

The Communicator

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Rio Huallaga- Peru – 1967 - Part I

By Merv McBride

What an incredible experience! Even to this day I can hardly believe that I was actually given the opportunity to travel through the jungles of Peru.

During my three-year posting with the Canadian Embassy in Lima, Peru, it was mine and my family's great fortune to befriend a small group of Canadian Priests who belonged to the Oblate order. Father Mac and Father John were two from this group.

During one of their visits to our home in Miraflores (a residential area of Lima) these two Priests invited me to take a fantastic voyage into the jungle with them. They were to visit a few of their parishes along the Rio Huallaga, which they had not visited in over seven years. Without hesitation I said "Yes".

Departure day finally arrived and I found myself with the two Priests standing in a bus station in the Rimac area of Lima. It was quite late at night when we boarded a rickety old bus and, in a cloud of smoke and a rather large backfire, we headed out into the coastal desert. Our first stop was to be Trujillo to the North. As soon as we past the airport and the port of Callao I really knew that we were indeed on our way to a great adventure.

Around midnight the noisy, stinky old bus gave one last 'belch' and died leaving us stranded in the middle of the night on a not-so-busy coastal highway. It was cold! I now knew what everyone was telling me about how cold the desert gets after the sun drops from the sky. Fathers Mac and John were obviously used to this sort of thing as they calmly hauled their luggage out of the bus, sat on the most solid one, and retrieved a flask of rum from their smaller one. We sipped and shivered as we waited for help. About an hour later an equally decrepit bus pulled up alongside and offered us a ride to our destination. The rest of the trip into Trujillo was uneventful.

Arriving at the Trujillo airport we headed towards a small terminal that housed one staff member who was selling tickets to the interior. Our first stop in the Jungle was to be a small village called 'JuanJui' (which literally meant 'John runs' as it was an infamous stop for people running from the law in the days when transportation to the interior was even more difficult). So, the two Priests went

Editors Ramble

By David Smith

While Canadian winters can be a challenge, they do offer the opportunity to catch up on things which might otherwise gather dust. A stack of books sitting on my night table is slowly decreasing but the stories our newsletters provide are always enjoyed and I trust you agree. In the next few months, you will be learning more about the next Ottawa CM reunion in 2005. The dates and place have already been selected - September 23/24th at the Hellenic Centre. An addition to Reunion Oh-Five will be a "montage" of photos and articles which will highlight our lives as CM's. For those of you who may have "historical" photos, especially of your Embassies/ High Commissions and/or Comcentres/equipment, would you consider sending me a copy in either digital or photo form. I would be most grateful. Go ahead, dig into those albums and boxes and let's see what we can put together. In the meantime, I continue asking for your stories for this newsletter. My appreciation to those who keep it going.
Happy Reading.

ahead of me in the line up to purchase our tickets. Father John was first and when he was asked his destination he said “Juan Jui and I am a Canadian Padre and wish the religious discount” – this meant he received something like 10% off of the price of his fare. Next came Father Mac who repeated what John had just said. He, too, received 10% off of his fare. Now it was my turn and the staff member asked me if I was a Padre also and just as I was about to say no, Father Mac said, “Si, Senor, el est un Padricito!” (which meant ‘Brother’) and I too received the 10% discount.

Moving into the small building with about 5 other travelers I spotted our aircraft out on the runway. Actually it wasn’t difficult to spot as it was the only one parked on the tarmac. It was a old DC-4, a 4-engine prop job. I believe this is what they called the “Dakota”. I was not overly impressed and was less so when finally getting to board the aircraft. Upon climbing the rickety stairs and entering the aircraft we were told to put our luggage in the rear where a large netting was pulled aside. And then we took our seats along the bulkheads on long benches that were specially fitted for passengers. From each passengers deck-head hung a black hose, which I was informed, was the oxygen that we may require as we reached our highest altitude of 15,000 feet.

After a short wait the last two occupants arrived, tossed a couple of small pigs, legs trussed, into the baggage area, along with their carry-ons, pulled the net

across the area and secured it. Closed the door and attached the two lugs (which still allowed daylight to show through the cracks of the door). They then welcomed us aboard and headed for the cockpit. The pilot and co-pilot had just arrived.

Next came a bumpy ride out to the semi-paved runway where I assumed we stopped for the usual pre-flight check up. Then the engines really roared to life, the plane shook something awful and then with flames shooting from all engines we leaped down the runway and into the air. We were to cross the Andes at it’s lowest pass which, as I found out just then was 14,700 feet. Whew, if I remembered correctly this aircraft’s top altitude was 15,000 feet. Giving us a clearance level of 300 feet! Oh this was going to be some hairy.

Oh well, I figured we were in good hands, after all, I was travelling with two of God’s messengers and I know we would be well looked after. With no pressure in the aircraft it wasn’t long into the flight, after we had gained altitude that the smell started to whiff around the aircraft. Apparently as the pressure outside your body decreased the bodily gases seemed to increase and were then passed in the normal way. Not exactly pleasant.

As the flight wore on I glanced over at Father John who was reading some kind of scripture type book and, he kept ‘crossing himself’. Oh my god! I thought, he knows something I don’t know and he is preparing himself for the worst. It appeared that every time he finished a page and went on to the next he, what is the word, “genuflected”.

End of Part I

The Echo in the Storm ***By Jim Fanning***

The Older Bald Guy was sitting at his regular table in the corner. In his cup was a blend of Kenyan Estate AA and Indian Peaberry that he savoured as he tried to rid his mind of the funk that had settled upon him. He had just passed through a nearby mall, and was disturbed by the nihilist lyrics of some of the music being played publicly throughout the popular shopping centre. On the small stage, the Folksinger gave a full dose of poignancy to the old 1965 song, “Bright, Elusive Butterfly of Love.” The OBG felt the despair of innocence lost more strongly than was his custom. A great believer in the truth and sincerity of the hippie movement in its’ seminal days, the OBG wondered if some aspects of modern music and lyrics were not spawned in cultural reaction to the Sixties’ aborted quest for truth, love, and peace. He hoped not: he preferred to think that violent and aggressively sexual music and lyrics were legitimate responses to difficult societal times.

The Resident Radical was berating the Owner/Hostess over her inclusion of Guatemalan Arabica on the list of coffees available. He claimed that the running dog capitalist government of Guatemala exploited the coffee workers solely to provide Wall Street robber barons with a cheaper cup of coffee. He would not listen to O/H’s argument that the present Guatemalan government had assisted in

streamlining the coffee industry in Guatemala, thus creating several thousand jobs that had not existed previously.

The Poet in the Beret was having a discussion with the English Major Coed about whether the Lake Poets were effete elitists, or if they actually were aware of the class struggle going on around their Olympian fields of daffodils.

The OBG sighed, ordered another blend with single cream and double brown sugar, and looked over the lines he had been writing on his steno pad.

The Echo in the Storm

The tempest continued to grow in unabridged intensity. At some other points in time it had seemed almost as catastrophic, but not quite.

Years ago, perhaps yesterday, breaks had appeared in a cloud cover that threatened to erase all memory of a sun dimly remembered.

Several times, before today, sunbeams fell on streets and on meadows, illuminating life with fond remembrance of better days.

Did we, by not pausing to appreciate this fleeting splendour, signal to unknown gods our proclivity for eclipsing light and order with self-imposed Chaos?

A Safari in Iran *By Gene Gullason*

I have always enjoyed events that were spontaneous, humour a little off the wall, and happenings beyond one's imagination. The story I am about to relate occurred in Iran, at the time, officially under the hand of the Ayatollah Khome'ini and administered by a radical hard-line Islamic Fundamentalist government, oddly headed by a rather pragmatic Clergyman, Rafsanjani. What happened was a delightful tweak to the conventions of the host country, and could be considered as lacking in respect for the laws of the land, but the sheer impishness of the plan, and absolute enjoyment of the relative danger was exquisite.

Our Administrative Officer, whom I shall identify as Lillian, was approaching her two year anniversary in that capacity, and had just been recalled to Ottawa, the result of which rounds of parties were taking place in her honour.. she was much appreciated by us at the Embassy, and very much respected by the other Embassies and by many Iranian families whom she considered friends.

The week before she was due to leave I received an invitation from The Trade Commissioner of one of the "Friendly" Western Embassies, inviting me to attend a "Safari" in honour of Lillian. The Safari was "Black Tie-formal"... and I was asked to present myself to the Residence Address promptly at 6 o'clock pm. RSVP. I was very puzzled, intensely curious and could scarcely hide my irritation at having to wait several days for this event to occur... a Safari would be superb, but in Iran??

The day arrived, and suitably attired, I presented myself at the Residence... all appeared normal, and it was delightful to see the ladies from various countries as well as from Iran, beautifully decked out in gowns, and husbands in Black tie... a very unusual occurrence in Iran. We were enjoying cocktails and chat, most of the conversation centering in curiosity of what this event entailed. Our host had disappeared, and after a period of time the head servant signalled we were all to proceed to six land-rovers parked in front of the residence, 3 for the women, and 3 for the men... and soon found ourselves on the road leading out of Tehran towards the mountains of the Elborz surrounding the city on the way to Shimshak the unofficial ski resort, leaving the main road soon after exiting Tehran, passing along narrow rut-ravaged roads through small villages into wilderness. Suddenly the lead land-rover left the road, on to a small trail which soon disappeared into nothingness, villages and civilization left far behind and I was astounded to see the lead land-rover suddenly turn and head up a hill-side at an almost 45 degree angle...we soon followed, some excitement building up as we were virtually laying back in our seats so steep was the incline. After half an hour of slow pace we suddenly levelled out, a perfect plateau on the top of a very high hill, and there before us stood our Host, champagne in hand, welcoming us to the final stop on this "Safari"... and behind him, we were startled to see a huge table, formally set, Table-cloth, Linen napkins, with huge 10 candle candelabra, wines glasses, fine china, silver flatware, porcelain serving dishes, flowers in intricate vases, and chairs for seating 18 people, while an army of servants put the finishing touches to the

table, cocktails were served and we all stood around admiring the backdrop to this most incredible setting... the valley of the city, some 30 kilometres away .. We, high enough to enjoy the warmth of the sun which would soon be setting, and the valley far below, encased in the soft mauve of dusk, the lights of the distant city appearing and twinkling in their smog-encased atmosphere, little diamonds sparkling in a darkened room. To the south lay the city, to the west, the "V" of the interlinking mountain chain in the distance permitting the setting sun to bathe us in golden light and magnificent warmth, to the north, the shadowed slope of a savage scarred rock face, cradling the castle of the "Hashishim" (see note at end)* vaguely visible, looking sinister, ruins nearly as old as history, ghostly eyes of shattered windows casting disapproving looks...eerie and cold, I shuddered involuntarily and turned once more to admire the beauty of the setting as a whole.. and was warmed by childhood memories as the scent of smoke from frugal cooking fires in outdoor hearths ascended to surround us in it's comfort. A most enjoyable setting.

Again, the head servant summoned us to the table, champagne was poured and toasts were made to Lillian, amusing stories concerning her and various of us who were party to the events, and we settled in to eat, behind every second chair, a fully liveried servant attending to our needs.. I am not certain how many courses were served, delicious, done to perfection...Champagne with fish, White Wine with a salad and spicy chicken breast, Red Wine with a roast, Lemon baked potatoes, vegetables of the season, White Wine again with plain salad in delicious vinaigrette, champagne with dessert .. hours of eating and finally the final toasts at table after which we were prompted to finish our drinks at hill's edge to watch the sun finally disappear into the "V" of the distant range.

While the table was being cleared and dismantled, other staff were laying Ghaleem carpets on the grass, on which were placed huge camel saddles, stuffed with foam for seating or reclining, copper filigreed lanterns lit from within by candles casting a warm glow over the area, and restful classical music from a portable radio sent musical notes over the hill and valley below. We retired to the cushions and excellent coffee and liqueurs were served...we talked, we laughed, we basked in the comfort of an intimacy enjoyed by close friends. The moment was greatly enhanced by the faint sounds of the village animals, bleating of goats, occasional call of one friend to another faintly heard at our level and the laughter of children at play before the final chores and sleep called. The servants had long departed and drivers were standing by to return us to the Residence. Reluctantly, we packed up what remained, returned to the vehicles, and were conveyed back to the city and landed at the Residence near midnight, all dispersing to our respective residences by our own means.

On my drive home, I was thinking "What Colossal Impertinence" to flaunt the laws of the host, in the wide openness of the countryside by serving alcohol, and enjoying the company of women, not our wives, in the open spaces of benevolent creation. It remains amongst my favourite memories of life in a strange country while serving in the Department Affairs most Foreign.

Note:

Hashishim - Legend has it, that this spot and castle was the creation of a political entity under the turbulent Reign of an early Shah who had trouble bringing certain factions and powerful Tribal rulers under his influence. The castle was built with magnificent gardens, huge opulent rooms and apartments, staffed by the most stunning women of the Realm. Young recruits would be brought to this oasis of peace in a turbulent land, their every need catered to by stunning beauties, food in plenty and Hashish on demand... plus opium and other hallucinogens...and at a given moment, recruits would be selected, the drugs withheld, until the need was imperative...at which time they were told they must perform a task, and upon completion of this task, their privileges would be restored. The task was usually the assassination of one of the troublesome Tribal leaders, or political troublemaker. It is said many assassinations took place during the period...and it is also said that our word "Assassin" is derived from the above named "Hashishim" or doped ones.

Final Comp "In memoriam"

Members and friends of the CM/EL community to whom we have recently said goodbye.

Gary Ogaick (CR/AS) January 2004, Age 63

Dan Adam, November 2003, Age 66

Jim Koradi, January 2004, Age 63