was food for the vultures.

Conversely, Sanpedranos could also be courteous, friendly, and hospitable to guests. When we arranged to have our third son born in the *clinica* on the slope above town, they were pleased. American wives had traditionally flown to New Orleans, or home to mother, to have their babies. The *clinica's* doctors and owners were the Bendaña brothers. Guillermo was the oldest; Sergio, in general practice, my wife's pediatrician; and Rene, the youngest, the pathologist. All were American educated and impressed me as capable, conscientious doctors. Guillermo had lost interest in treating human patients, but kept his hand in while he concentrated on veterinary medicine. He also managed the family cheese factory, entirely separate from the *clinica*. Bendaña's popular cheeses sold in fifty and one hundred pound wheels throughout Honduras and neighboring countries. Sergio took an interest in us after Josephine declared her intention to have her baby in his *clinica*, and one night may have saved her life.

She was devastated by an infestation of cattle ticks encountered in a careless moment on an archeological site, an ancient Mayan village discovered by the United Fruit Company. After the official survey, the company archeologist oft times invited us to visit the site. Pottery shards and obsidian knife blades were sometimes were to be found, and Josephine once found a human bone.

This time she wandered off the cleared site—a big mistake. By that night her beautiful body lay sprawled naked across our bed, arms and legs akimbo, unconscious, burning up with fever and covered in red tick bites. My panic phone call brought Dr. Bendaña, and we coated her in a salve he brought in a double handful of little glass jars stamped "sample." By morning her fever had broken. She was sleeping comfortably, oblivious to her ordeal, on the way to full recovery.

In preparation for the baby's birth—we did not yet know the sex—we visited the *clinica*; a long low building of heavy adobe construction, with a roof of handmade tiles, located high enough in the hills to be above the volcanic dust and almost volcanic heat.

The woodwork, the doors, windows, and furniture, were beautiful Honduran mahogany, *lignum vitae*, and other exotic woods.

Josephine received a gracious reception and was shown “her” room-to-be, adorned with a life-sized portrait of the Virgin with one arm outstretched, the other clenched over her heart. The room was clean and cool, with a dramatic, panoramic view over the jungle toward the sea, unmarred by the town sweltering below.

Josephine’s contractions began in the very late evening of December 13, 1957, after the annual Christmas program of the international school at the Casino Sanpedrano. After a cup of coffee we were off to the *clinica*. The three Bendañas rotated night duty so one was always there. That night I turned her over to the vet and cheese maker, Guillermo. When I asked if I should wait, he said in his brusque, raspy voice: “Come back at 6:00, it will be born then.” At precisely 6:00, December 14, 1957, I stepped through the door to hear the birth cries of our third son, Gregory. They called him *Gregorio lindo* (beautiful Gregory). Sanpedrano friends were anxious to see the *gringito* born in San Pedro Sula. He was a ten-pound baby, born in a perfect delivery. Veterinarians do these things right.

In the preceding months, Gregory’s impending advent had been the subject of much planning. He was the first child born to a consular officer in San Pedro Sula in recorded history. Not even O. Henry, a bachelor, had speculated on such an event. Some Americans warned us that, if a boy, he would be subject to service in the Honduran Army. Charlie and I knew better; the consulate was American soil, and he was born 100 percent American. The one baby necessity not available in town, one on which Josephine insisted, was American baby food. She wanted the gooey stuff in little glass jars with the picture of baby Humphrey Bogart on the label. Six cartons of assorted flavors were promptly ordered from Henry Fransen’s *supermercado*. Surely, cheaper ocean freight—we had seven months—would be good enough. Wrong, ocean freight was nineteenth century, skip ahead to the twentieth century; use airfreight, always!

Seven months later, early in December, the chief of customs at Puerto Cortes, Army Colonel Morales, telephoned to say my baby food would arrive at noon on December 24. Hopefully, the baby, due before then, could survive a few days without Bogart’s help. Col. Morales was one of the army officers who had gotten escape-hatch visas “to take my daughter to school,” just prior to the recent

coup. Perhaps, he felt he owed me a favor, or was preparing for the next *coup*. Furthermore, he said: "If you are on the pier, I will have the six cartons loaded directly into your jeep. If the boxes get separated, none can be released until all are brought together. I will handle the formalities. As for you, '*Adios, pues!*' goodbye, and off you go."

This is how business can be expedited here, with the proper incentive. He expected his next visa to be issued just as expeditiously. "I'll be there," I said.

The distance from San Pedro Sula to the port in Puerto Cortes is little more than thirty miles, but the road is unpaved and crossed time and again by unbridged creeks. When Josephine was along she hoisted up her skirt and waded in on her long legs to test the depth. With a ten-day-old baby she was not coming on this trip.

Charlie insisted I drive the consulate Jeep, despite a leaky radiator, because it had four-wheel drive. Going was downhill and easy; coming back would be a test of Jeep and me. Food, drinking water, my household pistol, the .45 Colt, seemed appropriate; a machete, rope, a spare tire, and a new straw hat seemed adequate equipment. No bucket was handy so the hat would do double duty.

"Promise to be home tonight," my wife said, as early on a dreary, drizzly Christmas Eve morning I hit the road. Major traffic concerns were slow-moving ox and donkey carts piled high with hay or vegetables, and fast-moving lumber trailer-trucks, laden with huge pine logs and exotic hardwoods roaring down from the mountains of Yoro and La Esperanza. The trucks' brakes barely slowed them down as locked wheels skidded on a road lubricated with slippery mud or talcum powder like dust, and the trucks fishtailed wildly. When a big rig came roaring up behind me, I snuggled over to the shoulder, however narrow, and stayed there.

To hit a cart could be a matter of life or death for the driver of the car, depending upon the severity of the accident. Damage to the cart could cost only the repairs to the "luxury" cart. Damage to the animal could be very expensive to this "one of a kind" beast. Injury to the cart's driver, or worse, to a pedestrian, could mean real trouble. Instantly a mob gathered to pelt the driver with stones, or in the case of a really bad accident, butchered with machetes. After an accident, keep going to the next police checkpoint, or better yet,

just keep going. The killing of a *norteamericano* is dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders.

I reached Puerto Cortes well before noon. In his hot, stuffy office in the Aduana (Customs) compound, Colonel Morales greeted me. Two snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wessons on his desk served as paperweights—and to settle complaints. He said the ship was due *prontissimo*, very soon. An hour later he said, go to the hotel for lunch and a cold *cerveza*. “Go enjoy Puerto Cortes.”

Seated at the hotel bar with bottles of *cerveza* in front of them, were two of the lumbermen whose trucks I had dodged and who knew what *prontissimo* meant. One, Plowden, owned a sawmill near the rail head of Potrerillos, the end of the road type town which made San Pedro Sula look like a Sunday school. He cut timber from the mountains to the south and east. The other man, tall and boney, worked for him and handled big and fast rigs. We got into conversation and I asked where they were from. Both said “Tampa,” my hometown. Interested, I asked the tall one “What section?”

“Seminole Heights.” That is where I had lived. “What street?” I asked.

“Paris Street,” he said. That was my street! “What number?”

“706,” he said, two doors from 702, my house!

Then he said, “I’m Ware, Louis Ware,” and it all came back to me.

He had been the neighborhood troublemaker, not mean, just always into mischief. Older than I. In 1933 when we both lived on Paris Street, he was then in his late teens. With a few dollars in his pocket, an A-Model Ford coupe, *sans* muffler, he was a local character. Gregarious and likable, sometimes Louis would give me a ride in his car. We got along, despite the age difference, or maybe because of it. Clare, his tomboy kid sister, older and bigger than me, was my nemesis. What tortures she inflicted afterward are lost in the dimness of faded memory. I think Louis, not always around and who thought it all very funny, came to my rescue.

The summer of 1933 saw the final, hectic days of Prohibition. “Revenuers” were making a last ditch effort to stem the rampant bootlegging. One night Louis was delivering a load of whiskey to the “Blazing Stump,” a neighborhood bar close by at the corner of our dirt street and the hard road. As he drove up he was waylaid

by deputies. Trying to elude capture, turning in the deep sandy ruts his car overturned and his friend riding shotgun in the front seat was killed. Louis was uninjured and charged with manslaughter and bootlegging. Scared, he jumped bail and ran. His parents, taking Clare with them, thank goodness, left town never to be heard of again. Now, twenty four years later, Louis sat on a bar stool next to me. He knew me and that I was government. I was, he said, "the law." The way he said it was a question; "What was I going to do about the manslaughter and bootlegging charges?"

Charges against Louis had not been pressed but by then he was gone, on his way, it turns out, to Honduras. He saw good prospects in lumber and stayed. He didn't give me details of his life, the less said the better, but the question remained.

Louis' accident had been almost a quarter century ago. Without knowing the law I was sure the statute of limitations had taken effect. He didn't need to worry about a twenty-four year charge of manslaughter, or bootlegging. I told him: "If you want to go to Tampa, come in sometime and get your passport renewed." He probably knew that too but seemed happy to hear me say it.

A messenger from the colonel told us that our ship was in so we all headed to the docks. While the lumbermen took care of their logs, the ship lowered a pallet with my cartons of baby food down beside my Jeep. The colonel was as good as his word. In the late afternoon with an "*Adios, pues,*" I started home.

Laboring up the inclines in low gear the Jeep's radiator drained quickly and, with much hissing, steam poured out from under the hood. Each time that happened I would stop at the next stream and, using my new straw hat, refill the radiator. As it was getting dark about midway, but with the inclines ahead getting steeper, the radiator started hissing at a spot with no stream and not much of a shoulder to pull off on. With the engine off, the jungle became noisy with unidentifiable but ominous sounds. Black panthers were not uncommon in these jungles. We had seen them with their long, thick tails on field trips. They and other carnivores would be coming to the streams to drink. Wild boars in fast-moving herds were vicious, unpredictable, and exceedingly dangerous. Gangs of unruly two-legged predators, loitering about ready for any opportunity to cause trouble or for loot, could be worse. My .45 would

make them go crazy. If one chance passerby spotted me, a lone traveler, and my presence became known, I would be a tempting, easy target. When I needed help most Louis and Plowden roared up the road. In the glare of their headlights, I flagged them down.

"How about a tow," I shouted.

They quickly grasped the situation and hooked a logging chain onto the Jeep. For a second time, Louis was there when I needed help. It was slow going but before midnight they dropped me off close to my house. After brief "so longs," they headed up into the mountains. I never saw either again. The big trees and big money are there; it's hard work but a good place to hide. Besides, Louis, a born mischief-maker, may have had other misdemeanors and charges he forgot to mention to worry about. It was after midnight when I got there but I was, as promised, home for Christmas.

Gregory did not like the baby food and never did eat much of it. I didn't like it either. He thrived on the boiled milk Honduran families with babies always kept in a pot on the fire.

This was our second Christmas here and would be our last. On the Sunday after that next Thanksgiving, I would read a third Thanksgiving message from President Eisenhower at the church, this time my own "*adios, pues*" to San Pedro Sula.

All of that was still eleven months in the future but living in San Pedro was now routine. We were not given stateside vacations each year, as were most of the expatriates in the private sector. In fact, while researching to update the post report, I discovered that the lowest-paid American employees of Tabacalera and United Fruit were paid about twice as much as I was.

We did take a short vacation after a consultation visit to Tegucigalpa but could not really relax. We were headed for Costa Rica, which I had visited in navy days, because that was as far as the Pan-American Highway reached. We got as far as Managua, Nicaragua, where car trouble forced us to turn back. The Nicaragua we saw was flat, hot, and dusty, and not everyone carried a machete as in Honduras. There were no Turcos, Arab escapees, now businessmen, from the Ottoman pogroms.

We had other compensations; United Fruit let us use an ocean-front vacation house on a glistening white sand beach at Tela, on a space-available basis. They also let us use (when available) their

lodge at Lake Yojoa, a freshwater, ice cold mountain lake, ten miles long, half as wide, and full of accommodating fish. Of course, and this was our secret, we had the Mueller's mountain pool.

In April 1958, I got my first chance to be on the receiving end of a "friendship visit" by a U.S. Naval vessel when the USS *Bigelow* (DDL 942) came to La Ceiba. The *Bigelow* was the first of a new, larger, and more powerful class of destroyers called "Destroyer Leader," (DDL). Embassy Tegucigalpa delegated responsibility for the visit to consulate San Pedro Sula. Charlie and I were pleased and flew to La Ceiba to make the arrangements and to meet the *Bigelow*.

Why the navy chose La Ceiba was never explained to us. It could have been because the Standard Fruit Company, founded by the Vacarro Brothers of New Orleans, shipped their bananas from La Ceiba and the company had influence with the navy. It could have been because the communists were less obstreperous in La Ceiba than in San Pedro Sula and Puerto Cortes. Two years ago the communists had almost closed down United Fruit with strikes and sabotage in the ports of Puerto Cortes and Tela. At this same time, both companies were in a long-term fight against "Panama disease," a ruinous banana fungus. The two: Panama disease and the communists almost wiped out the industry in Central America. That would have meant the literal end of the "Banana Republics." Both threats were defeated. It could have been that the navy wanted to stay away from San Pedro Sula because the consulate was there. There had been only a consular agent in La Ceiba for fifty years.

The navy knew the consulate was no longer in La Ceiba, because it had used San Pedro Sula as its center of relief operations for hurricane damaged British Honduras in 1954. After the hurricane navy officers helicoptered in and landed on the lawn at Sig Lingelbach's Cervecería Nacional brewery. Driving through San Pedro Sula, which was undamaged by the storm but appeared its usual trashy bedraggled self, they had exclaimed "My God! What devastation!"

By contrast, La Ceiba was an attractive town isolated from the rest of Honduras by ocean, forest, mountains, and the personal

preference of La Ceibans. To the north lay the clear deep Caribbean, the beautiful *hondos*, the depths known to and feared by Columbus when the wind was wrong. They were fertile fishing waters sheltered by the Bay Islands. Approaches from east and west were hindered by thick forests in which Columbus reported "many pines, oaks, and seven kinds of palms." There were *ceibas*, hence the name, flowering trees with stout trunks and long limbs which reach out horizontally. Southward, the eight-thousand-foot-high range *Cordillera Nombre de Dios* (Name of God Mountains) separated Atlantida, the *departemento*, province, and its capital, La Ceiba, from the contagion of the rest of Honduras.

Clouds from the north heavy with moisture were forced to drop their rain on the fertile coastal plain. La Ceiba had a corner on exotic lumber from the mountains which they uniquely, and quaintly, exported on Swiss flag vessels. These ships called Basle home port but in fact used Dutch ports. Entranced by the *cordillera*, I prayed that its beautiful, distant vistas had comforted the last earthly thoughts of my favorite *pistolero*, Lee Marston.

Finally, the insularity of La Ceiba has been cherished and fostered over the centuries by the preference of its inhabitants. They prided themselves on what they had, and they wanted to keep it.

The pride and joy of La Ceiba is threefold, of which the first is its relatively "pure" Andalusian Spanish blood, *limpieza de sangre*, with minimal African and Indian input. Second is the observance of colonial era Spanish customs, traditions, and manners preserved through usage. They do this much as the Bay Islanders try to preserve their Elizabethan era English identity. Third is a confluence of the first two, which has produced beautiful, gracious women of whom it is justly proud and jealously defensive.

First, Charlie and I had to establish ourselves with the local authorities. We called on the *Alcalde Municipal* (the mayor); Colonel Marcelino Ponce; the *Gobernador-Politico*, the governor of the *Departemento*, Atlantida, Colonel Napoleon Cubas Turcios; and finally, the real wielder of power, even in insular La Ceiba, the *Comandante de Armas*, local commander of the Army, Major Raul Diaz Garcia. All were gracious with the dignity of old power; they knew who they were. Charlie knew from experience that it was not us they honored but the United States. The ship was met by some of the

officials standing on the pier. Afterward, we took the *Bigelow's* Captain, Commander Audley H. McCain, to call on them.

Charlie hosted a party on shore the first night for local officialdom who came arrayed in uniforms or sashes of office, and many leading citizens. Other officials included Major Ruben Hernandez Lopez, deputy army commander; Captain Jose Joaquin Garcia, chief of police; P.M. Miguel Suazo, a political leader; and Doctor Salvador Godoy, police commissioner. The renowned beauty of the faces and figures of the women was in full display in fashionable, lavish *décolleté* gowns. The pomp and ceremony I had enjoyed so much in my navy days, and greatly missed in San Pedro Sula, was refreshing. The *Bigelow's* officers and crew were resplendent in dress whites and a credit to the captain, their ship, the navy, and the United States. The three cases of whiskey Charlie had brought were consumed *con mucho gusto*, with great pleasure. It was an event to be long remembered by one and all and I am sure it was. I do.

The *Bigelow* responded with a luncheon for fifty one guests on board the next day with as much protocol and formality as it could muster. There were side boys for the guests, with the Boatswain piping them aboard. The officers wore swords. The ship even produced a band. There were guided tours for the La Ceibans. There was a "Limbo pole," a long rod held horizontally and danced under leaning backwards, balanced by legs and arms, by the daring, then gradually lowered. The limbo pole was introduced from a port call in Jamaica. To sit on the bridge in the captain's chair or to stand in the Combat Information Center (CIC) with its electronic screens glowing were thrilling new experiences for young and old.

Standard Fruit gave the crew a train tour of a banana plantation and hosted a swimming party. The company also arranged other sports, sightseeing, and shopping in town and at the company store.

In my report I said that the visit was an unqualified success for both the U.S. Navy and La Ceiba. When the ship shifted its berth I got to ride along and reported that the ship "is a dream, fully air conditioned... a marvel of electronics and automation." Then, my "dream" was over and it was back to San Pedro Sula and reality. In October 1963, five and a half years later, I again hosted the *Bigelow*; this time she was on a routine visit to Aden and was then the flagship of Destroyer Squadron Sixteen. We hosted many port calls in Aden but not one was as memorable as my first in La Ceiba.

April was a good month in another way. I got promoted. The numbering had been changed so I went from class seven to class six. The promotion list showed that everyone in our A-100 class had been promoted and that only one man, J. Harden Rose, had left the service for bigger things. Some said he had bettered himself, however impossible that seemed to us, because his first post was a prize. He would have started at the top; in the Secretariat, the office of the secretary. Harden was a Princeton man, made in the F. Scott Fitzgerald mold, engaged to Georgia Rockefeller. My promotion meant an annual pay raise of \$600. Today that doesn't sound like much, and frankly, it wasn't much then.

Foreign Service life is hard, strenuous and always stressful. The State Department is a demanding taskmaster putting our lives, and careers, as we had been warned, on the line. We are always subject to the exigencies of the service. Our first tours were not over, and already we were learning that truth. Twelve years later when my time ran out, most of the nineteen had disappeared. Only one of our class, Thomas Smith, our only Harvard man and only World War II Marine, made ambassador; but despite that success his was a sad, hard luck story. In a freak accident he fell down an elevator shaft and was permanently crippled. He hung on and served in Tunis, Paris, University of Wisconsin for postgraduate study, the National War College, London, and, finally, Lagos, as ambassador. During his tour there he contracted the African virus that killed him. Tom was smart, knowledgeable, cultured, and handsome, picture-perfect ambassadorial material. Better yet, everyone liked him and took vicarious pride in his success. He was everything a Foreign Service officer could wish to be.

More excitement came in June when our ambassador, Whiting Willauer—who, like Ambassador Hare, apparently didn't know where San Pedro Sula was because he never came—resigned. Willauer had been a political appointee and was a talented man. He had been number two to General Claire Chennault of the World War II Flying Tigers in China and afterward in the Flying Tiger

Airline. The stateside press described him as our “skin-diving ambassador” because he did a lot of diving off the north coast using his own tank and aqua lung. He also recovered the body of a boy drowned in the river near Tegucigalpa. His diving trips were a source of envy to me as a diver.

At the end of the Korean War I had trained with the Underwater Demolition Team Five, UDT, in Coronado, California. However, Ambassador Willauer was not interested in me or my diving skills. I did get one up on him when I had a couple of days diving on the reefs off Punta Ycacos, British Honduras. United Fruit invited me to go up on their yacht the *Chamelecon*. Ambassador Willauer lost part of his stomach when he drank from a water can filled with gasoline. Finally, in a period when many ambassadors spent months away from their posts, Ambassador Willauer held the record by an American ambassador for the most time out of country, 108 days. In a sad ending to a generally unsatisfactory tour of duty, his beautiful twenty-two year old daughter contracted polio—endemic in Honduras—and was evacuated on a stretcher. Tending to her in Tegucigalpa must have taken a heavy toll on his time and energy.

Our new ambassador, Robert Newbegin, was a veteran Foreign Service officer familiar with Latin America. He had opposed U.S. insistence that Latin American countries deport Germans while we secretly smuggled Nazi scientists and intelligence agents into the United States. Too bad he never met Hans Mueller and confronted his problem. Newbegin could have backed up his words with help from Hans.

Soon after his arrival Ambassador Newbegin drove up to San Pedro Sula; Charlie and I delighted in showing him the sights. To the places previously mentioned we added the brewery and the prison, the latter a four centuries old Spanish fort deep in the swamps. The prisoners’ families had to bring food for them. He came once and apparently saw enough of Honduras to satisfy his curiosity. Besides a new Embassy and residence were being built in “Teguc” and that diverted his attention.

Lawrence S. Eagleburger, a new officer, class eight, who had recently arrived in Tegucigalpa, accompanied Ambassador Newbegin. Larry was a handsome young bachelor, very popular in the embassy, already recognized as a nascent star, destined for a great

career. By the time I was in class five, eight or nine years later, he was class two. Larry became a protégé of Henry Kissinger. His goal, which he achieved, was to be ambassador to Yugoslavia. That was his first stop on his way to becoming a respected secretary of state. He is the only career Foreign Service officer to be so promoted. He knew where San Pedro Sula was and was smart enough, except for one visit, to stay away.

More memorable than our funerals were our weddings. When the sister of our non-immigrant visa clerk, Lena Sunceri, was married the President of Honduras Francesco Villeda-Morales attended. They had two wedding cakes, flown down from New Orleans, and 100 bottles of champagne for starters.

Poor Charlie, with transfer orders to the department in hand, he lingered too long in San Pedro Sula, without power and not much prestige. His replacement, Consul Harold Wood, whom I described in the last chapter, with his orders as principal officer in hand piled in on top of him. Wood had a wife and valued his prerogatives and privacy. Harold could be demanding. Charlie wanted to stay and tie up some "loose ends," so he moved out of the consulate residence into the Hotel Bolivar and out of his office into the file room. It didn't matter; the curse of de Alvarado had doomed Charlie long ago. Even I sensed something amiss. Charlie didn't ask for my help and my plate was full. Could I have done more for Charlie, *pistolero* Lee Marston, and the "good" Nazi, Hans? In every case, what could I have done to avert what in the end was not averted? As they say in San Pedro Sula, "*Que sera, sera,*" what will be, will be.

In the beginning, Charlie seemed to have much going for him. An army veteran of WWII; he was from a good family; and a direct descendent of a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Charlie was fluent in Spanish and German, with degrees from Yale in Music and Classical Languages. He had bad luck in his first two marriages—although, his second wife, whom he met while posted to Prague, was from Czechoslovakian nobility. He said she was a "princess." Charlie left in 1958; came back and married Leonor Gavidia, one of his smarter moves. We certainly wished them well and they stayed together until he died in 2002. In Washington Char-