

## PÁGINAS DE UN DIARIO SOBRE ACONTECIMIENTOS EN VILLA MILLS DURANTE EL CONFLICTO ARMADO DE 1948<sup>1</sup>

*R. J. Phillips*

### **Nota editorial**

Este diario fue amablemente enviado a la *Revista de Historia* por la antropóloga Dra. María Eugenia Bozzoli, miembro de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, en el mes de diciembre de 2005. Como explicó Bozzoli en esa ocasión, el documento había sido entregado años atrás a esa Academia por el señor Tomás M. Zeledón, quien adjuntó una carta de presentación explicando cómo había llegado el diario a sus manos y quién era R. J. Phillips. Ambos documentos quedaron archivados en la academia hasta que años más tarde, a instancias de Bozzoli, el documento fue digitado y enviado a la *Revista de Historia*. Aunque desconocemos qué ha sucedido con el señor R. J. Phillips, consideramos que la publicación tanto de su diario como de la carta de Tomás M. Zeledón es oportuna e importante.

*Consejo Editorial*

## Carta de Tomás M. Zeledón

San José, Costa Rica  
14 de diciembre de 1978

Señores  
Academia Costarricense de  
Geografía e Historia  
Presente

Atención: Sr. Gabriel Ureña  
Secretario

Estimados señores:

Durante mi trabajo por muchos años como ingeniero de la Carretera Interamericana, conocí y llegué a establecer una buena amistad con el ciudadano norteamericano Sr. R. J. Phillips.

En 1948, año en que se produjeron los sucesos de todos conocidos, que vinieron en época siguientes a configurar una nueva fase de la historia de Costa Rica, el Sr. Phillips se encontraba a cargo del Campamento de la Carretera Interamericana en Villa Mills, muy cerca del principal teatro de acción de esos acontecimientos. Por varias razones que estaría de más comentar ahora, le correspondió hacerse cargo de la transmisión por radio de una serie de mensajes entre los principales líderes políticos de aquel entonces.

El Sr. Phillips elaboró, en esos días en que la contienda alcanzaba su punto más crítico, una pequeña crónica basada en sus vivencias y en los mensajes que hubo de transmitir. Una vez establecida la paz tuvo la intención de publicarla, pero dadas las circunstancias la Embajada de su país no lo consideró prudente y decidió guardar su pequeño diario.

Este año, el Sr. Phillips me hizo el honor de confiarme estos documentos, con el deseo de que fueran entregados al país que tanto quiere y del que tan buenos recuerdos guarda.

Después de consultar con algunas personas sobre el mejor destino de estos papeles, llegamos a la conclusión de que convendría entregarlos a la Academia Costarricense de Geografía e Historia, para que ésta los conserve y, si lo considera conveniente, los publique en sus Anales.

A pesar de que en Costa Rica se han escrito ya varias obras sobre el 48, creo que esta crónica viene a significar un nuevo aporte a la historicidad de estos sucesos. Además de constituir –como en el caso de los mensajes enviados por radio– un texto fidedigno hasta ahora no publicado, representa –en el caso del relato de Mr. Phillips– el testimonio de primera mano de un testigo presencial de un momento de nuestra historia. Además, como podrían Uds. mismos apreciarlo, es un trabajo valioso desde el punto de vista literario.

Atentamente ruego a la Academia Costarricense de Geografía e Historia recibir esta crónica y escribir directamente al Sr. R.J. Phillips, 14 Knollbrook Road, Rochester, New York, 14610, USA, ya que en esta forma él podrá tener una constancia de que su diario ha sido recibido y se encuentra bien guardado en manos costarricenses.

Caso de requerir Uds. la traducción de este trabajo, tendría mucho gusto en colaborar en ella.

Agradeciendo la atención que se sirvan prestar a esta carta, me es grato suscribirme de Uds. atto. y ss. ss.,

(firma)

Tomás M. Zeledón  
Teléfono 24-57-04, Ap. 2945  
San José, Costa Rica

*Tuesday, March 30*

A salvo conducto, finally having been arranged, Mr. Harshberger, the jefe, and all North Americans and visitors left this morning for San Jose –all except myself, the sole– remaining Macho. The young ladies, Merci, Millie, and Cecilia, who have been nursing and serving in the hospital, will be missed by the patients and our fellows in camp. They have filled a social void in the grim life of a construction camp, idled since March 11, when fighting began, and they coincidentally arrived for a weekend.

Fortunately there will be left several young Costa Rican fellows, without whose knowledge and loyal aid we could not carry on effectively.

Mrs. Figueres and her two children remained, since, of course, she would be recognized and captured at the Government lines.

Our driver, who transferred cash and cigarettes sent with the San Jose car, was held for questioning on his return to camp, but later reluctantly released.

At 11 a.m. this message was received over our radio from U.S. Ambassador Nathaniel Davis to Commander-in-Chief Jose Figueres:

“I am speaking with the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (C.R). This is the message as transmitted by Dr. Alberto Oreamuno: “Please hold your positions. Do no attack unless you are attacked. Similar instructions are stated to have been given to the Government forces”.

A driver left immediately with the message for “La Lucha”, headquarters of Figueres. Four hours later he returned having left the message with Figueres' secretary.

At night we received the official answer from the Army of National Liberation for Dr. Oreamuno through Ambassador Davis: “We have been heavily, though unsuccessfully attacked today since 2 p.m. -March 30”.

Immediately called Ambassador Davis to relay the message from

[page] (2)

Jose Figueres. Also radioed Mr. Harshberger, and purely by inference, told him that the Presidential Palace in San Jose would be bombed by Pilot Nunez [Nuñez], head of the Opposition air force, at 5:30 a.m. tomorrow. The information had been given by the pilot himself during a conversation at San Isidro this afternoon. Several of our men, including construction boss Cave, live within almost a stone's throw of the palace.

Two of Figueres' men woke me at 1:30 a.m. with confirmation of the message received earlier in the evening by radio. They brought also a badly-wounded comrade, who was operated upon within an hour.

### ***Wednesday, March 31***

Government radio from San Jose announced "an outrageous bombing of the Presidential Palace" at 6:30 this morning. Damage was slight, the announcement stated; what the radio didn't state, probably didn't know, is that Pilot Nunez' [Nuñez'] bombardier [bombardier] had several other eggs to drop, but he flew so low over the palace, so as not to miss, that the concussion of the one bomb damaged not only the hydraulic system but the landing gear of the plane. He had to hightail it away at once. He barely landed safely at his home field.

Checked our gasoline supply in camp to learn that it is alarmingly low, with no chance of course of fuel being passed through the lines from our tanks in Cartago. Diesel oil for our light plant, kitchen stoves, and laundry is likewise sufficient for only a few days.

Talked to the patients in the hospital and passed out the daily ration of cigarettes from our dwindling supply.

There are 11 patients, 2 of the opposition, 9 of the Government. We record the political faith of all patients and their nationality. Most of the Government men are

Nicaraguans, who often refuse to disclose the fact. "We are neutral," they declare. Most of the fellows are almost childishly touched by the treatment they receive. They had been told that they would be tortured if captured. The Government newspapers give out the information that our hospital staff is, in

[page] (3)

fact, torturing its patients to obtain information. The men talk of their own volition, declaring bitterly that they have been "sold a bill of goods".

The new nurse from San Isidro failed to appear. Our staff, with Millie gone, is very over-worked and the situation becomes worse daily.

Understand that a new group of Mariachis and Nicos [Nicas] have landed at Dominical. The commanding officer at San Isidro declared that a trap is being laid for them. "I hope the trap springs this time," laughed Carlos Delgado.

### ***Tuesday , April 1***

At 8:55 a radio message was received by us for transmission of Jose Figueres: "This is the American Ambassador speaking with the approval of the Minister of Foreign Affairs: Please transmit the following message from Archbishop Sanabria to Mr. Figueres": "I desire to talk with you regarding certain discussions I am conducting in San Jose, accompanied by Don Ernesto Martins and Dr. Fernando Pinto. If you will permit us to arrive please send your reply through the American Ambassador and state at what time we should leave and what precautions we should observe to reach there. If this message is received too late for arrival today (Thursday) please appoint an hour on Friday. If arrangements can be made in time I will also bring along several medicines".

The message was signed "Sanabria. Archbishop of San Jose". As head of the Roman Catholic Church in Costa Rica, Archbishop Sanabria exerts a powerful political as well as a spiritual influence in Costa Rica, a

predominantly Catholic country. He had a large voice in negotiations of arbitration following the election of Feb. 8th which, however, had failed to bring the contending parties together, mainly because of Manuel Mora, Communist leader, who, although his party represents a very small minority, carries the balance of power.

This message was immediately taken by our driver to "La Lucha" for delivery to Mr. Figueres or his representative.

During the afternoon Cornelio Orlich, an engineer, married to

[page] (4)

Mr Figueres' sister, now living outside camp, arrived with a letter of introduction from Figueres and asking for assistance for transportation of the Archbishop and his party next day. He asked that we do our utmost to obtain a confirmation of the arrangement by tonight and radio him immediately afterward.

The communication to the Archbishop, written in Spanish, was to be given without translation so as to be exact. Substance of the message is "Although we are engaged in a great battle which is expected to end shortly in our favor, a delegation will meet your party at 8 a.m. tomorrow at El Empalme. Your car should display prominently an American flag so that our forces will recognize it. It is requested that you arrange with the Government forces to cease fire on the Empalme front at the time of your arrival and during the time of your visit in the war zone." Then thanks for the offer of the medicines and a list of those most urgently needed.

At 9 p.m. tonight the following message was received from Ambassador Davis through Archbishop Sanabria for Mr. Figueres: "Terms of Mr. Figueres letter are acceptable. The Archbishop and the two gentlemen named in the previous message will leave San Jose at 5 a.m., April 2<sup>nd</sup>, to meet the delegation at El Empalme at 8 a.m. After the meeting the Archbishop may desire to speak to a representative of the Government to be named later. If so the Government agrees that the Millsville radio may be used

for the purpose. If he asks to use your radio please call us. Stand by until the Government representative comes in. We expect to be able to bring him in to the radio on a half- hour's notice”.

It was necessary to use more of our remaining gas to send the message to Mr. [F] Figueres. Some station is always jamming up radio calls, especially at night, by injecting loud, continuous and senseless conversation whenever we are speaking. This practice irks the boss [to] no end. As for me I'm worn out [out] at the end of a broadcast period trying to hear a voice which sounds like a whisper, trying to

[page] (5)

outshout the opposition, then repeating and repeating.

### ***Friday, April 2***

Guard at gate reports that the Opposition tank built around our tractor passed the gate at 4:30 this morning headed for Empalme, riding slowly and serenely on our trailer truck. Have no idea how they negotiated our truck for the job. Was even more disturbed when it suddenly occurred to me that the peace delegation would probably be coming to camp early this morning for peace deliberations. Would be most embarrassing to have them pass the tank propelled by power carrying our license plates. So we rushed a driver down the road with instructions to the operator to park it in some secluded spot.

Received radio message at 9 o'clock that peace delegation had been delayed, would leave San Jose at 10:30 a.m., arrive at El Empalme at 12:30 p.m.

At 10:45 another radio message from Ambassador Davis: “Due to unforeseen difficulties, not the fault of any person, departure of Archbishop Sanabria from San Jose has been delayed. Will Mr. Figueres please consider previous arrangements as temporarily suspended until the Archbishop can make, through Ambassador Davis, a new hour, or a new date, for the meeting”.

A new driver was dispatched with this message.



At 1:15 p.m. still another communication via radio: "Archbishop Sanabria and party plan to leave San Jose at 2.30 p.m. today and request that you get word to El Empalme. If there is a change in plan regarding time of leaving we will notify you just as soon as possible." Carlos Delgado scurried off with this dispatch for "La Lucha". By this time we have all gone slightly loco, and our precious gas is going too.

Radio quiet reigned until 3 p.m. when this message arrived from Mr. Harshberger, through Ambassador Davis: "Archbishop Sanabria and his party has once again been delayed. They now plan to leave San Jose tomorrow at 8 a.m. They expect to arrive at El Empalme at 11 a.m."

[page](6)

We are now completely nuts and gas almost gone. Our last car and driver has also gone.

Soon afterward the first driver returned with reply from Señor Figueres to our first note. He stated that the fight was raging, that the lines were moving fast, that the original meeting place had been bombed by "enemy" planes, and that a new meeting place should be selected. We advised Ambassador Davis.

At 3 o'clock Carlos returned. He had been fired upon by Government forces, had found the steep road to Santa María too slick for the pickup, and had given the message to an officer for delivery.

Then, about 5 o'clock, Señor Figueres sent his driver with the following message: "Your two messages of today, 1:30 and 3 p.m., came together. Kindly give Mr. Harshberger the following reply": "Our representative will meet Archbishop Sanabria and his party at "La Sierra" - 5 kilometers north from El Empalme - 25 kilometers south from Cartago - at 9: 30 a.m. All possible precautions will be taken tonight to prevent accidental fire from our side in case of fog."

Our last chauffeur hasn't returned and we are unable to learn his whereabouts. Neither can we get through to San Jose with message about the new meeting place.

A hospital patient is very ill with tetanus [sic]. We have been unable to secure the necessary serum. He is in terrific pain. He draws up his legs, stretches out his arms with his hands clenched, gives an awful grimace of pain and simply moans. Another man brought in today, shot through the neck. He has been in a coma since arrival.

Missing driver returned at 10:30 in Opposition car. His own had broken down. Officer reports that "La Sierra" has been retaken, that Government troops are in flight toward Cartago.

### ***Saturday, April 3***

Arose at 5:30 to transmit the message to Mr. Harshberger regarding new meeting place for this morning. Two patients died in hospital during the night, the one with tetanus [sic], the other shot through the neck.

[page] (7)

Messen took the bodies to San Isidro to make the official arrangements for burial. The man in the coma never regained consciousness and as he was of the Government, we had no identification. He was simply registered and buried as "unknown". Another man, shot through the head, will probably die.

At 11 a.m. another radio from Ambassador Davis: "Peace delegation did not leave until 10:30 from San Jose". Just another car and driver to advise Mr. Figueres.

Padre Nunez [Nuñez] arrived at camp and lunched with me. Delegation, he told me, will carry on discussions at "La Lucha". Then, if there is any chance of settlement, will come here later to use our radio as planned for talk with Government representative in San Jose. He is, however, not hopeful of successful negotiations as "we will accept nothing short of unconditional surrender, and I doubt if the Government is ready for that".

We discussed the mystifying delays of the Archbishop. He, of course, had no exact information, but he did have a theory: "Every time an hour and place has been arranged

by Ambassador Davis for the meeting, at exactly the appointed time and the very place, the enemy has concentrated fire or a bombing attack there”, he explained. “It is obvious that they hope to get Commander Figueres and his staff, also perhaps the Archbishop”. Certainly four such attacks rule out the possibility of coincidences.

The force of Mariachis and Nicaraguans, boated and landed at Dominical several days ago, has been bombed and heavily damaged by Pilot Nunez. They were massed, and two bombs made direct hits in their midst.

Our food supply is shrinking rapidly. During the time San Isidro was occupied by the Government it was, of course, impossible to get through for supplies. Now most of the available food stuffs have been commandeered by one side or the other. Most of the poor mountain folk are in desperate need. They come to our gate every day with a few

[page] (8)

supplies we may need. Money in payment is absolutely of no use, since there is nothing to be purchased. “We would like to trade these for some sugar, or some flour, or some soap,” they tell us. So we are on a barter basis. What we have enough of which they need, is traded for that which we have not. Today a fellow arrived at the gate with 10 eggs to trade for some coffee.

“Rush two extra guards out quick to hold him!” yelled Rojas.

“Don’t let him escape!”

Carlos called after him, “Yeah Rojas! And we’ll scramble the eggs so we’ll all get a taste!”.

Our driver not yet returned, and we are worried, sent another man to look for him.

Suddenly tonight the clandestine radio Station Zero at “La Lucha” began: “Attention! Attention! This is the Archbishop Sanabria at Station Zero calling Mr. Phillips at Station 11. Kindly advise Ambassador Davis that we arrived here at Mr. Figueres’ safely. We cannot go back until tomorrow. We expect to be at ‘La Sierra’ Sunday

between 1 and 2 p.m. We request the Ambassador kindly to make the necessary arrangements.”

Ambassador Davis was acquainted with this information and, tireless as usual, he began immediately to go through the usual exacting routine to arrange safe conduct.

About 10:30 a jeep pulled in from San Isidro with two opposition soldiers. They were cold, wet, and had a flat tire. They wanted to stay the night here, but this camp, being neutral, no men of either side are allowed to enter, much less sleep. Now the hospital patients that's different. Asked one of the men if he was sick.

“Yes,” he answered, “I've got malaria”

“What have you got?” I asked the other, who hesitated and didn't answer. But Rojas popped up, “He's got a flat tire!”. So we sent them both to the hospital for the night.

About 2 a.m. I was awakened by two of Figueres' men with the

[page] (9)

written confirmation signed by the Archbishop. They had brought back our driver whom we sent scouting for the first one. “He had broken down”, they told us.

“Howabout the first fellow- the guy with the message?”

“Oh! We saw him about three hours ago,” they answered. “He was then hauling dead men over the access road near “La Lucha” in his pickup.”

#### ***Sunday, April 4***

Woke and arose at 5:30 this morning to the boisterous crying of the baby of the pharmacist who arrived yesterday to assist in the hospital. To make the deal for the pharmacist from San Isidro we had to take his wife and two small children. Now I realized I'd made a bad bargain. So now our bunkhouse rings to the laughter, the crying, and the patter of the feet of little children.

Another Government soldier died in the hospital last night. Perhaps this accounts for the very early departure

of the man who “had a flat tire” the night before. There was quite a delay in taking the body from camp because of a lack of transportation, but we finally beat the Costa Rican deadline of 24 hours.

At 7: 45 a.m. Ambassador Davis radioed a message to be sent to Archbishop Sanabria: “The authorities have been notified that you plan to leave ‘La Sierra’ for San Jose between 1 and 2 p.m. today. I am assured that all measures will be taken for your safety”.

Father Nunez and Dr. Orlich, the latter in charge of first aid at the front, arrived at camp this afternoon. They were permitted entrance to visit the hospital and the patients. Padre Nunez, because of his personality and his humor, is a favorite with the wounded, both Government and Opposition. Even the boy with the amputated leg, who is now almost a mental case through despondency, seemed cheered. Dr. [Orlich] brought some morphine, a godsend for these seriously wounded men. Later, over coffee, Father Nunez told us the real story behind the many delays and postponements of the Archbishop’s departure from San Jose. “Every time an hour had been decided upon the Government later

[Page] (10)

refused to let the medicines come through,” he declared. “Finally, yesterday, they decided to burn the entire 40,000 colones worth, then tell the world that the boxes really contained ammunition and not medicine”. He told me before he left that the peace delegation had been unable to reach even a tentative settlement, which had as its basis: to appoint Dr. Alvarez, formerly a Calderonista, as president; to settle on a cabinet made up equally [equally] of both parties. The “Commies” also demand representation. “This is entirely unacceptable to us”, the Padre said. “Probably the Archbishop himself knew that it wouldn’t be given consideration. What he is perhaps most interested in knowing at the moment is just what Figueres will accept. And now he knows- unconditional surrender!”

Late this afternoon several trucks passed the gate, headed for "La Lucha". They were loaded with rifles, ammunition, cannon, machine guns—all brand new—the proceeds from three planes landed during the early morning hours—from Guatemala—at San Isidro.

These were a portion of the arms we had been hearing about through 'bolas', supposed to be from a pool originally cached in Cuba, later flown to Guatemala, to be used by "organizations to induce" certain Central American governments to conform to more democratic principles.

***Monday, April 5***

Called Mr. Harsberger at 7 a.m. He told me what we already knew, that the box sent with the medicines, and containing parts for our radio, had been confiscated [confiscated] at the Government lines, despite a personal letter from Ambassador Davis.

Got a break today; a sleek fat steer strolled into camp, and inasmuch as this is neutral territory, we had no alternative but to intern it in accordance with International Law. Shortly afterward the poor animal fell into a hole, broke its leg, and had to be put out of its misery. Sad for the animal, but lucky for us, since we were completely out of fresh meat.

A rancher down the road is now unable to sell his milk so he has

[page] (11)

kindly offered to bring it to camp daily as a present to our hospital patients.

Talked this morning with Figueres' brother-in-law, Cornelio Orlich. He is now certain of victory since yesterday's arms arrived. He tells us that a bomber is coming in to San Isidro tomorrow to be used by the Opposition for carrying gas and oil, arms and men—also for bombing if the Government persists in its bombing of such targets as San Isidro and peace delegations.

Two truck-loads of medicines arrived at camp late last night for our hospital. We now have sufficient of all instruments and supplies to perform any operation which may be necessary, Dr. Gamboa tells us.

***Tuesday, April 6***

This may be the quiet before the storm. There is no fighting, either at San Isidro or Empalme. There are, however the usual camp troubles. We have only 100 gallons of gas, which we drained today from all unused trucks and equipment; and this was so dirty it had to be strained before using.

Still also scrambling for food. Have had scouts out around San Isidro for two days without finding a trace of a vegetable, an egg, or in fact, anything edible. Food is just terribly scarce, and money is no object. Everything is on a barter basis, and God help the guy with nothing to trade. There are, and have been so many troops in and around San Isidro, that almost everything is either used up, or has been cached for after-the-war use. Also most of the farms have lost their workers, so are not producing. Most of the houses and stores have been looted of everything they contained. A chicken is almost as rare a sight these days as a Calderonista. Every one seen (the chickens) is shot for the pot.

***Thursday, April 8***

Breakfast here in camp is usually a grim meal. It is always cold at 5:30 and no time for light and snappy banter. Occasionally, however, one of the boys, hoping to catch another half asleep and kid him without the usual comeback, will start something. Rojas found this morning, to his great surprise, an egg on his plate.

[page] (12)

“What,” said he, looking at it curiously, “is this?”  
And what do you do with it?”

"That, Rojas," replied Carlos, "is an egg. Generally you eat it, and usually for breakfast. Remember?"

"Where did you steal this egg Camacho?" asked Rojas, glancing accusingly at him.

"I didn't steal it Rojas. Don't you know there are no longer any eggs to be stolen. And don't you know there are no laying hens in this part of the world, except those laying at the botton of stewing pots? I have had that egg hidden for weeks just to please you some morning when I thought I couldn't stand that sour puss of yours one more day!"

"Muchas gracias Camacho," answered Rojas, sniffing the egg suspiciously.

A truck stopped at the gate with 57 prisoners of the Government from Division for Santa Maria. We sent out coffee and bread for them. They are a motley-looking crew, mostly barefooted and-be-whiskered. They looked as though they'd had enough of war, which they said they had. The young fellow in charge of the prisoners was pretty rough-looking too. He came toward me, and I mentally girded up my Spanish for the conversation; instead he spoke in perfect English. He is, I learned, a graduate engineer from the University of California.

Some of our employes [sic] tale [take?] two or three days off now and then, disappear, then return. There are "bolas" about where they go and what they do, but it seems best to ask no questions.

"Kay," our telephone operator, butted in on the radio this morning to ask if either of the babies had yet been born. As she put it, "Are you a papa yet?" With such talk, together with several of the fellows making drinking dates for after the war, I won't have a shred of reputation left when I finally do reach San Jose-, or if I do?

No confirmation yet of Figueres's plans, but he says he'll let us know so that we can make necessary arrangements for our property in San Isidro. Hear that Government troops are moving in a circle



toward the town from around Vulcan [Volcán] and Dominical. Another airfield is being built by Opposition near Santa Maria to replace the one at San Isidro.

**Friday, April 9**

What we've been afraid of has occurred. Figueres has decided to evacuate San Isidro in order to augment his forces at Santa Maria for the attack on Cartago with everything he has. From a military standpoint he has something, but it leaves our position here wide open.

All day trucks have been rumbling over the road toward Empalme. Troops are stopping at the gate for coffee and rolls. We've even fed the prisoners they are taking with them. Two or three wounded men fell out and found their way to the hospital. A pregnant woman asked and received sanctuary and rest at the hospital. Civilian families have been requested to leave San Isidro –and most of them did– for our old camp at Division –which is being reopened as an Opposition camp. Figueres' men will make their stand at and near Division, about half way between here and San Isidro.

Talked with Mrs. Figueres this afternoon about her position here now that her husband's forces are withdrawing. She agreed when I suggested that she and her sister-in-law outside the gate should be ready to go just as soon as the first Mariachis broke through the defense at Division.

"Certainly I can't stay here if they break through," she stated calmly. "The Mariachis will learn in San Isidro that we're here. They'd force their way into this camp, take us as political prisoners and hostages. 'Pepe' would be notified that unless he gives up the fight we'd all meet with 'accidents'".

Radioed Mr. Harshberger at night acquainting him by inference with this new situation. Told him that we now have absolutely no protection for our property in San Isidro, as the last guard arrived here this afternoon. Also

explained the danger here at Villa Mills should the Mariachis arrive at the gate –with Mrs. Figueres, her two children, and her sister-in-law, as well as our more enthusiastic employes [sic].

“What do you suggest?” he asked.

“My suggestion is that an official of the State Department come here at once. We will need him to talk with the commander of the Government forces in San Isidro about protection of our property. We can also talk turkey to the commander when, as and if his troops reach our gate, in regard to entering this camp and taking out our employes [sic] and guests. He would have the authority,” I pointed out, “to threaten, with the backing of the U.S. Government, while we can only talk fast

[page] (14)

and hope that the commander is stupid enough to swallow it.”

The boss didn't seem optimistic about our chances of making such a deal, but agreed that it would be advisable. He remembered, no doubt, what happened at our North camp when the Mariachis simply entered camp and jailed those employes [sic] who hadn't taken off for the hills. Mr. Harshberger said he'd see the Ambassador.

### ***Saturday, April 10***

A bus and a large truck arrived at the gate this morning. Both had been captured from the Government in the fighting on the Highway below Empalme. They were sent immediately to San Isidro to bring the remaining troops from our Plantel to outfit the Division camp.

Radio message stated that perhaps a State Department official might come up the end of next week. Reply was that if he couldn't come very soon he would be of absolutely no use to us.

Following this encouraging news Rojas, Carlos, Mesen and I worked out a plan to evacuate Mrs. Figueres, her sister-in-law, their children, as well as all employes

[sic] whom the Government commander might have on his list should his troops reach the gate.

For transportation we have received permission to use the large bus which arrived this morning and which will remain parked at the gate ready to go. A list of employes [sic] was prepared, none of them to know that they are going anywhere until told, day or night, "Let's go!" The bus will be driven by Cholo [Chalo? see below] Coto, a large muscular man, an excellent driver, and very "woods-wide", [woods-wise?] who knows this country from much experience. Coto will select a place, known only to himself, between here and Empalme, where he can hide his cargo and get the bus out of sight.

Told Mrs. Figueres and her sister-in-law about the plan. They are for it and will be packed and ready to go within 15 minutes after our scout at Division returns with the news of a break through.

Advised that all Opposition troops have now left San Isidro for Division, where there are about 100 men to hold the road against the Government forces. Troops are now pushing down a most unnatural slide from the 400-foot dirt and rock cliff rising sharply ABOVE THE highway just below Division. Another slide is man-made near San Isidro. Then there is an equipment block on the lower end where a detour road branches off the main road, thus barricading both entrances; also a tractor block on the north end exit.

Troops cannot be transported over the road without first clearing the way, a job which would require three or four days. Figueres' men will be scattered atop the tremendously high cuts on one side of the

[page] (15)

road, others on the low side in the dense jungled ravines. Another group will guard all the mountain trails which circumvent the main road.

It is a good defense plan, and even with so few men, should at least hold up an advancing force for a considerable time, meanwhile inflicting terrible losses.

Hear the Figueres' forces have already left "La Lucha" by the back trails for the attack on Cartago.

**Sunday, April 11**

Talked with Chalo Coto [Cholo? See above] about driving the bus, if necessary, with the evacuees. He whistled between his teeth as he always does, grinned, and said, "Sure, I'll pick a place where Good Almighty can't find them. Don't know where yet, but nobody else will know".

"Not even us," we reminded him.

Later spoke with Tommy and arranged, if necessary, for his wife to go to bed in hospital. Also Jara's wife whose sister will go there as a nurse. All the kids will be taken care of by a woman helping Mrs. Brower.

"Yeah!" said Tommy "she's safe; even from a Mariachi!"

Made a Red Cross flag and a large marker for the hospital roof from old cut-up sheets and a red blanket cut in strips for the cross; also white arm bands with little red crosses for the hospital personnel.

Mr. Harshberger called at 7 p.m. He gave the following message from Ambassador Davis: "I desire to visit Villa Mills to inspect Government property there. While there I desire to talk with Mr. Figueres, or an authorized representative having his complete confidence. The Government has given full guarantees that no military operations will take place in the Villa Mills area. I will be passed through the Government lines without question at 11 a.m., Monday, April 12. If this date and hour is not convenient advise me as soon as possible. I will drive a black Ford bearing Embassy license plates and fly the American flag on its front."

Here is a dilemma! Our information is absolutely reliable that Opposition troops have left "La Lucha" for attack on Cartago including Figueres and his staff. Nobody is at headquarters to whom this message can be delivered. But we can't tell the Ambassador without tipping off the Government of Figueres' move, as our radio is always tapped. Ambassador Davis cannot, of course, come through the lines tomorrow, as he must pass Cartago and the inferno of fire.

“We’ll try to contact Figueres by radio and call you back in an hour.”

Gathered Mesen, Carlos, Rojas, also Mrs. Figueres, and discussed the matter. Finally decided we call Mr. Harshberger that condition

[page] (16)

of the access road to Figueres’s headquarters makes delivery of the message impossible tonight or probably tomorrow, although Mr. Harshberger know we jeep some very bad roads during the rainy season.

“In view of this,” we told him when we called back, “we do not believe it advisable for the Ambassador to attempt the trip tomorrow.”

Sure enough the Boss wanted to know if the road was really that bad.

“Suggest you to let the message stand as given”.

Still he was not satisfied. “Answer me one question, and answer it yes, or no”, he came back. “Is it because of rain and mud on the road to Santa Maria that you can’t deliver the message?”

“I’d rather not answer that question at all.”

A few minutes later a message came back that Ambassador Davis had received the communication and had accepted it.

Left word at the gate for the guard to bring to my room any time before 6 in the morning Capt. Godoy, who ia [sic] [is?] commanding troops at Division. Godoy, we understand, is at “La Lucha”.

El Capitan came clumping into my room at something after midnight. Godoy is a little strutting man, his dark skin drawn tight over his ferret-like face as the parchment on a drum, causing a network of wrinkles about the eyes and mouth which belie his 35 years. Imported from Honduras, his native country, he is a soldier of fortune, this being his 17<sup>th</sup> revolution. “And I ain’t been killed yet!” he told me.

**Monday, April 12**

What a day! Began, as usual, with a radio talk at 7 o'clock, during which we told the Boss impossible to contact Figueres. Exact word from Santa Maria this afternoon, as Figueres' sister has gone there in jeep with Manuel Camacho, an aide to Figueres.

Mr. Harshberger called again at noon. Said it is highly important to contact Figueres. Told him he knew why that is highly improbable, as Opposition has been broadcasting from the principal radio station in Cartago that city is virtually in their grasp, although there is still some house-to-house fighting.

Sent note by Mena for Cornelio Orlich, Figueres' brother-in-law,

[page] (17)

whom we understand is now at "La Lucha", asking him, if possible, to contact Figueres on their field radio, and have Figueres call Mr. Harshberger over our radio in Cartago. We, and the San Jose radio, trying every few minutes to contact our headquarters in Cartago. Apparently nobody is working there. Telephone communication is down between San Jose and Cartago, no telegraph, the road blocked to civilian traffic.

Finally, at 5 o'clock, made contact with our master mechanic in Cartago. While Rojas was talking to him he said Opposition was trying to enter the Plantel to seize a tractor and trailer to block the highway to Tejar, a small nearby town. "I'd suggest you turn it over if you don't want to get plugged," said Rojas. "Hang on and I'll get the San Jose office".

Tried frantically to get San Jose to have them call Station 5, asking our mechanic to send note to the broadcasting station for Figueres to come to our Plantel and talk to the Ambassador. No answer. Believe Mr. Harshberger has heard conversation regarding request to grab our tractor, and being smart, has disconnected the radio, so he wouldn't be put on the spot.

When we did finally contact Station 1 the mechanic had gone, no doubt driving the tractor to the road block.

Mena returned from Santa Maria with Cornelio Orlich, who is prepared to talk with the Ambassador over the radio after supper.

Re-established contact with Cartago and San Jose. Mrs. Harshberger has arranged for Figueres and the Ambassador to converse by radio between Cartago Plantel and Mr. Harshberger's home, Station 1. The Ambassador is hurrying there, despite martial law prohibiting any person on the street between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Mr. Figueres is already at Station 5.

In a few minutes Ambassador Davis arrived at Mr. Harshberger's home. With him were also the ministers from Peru, Mexico, Panama, and The Dominican Republic.

Talks began, all in Spanish, from which I gleaned snatches of diplomatic palaver: "Glories of peace; stoppage of bloodshed". Then they suggested to Figueres that peace negotiations begin tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock at Ochomogo, midway between San Jose and Cartago.

"This is the Mexican Ambassador speaking for the Chief of Costa Rica" (no mention of the President) came over the air. "The Government", he advised, "Will stop fire at any moment suggested".

[page] (18)

Figueres replied that he'd like to consult with his staff before answering. When he replied in a few minutes he said his troops were in complete command of Cartago, had taken nearby Tres Rios, were now pushing beyond toward San Jose. "We will consent to the conference only if the Government comes with an honest intention to submit to our demands for social justice, freedom from dictatorship and Communism—in short—unconditional surrender."

Each Minister spoke and the general tone was that the Government had better be honest—or else. Ambassador Davis made a superb effort about an historical occasion; a new concept for settlement of disputes in the Americas; that he was personally looking forward to the

conference tomorrow as an honor, a privilege, and a great responsibility.

We heard it perfectly, but Cartago replied, "We couldn't hear a word. Will you please repeat?"

At the end it was agreed that "cease fire" should be at 5 a.m., that the conference would be at 9.

Mr. Harshberger called, said we'd done a good job. "You'll sleep better tonight. Goodnight!"

Captain Godoy came into the radio room on his way to Division. The cease fire order applies only to the Cartago sector.

### ***Wednesday, April 28***

Tonight the band played its regular Wednesday concert in the Plaza Central. At the finish, as is custom, the band lined up before the bandstand; the conductor raised his baton. The musicians swung over the colored tiles of the park and down the street to the notes of the Marseillaise, battle hymn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic. The jaunty swaying of the brass horns was the last seen of the little procession, while the music lingered on.

That last old-familiar sight seemed somehow to symbolize the peace which once again had so mercifully come to this traditionally peace-loving little land. END.

### **Notas**

1. La MA. Floria Arrea Siermann digitó este trabajo. La Dra. María Eugenia Bozzoli Vargas lo editó revisando cada palabra y línea, de manera que quedara como la fotocopia (salvo por las adiciones de MEB en corchetes [ \_ ] ) que tiene la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, del original que fue escrito a máquina a doble espacio. Noviembre de 2005.