

The Story of Trujillo: A
Little Town with a Big
History

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Chapter 1 - THE COMING OF THE SPANISH TO HONDURAS

*Where there are such lands, there should be profitable things without number -
Christopher Columbus*

The first known contact the indigenous natives of what is now known as Trujillo, Honduras had with European explorers was on August 14, 1502, when Christopher Columbus, accompanied by his 13 year old son Fernando and his brother Bartholomew, plus 140 Spaniards, arrived in four boats named the Santa María, El Vizcaino, El Santiago and El Gallego. Columbus was on his fourth and ultimately fruitless final voyage, looking for a trading route to China and India. He incorrectly thought that he had entered the Straits of Molucca, Indonesia, when he arrived in the channel between the Bay islands and the Honduran mainland. Although he had gained much prestige, wealth, and fame during his previous three voyages of discovery in the New World of the Caribbean starting ten years earlier, Columbus's star was now on the wane and at 51 years of age, he was a much changed and different person from the arrogant explorer of 1492. During his tenure as Governor of Hispaniola (modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), his subjects had openly rebelled against his regime, accusing him of poor administration, embezzlement and extreme brutality towards the indigenous peoples of the island, including rape, torture and mass murder. Stripped of his powers, he had been shipped back to Cadiz, Spain in chains, where he spent a

year in jail before being cleared of the charges due to intervention by the Spanish monarchy, which felt he was still of some value to them. However, his chief benefactress, Queen Isabel, was suspicious of his self-advancing ambitions and by the time of the embarkation of his fourth voyage, he had been relieved of his grand title of Governor of the Indies. He was now accompanied by a royal administrator, who was to make sure that Columbus neither settled nor traded with any newly discovered countries. The sole purpose of the small flotilla which departed Cadiz on May 11, 1502, was to discover a trade route with Asia and nothing else.

Two months earlier, in what was known as “The Grand Design”, the largest collection of ships ever assembled in Europe had left Spain bearing 35,000 hand-picked colonists to settle in the New World. Much to Columbus’ chagrin, he played no part and had exchanged his nobleman’s robes for the humble sackcloth of a priest, went barefoot, and was never seen without a bible in his hand, talking to himself and professing that the end of the world was nigh, believing that he had converted the whole known world to Christianity and that God was going to call them home.

The bay Columbus entered was one of the largest natural harbors in the world, 26 miles in diameter, overlooked by two large, rain-forest-clad mountains, the highest - Mt Calentura/Capiro - being over 4,000 ft high. The miles of white beaches were surrounded by a fringe of thousands of coconut trees and dense tropical jungle. Columbus stayed in the newfound bay for two weeks, questioning the natives with the help of interpreters brought from Hispaniola (who were of no help in this new country) about the whereabouts of a pas-

sage to the Pacific ocean (known to the Spanish as the South Sea). For most of his stay he remained on board his flagship "Santa Maria," stricken by arthritis, syphilis and fever. He was not present on the day his fleet arrived, when his brother and son presided over the first Catholic mass to ever be held on the American continent at a place on the eastern tip of the bay he named Punta Caxina, after a species of tree he found there which is also indigenous to Hispaniola. When the Spanish colonized Honduras 22 years later, they would rename the point Puerto Castilla.

Columbus stayed for exactly two weeks, questioning the natives about a southern sea, which they informed him did indeed exist. He departed the bay on August 28th, taking with him as hostage and translator the owner of a large Native trading canoe manned by 25 slave rowers, whom he had encountered on his way to the mainland while sailing in the vicinity of the island of Guanaja, 35 miles away. He noted that the canoe was "as large as a Spanish galley" meaning that the strange vessel, at over 100 feet long, was almost twice the size of the biggest caravel in his fleet. Among the items they had brought from the Yucatan to be traded were copper tools and bells, textiles, weapons, a fermented corn beer known as Chicha and cocoa. This was the first encounter that Europeans had with chocolate. Unbeknownst to him, Columbus had come into contact with one of the most highly advanced civilizations in the new world - the Maya. He tacked east down the coast looking for the elusive river he thought would connect him to the Pacific. His Mayan hostages linguistic help lasted until they reached the country Columbus named Costa Rica, for the gold ornaments the natives wore. Here the Mayan captain was

released to make the difficult trip back to Guanaja. The tiny fleet continued to Panama where, after sailing through a hurricane for nine days and with his boats riddled with marine worms and about to fall apart, his men threatened to mutiny unless they returned to Spain. Dispirited by the failure of his voyage, Columbus agreed to his men's request and headed home, but not before spending a year marooned on Jamaica after his boats gave out on him. Two and a half years after leaving Spain, he was rescued and returned home a broken man on November 7, 1504. He would never set sail again and died eighteen months later, aged 54.

Fortunately for the natives of the region which Columbus had christened Honduras, meaning "Deep Waters" (although no mention of this is made in his ship's log or memoirs and the historian Bartolome de las Casa claims that the Paya natives already knew the land as Honudure or Higueras), the royal decree prohibiting him from settling their country brought them nearly a quarter century of peace and calm before the Spanish returned in 1524 to attempt to colonize and terrorize their new conquests in Central America.

The Mayan canoe he had encountered earlier had sailed down from the Yucatan peninsular to trade with the natives of the region, the bay islands of Utila, Roatan and Guanaja, and the province in which the bay was located - which was known as Guyamaca (meaning land of the hot chile peppers in the local Native dialect). The beaches and fringes of the bay had no villages and were not populated by the local population, who probably numbered some 12,000 before the arrival of the Spanish. The natives around the bay were nomadic hunters, and had none of the impressive stone cities of the

Maya and Aztecs living to the North, but lived in flimsy dwellings of mud, lashed together with poles and thatch, which were no match for the hurricanes that whipped through the area each year between July and November. They preferred to live inland away from the coast, but still within walking distance to the ocean to fish and hunt crustaceans. Large oyster, clam and scallop shell mounds up to twelve feet high still exist around the bay. There were three large towns of a thousand odd houses, each with around 4,000 people within a days walk of the bay. The towns were called Papayaca, which served as the capital, La Haga (a Spanish approximation of the Native name) and Chapagua. They were populated by four predominant tribes- the Paya (since 1994 known as the Pech), Tarawaks, Jicaras and Tolupanes - who were a mix of tropical forest tribes and Aztec and Mayan immigrants. They had traveled south from Mexico and Guatemala to escape the almost constant state of civil war and political unrest which persisted among the northern tribes.

Each state or province was ruled by a chieftain or ruler known as a *caique* or "papa." He was the overall political leader, although the head priest or shaman shared almost as much power as he did and had a major influence on the superstitious subjects. Below the *caique* and shaman were other sorcerers, plus several noblemen and women known as "principals" to the Spanish. These people would take charge of agricultural and trading projects and would be distinguished from the general populace by their elaborate clothing, jewelry and hairstyles. The region was famed for its fine pottery and ceramics with the artisans enjoying an elevated position in society, living apart from and provided for by the other townsfolk.

The Paya were the dominant tribe and held the closest relations to the Maya. Their existence in northern Honduras can be traced back at least 1800 years. Archaeological evidence of flint arrowheads shows of an even earlier lost civilization dating back a further 1200 years. With the population of Honduras standing at approximately 500,000 at the time of Columbus's arrival, to support the people's diet large scale agricultural projects were needed to supplement nomadic hunting and fishing techniques. The predominant crops were corn and beans, as they still are 500 years later. These were cultivated on terraced farms along with sweet potatoes, yams, manioc, pineapples and the mild and hot peppers in which the region abounded. The natives also grew ground cherries, pumpkins, squash, peanuts, cashews and cocoa, their most valuable cash crop and whose beans they used for trading and currency (the Spanish would continue this practice of paying native wages in cocoa beans until the 1680's, 160 years after their arrival). The jungles surrounding the bay provided a huge diaspora of wild fruits and vegetables, including tomatoes, plantains, avocados, plums, figs, tamarinds, guava, guayava and mammy apples, as well as an abundance of wild game to hunt and fish. Their meat diet was varied and included turkeys, geese, ducks, armadillos, raccoons, coatimundis, tapirs, monkeys, rabbits, deer, antelope, kinkajous and a large guinea pig like creature called a paca or tepisquite, which weighed up to 25lbs. The rivers provided them with fresh water shrimp, giant crayfish and a large trout like fish with pink flesh, the much prized Cuyamel. They also hunted river turtles, manatees (prized for their flesh which supposedly had seven different flavours), iguanas, crocodiles, caymans and alligators. In and around the bay of Trujillo, large shell mounds up to twelve feet high have

been found indicating that oysters, scallops and clams were once plentiful, as were lobster, shrimp and ocean fish such as red snapper, barracuda, grouper, shark, tuna and yellowtail. Woven baskets and traps were used for fishing, and stone net sinkers dating back over a thousand years have been found near Trujillo.

Cotton was grown for making clothing and was always harvested from the Ceiba silk cotton tree, sacred to the natives and now Honduras's national tree, forbidden to be cut. The garments they wove were dyed in bright colors obtained from cochineal beetles which were harvested from the Nopal, or prickly pear cactus. These resulted in a vivid red dye after being roasted and crushed in a pestle and mortar. Nance cherries provided a yellow stain and Indigo, a flax like plant, was used for blue dyes. Anetto seed had two uses, one for flavouring soups and stews, as it is still used for today, and also to provide an orangish yellow paste, which girls used for makeup and for dyeing clothing. Palm trees provided them with not only coconuts to eat and drink, but with thatch for their houses, alcoholic wine from their fermented sap, and arrows for their hunting bows. Calabash or Jicaro trees gave them hollow gourds for drinking from and to make musical shakers known as maracas, filled with dried beans and seeds. The Natives lived a completely self-sufficient lifestyle reaped from their natural habitat and enjoyed trading up and down the Caribbean coastline as far as Mexico and south to Costa Rica. Overland routes went some 800 kilometers as far as the Pacific coast. They spoke a form of Nahuatl, which originated from the Aztecs to the North and made trading easy. The main items that were traded were gold, cocoa, jade, fine ceramics and sea shells - especially the Queen

Conch, which was prized by the Aztecs and Mayans for use as ceremonial horns in religious ceremonies. Also very popular for use and export were feathers from exotic birds such as parrots, macaws, toucans and the much prized Quetzal bird of paradise. The use of such feathers in headdresses, earrings and jewelry was extremely popular among the natives and led Columbus to name the residents of the bay he landed in: "La gente de orejas adornados" or "The people with decorated ears". Although not without such day to day problems as inter-tribal rivalry, severe weather conditions, occasional earthquakes and wild animal attacks, life for the Paya Natives was balanced and relatively peaceful. All that would change forever in 1524, with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores.

Chapter 2 - THE SWEAT OF THE SUN & THE TEARS OF THE MOON

We came here not only to serve God and the King, but also to get rich. Bernal Diaz de Castillo, Conquistador

Columbus's discovery of a New World of riches a mere six weeks sail from Spain, was the sensation of the 15th century and the Spanish were quick to attempt to colonise the entire region. Between 1492 and 1518, they spent 26 years setting up administrative governments in the islands of what are now known as Cuba, Haiti, The Dominican Republic and Jamaica. In 1518, news came to these islands of a new country abounding with riches, which lay a thousand miles away to the south west. This provoked much interest and after two failed expeditions to settle it, a third was launched, led by Hernan Cortez, a 33 year old former magistrate with no previous military experience. The incredible success of Cortez in Mexico, Pizarro in Peru and the driving force behind the almost superhuman resilience of the Spanish conquistadores, lay in the fact that back home all that awaited them was a very poor country plagued by civil war, unemployment and debt, whereas in the New World massive riches and glory were up for grabs, and a combination of self belief, arrogance and cruelty prevailed over all other considerations. Believing themselves incarnations of medieval superheroes and knights errants who were accountable only to God and the King, they swept through the Amer-

icas, using their superior military training, modern weapons and aggressiveness to overcome far superior numbers of enemies, sometimes with odds of as many as 1,000 to 1. Never on the defense, the Conquistadores fighting methods were fast, furious, murderous attacks, where no quarter was given, even to women and children, and the razing of entire towns was common practice.

Accompanied by an invasion force of 11 boats, 500 men, and 13 horses, Cortez arrived in the Yucatan in March 1519, burned all of his boats to demonstrate his intentions of total victory to his men, and claimed the entire country of Mexico, as it was known in the name of the Spanish crown. In an amazing act of self faith, using a combination of incredible boldness, luck and treachery, he succeeded in allying himself with certain tribes against the Aztec ruler Montezuma, killing him, capturing the Aztec capital of Tenochitlan (present day Mexico city) and subduing large areas of central and southern Mexico. The huge, newly conquered territory was named "New Spain of the Ocean Sea" and Cortez proclaimed himself its governor. He then spent the next five years consolidating Spain's foothold in the vast new country, setting up towns, gold and silver mines, plantations, and encomiendas (settlements for forced Native indentured labour). Although certain southern states, such as Chiapas and the Yucatan, as well as large areas of Guatemala, would not fall to the Spanish for another 150 years, Cortez decided to bypass them, having heard reports of "very rich provinces to the south, with powerful chiefs presiding over them". He had also heard reports of a legendary city known as La Ciudad Blanco (White City) in a province neighbouring Guyamaca in Honduras (then known as Higuera to the Spanish,

where Columbus had made landfall) called Tagucgalpa, meaning either "Mountain of Gold" or "The House where Gold is smelted in", where the Kings and Queens dined from golden plates. Inspired by these tantalizing names, he acted quickly on this information and sent an able young Captain named Christopher de Olid, who had distinguished himself in several battles against the Aztecs, back to Cuba to assemble a colonising taskforce to sail to Higuera/Honduras. However, while in Cuba preparing for the voyage, Olid was approached by the governor, Diego Velasquez, who was a bitter political and personal enemy of Cortez, who had had an affair with Velasquez's married sister in law. Velasquez proposed backing Olid's expedition if he would break away from Cortez's command and establish a new province to be governed from Cuba and not Mexico. Olid agreed to this pact and set sail for Higuera/Honduras on January 11, 1524 in six ships accompanied by 370 men, 100 of them expert crossbowmen, as well as 22 horses. Two weeks later, he landed a little east of present day Puerto Cortez and immediately declared himself ruler of the new province, cutting his ties with Cortez and the Spanish crown. This was a brave gesture, as he was now a traitor and subject to the death penalty. He immediately embarked on setting up the first Spanish settlement in Honduras at the place he landed - Triunfo de la Cruz, close to the town of present day Tela.

Unbeknownst to Olid, a rival party of conquistadores led by an adventurer called Gil Gonzalez Davila, who had recently discovered and claimed Nicaragua for the Crown, was seeking to extend the territory and had arrived by boat with his own invasion force at a place he named Puerto Caballos, so called because Davila had to jettison a

lot of equipment and all of his horses to keep his boats afloat after being caught in a storm¹. The port would retain its name until 1894, when it was officially changed to Puerto Cortez. Olid split his army and sent half of it to deal with Davila. However, by now Cortez's spies and informers in Cuba had advised him of Olid's duplicity and insurrection, so Cortez decided to send a punitive force under his 63 year old cousin Francisco de las Casas to replace, capture and if necessary, kill Olid.

Another storm sank half of De La Casa's small fleet off Belize and upon arriving off Triunfo de la Cruz, despite showing a white flag of truce he was immediately attacked in the bay by Olid's boats. Defying the odds, the aging De las Casas managed to capture two of Olid's caravels, upon which the younger man proposed a truce on account of the worsening weather conditions. De las Casa hastily agreed, but before reaching land, the storm hit hard, destroying all but one of his boats and drowning a third of his remaining punitive expedition. After two days spent shivering on the beach without food or water, De las Casas and the few survivors surrendered to Olid, who made them sign a non-aggression pact and oath of allegiance to him. The soldiers were then incorporated into Olid's forces, while De las Casa remained a prisoner. A few days later Olid's expanded force triumphed over Davila near Naco. Shortly thereafter his army returned bringing in Davila and his men as prisoners. However, that night de las Casas, Davila and Olid became involved in a tense confrontation and De las Casas fatally stabbed Olid with a knife he had hidden in his cloak. As Olid lay dying, he was beheaded and his head displayed on a pole in the camp as a traitor. Thus came the Spanish to Hon-

duras, and the manner of their arrival must have considerably perplexed and puzzled the local natives.

De las Casas and Davila, not knowing how to deal with 370 restless mutineers, and tired and weakened by in fighting and hunger, then decided to trek overland to Mexico to seek instructions from Cortez. Before leaving, De Las Casas, realising that the coastline around Triunfo de la Cruz had no naturally sheltered harbour, ordered 110 of his men led by captain Juan de Medina, to march down the coast to the bay Columbus had discovered 22 years earlier, and establish a new settlement and capital for the foundling province. De las Casas decided to call it after the town of his birth in the barren and inhospitable desert state of Extremadura, in western Spain -Trujillo. The man who gave it its name would never set foot in the first capital of Honduras. There was only one serviceable boat left to haul supplies for the expedition and it was unfortunately entrusted to a young captain called Lope de Aguirre. De Aguirre was later to be known as "El Loco" by Spanish and Native alike for his barbaric actions in Peru and Venezuela two decades later, when he became obsessed with his quest for the golden city of El Dorado and murdered anyone, including his own daughter, who crossed him². When Juan de Medina and his men reached the bay of Trujillo in late 1524, after an incredible forced march through nearly 300 miles of inhospitable jungle clad terrain, they camped on the beach and waited for Aguirre's boat bringing their armour, horses, weapons, and much needed food and wine. They must have stared in disbelief when the only European boat to pass through the bay for the past 22 years, simply kept on sailing eastwards down the coast of Tagucgalpa (now known as La

Mosquitia), the next province down, where Aguirre "El Loco" had heard of the mythical golden city 150 miles from Trujillo known as La Ciudad Blanca. Abandoned to their fate, Medina and his men stayed camped on the beach, begging food and sustenance from the natives until an unlikely saviour rescued them from starvation and death.

Back in Mexico, Hernan Cortez grew tired of waiting for news from De Las Casas and decided to mount his own expedition to Higuera/Honduras. Deciding to go overland, he assembled an army of 140 crack Spanish troops, 93 of whom were horsemen, along with 3,000 Mexican Native warriors, 600 Chortol Mayan pack bearers, plus a large herd of pigs. He also took with him enough supplies, gunpowder and cannons to wage a three year military campaign. Also accompanying him as translator was his Nahuatl Native mistress, the 24 year old girl known to the Spanish as La Malinche, with whom he had a child named Martin. (The term "Malinche" is still widely used throughout Mexico to denote someone accused of being a traitor). Nahuatl was widely understood in Honduras and so her presence was invaluable. He also took with him several hostages from the Aztec royal court, to stop them from rising up in his absence. The most important was Cuauhtémoc, Montezuma's replacement as emperor of all the Aztec's, two of his kings - Coanacoch and Tettlepanquetzal, plus five other lords. Despite promising them safe passage as his "guests", Cortez had all eight men hanged upon his arrival in Tabasco, fearing they would incite a rebellion in non-Spanish controlled territory. An enraged Cautemac (do you mean Cuauhtémoc???), cursed Cortez and his expedition from the gallows and the events

which followed must have caused Cortez much regret for killing his guests. It was this act which earned his moniker Cortez the Killer. Cortez's journey was an odyssey of incredible proportion, and after becoming completely lost twice in the Petén mountains of Guatemala - the second time having been sent in the entirely wrong direction by his Mayan guides - he arrived in Naco, Honduras 18 months after departing Mexico city, with only a few hundred men left of his original force of thousands. There the survivors of Olid's previous debacle pled for his mercy as renegades and, not wanting to lose any more valuable Spaniards, Cortez forgave them on condition they swore allegiance to him and the King. While still in Guatemala, Cortez had sent for a boatload of provisions to be sent from Cuba and when this arrived, he distributed the much needed supplies to the settlers, and set off in the boat for Trujillo, arriving six days later.

Finding Juan de Medina and his men living in extremely reduced circumstances on the beach and dependent on the local natives for food, Cortez took stock of the situation and set about rectifying what had become a nightmare expedition for all concerned. Another boat was sent to Cuba for supplies and reinforcements, game hunting parties were organized and he ordered the bluff above the bay cleared of trees. This was to become the location of the present town. He had a villa built for himself, a church and houses for the men, laid out in a grid pattern around a central plaza in the Spanish style. He then began exploring the region, where his reputation as Cortez the Killer again became more apparent. Using his Nahuatl speaking mistress, he summoned three of the head caciques of the region to a meeting, where he proposed that they and their subjects come under

Spanish rule, abandon idol worship and human sacrifice, convert to Christianity, and pay tribute and taxes to King Charles, while participating in assisting the Spanish increase trade with their neighbours. However, the Native chiefs were aware of violent Spanish slave raiding parties sent to the Bay Islands from Cuba, Jamaica and Hispaniola during the previous decade and flatly refused to deal with him. The chiefs of four of the largest towns in the region - Chapagua, Merderato, Potlo and Thicahutl, took their families, courts and shamans and fled to the high sierras many miles inland. In retaliation, and to prove his superiority over whom he considered infidels, Cortez captured two of their most powerful leaders, Mazatl the lord of Papayeca the capital and his high priest Pizacura, along with 100 other hostages who were branded with his initial "C" denoting they were his personal slave property. On being brought to Trujillo, Mazatl again refused to swear allegiance to Cortez and took offense to being manhandled by a Spanish soldier, whom he slapped. His hands were immediately nailed to a tree in the plaza and later that day he was hanged from it. Once again, Cortez was cursed from the gallows, and the execution of Mazatl led to the legend of *La Maldición de Trujillo*, or Trujillo's curse. Pizacura and the 100 slave hostages were shipped to Mexico, where they all died in a smallpox epidemic brought from Europe. Smallpox, as well as tuberculosis, yellow fever and measles, were among several potentially fatal and devastating diseases the Spanish brought with them. In exchange, they contracted syphilis by the thousands, a debilitating and dreadful disease not previously known to Europe before Columbus's visits to the New World, with Columbus himself suffering from it for 12 years before his death.

Despite being once again heavily outnumbered by a native population, the Spaniards had the advantage of modern weapons which used gunpowder, leading the superstitious Natives to believe that they could harness thunder and lightning into their cannons, muskets and arquebuses or blunderbusses. The latter fired split musket balls wired together, as well as grapeshot, which was highly effective against the Natives light padded armor (which the conquistadores would later adapt for themselves once their own breastplates rusted out in the humidity). The two boats Cortez had sent for to bolster the 140 original colonists arrived from Cuba, bringing two hundred reinforcements, including forty-four African fighting slaves who were the first black people to visit Trujillo, a hundred horses, the first cattle to be seen in Honduras and large Pyrenean trained fighting dogs boasting spiked steel collars, who would be set loose upon the natives without provocation. The Spanish armor proved effective against the natives' wooden spears, swords and arrows, and their iron swords and lances outmatched their rivals, as did their use of crossbows. Although they lacked heavy body armor, iron weapons, guns and horses, the natives' intimate knowledge of jungle tracks and mountain paths, as well as general bushlore, gave them an advantage. It would take decades to finally subdue them. When Honduras finally gained independence in 1821, there were still several hundred mountain villages which had never fallen to Spanish conquest. Along with the never before seen horses, dogs and cattle, the Spanish also introduced new vegetables and fruit to their fledgling colony, with boats arriving from Spain bringing oranges, lemons, grapefruit and coffee.

The Spanish looked upon non-Christians as subhuman so treated the Natives accordingly, considering them unworthy of any kind of just or humane treatment. Apart from their insatiable quest for gold and silver (which was so great that the Natives thought that they must eat it), slave taking was an important and profitable commercial enterprise. Spanish mining and plantation projects had annihilated the native populations of the Caribbean islands and more workers were needed. Before the arrival of replacement black slaves from Africa, it was considered necessary to conduct slave raids on the Central American coast and islands, beginning a decade before the colonisation of Trujillo. Starting in 1515, the Spanish conducted brutal raids on Utila, Roatan and Guanaja. However the Paya natives had not always gone to their fate docilely and after one raid, carried out by 80 Spaniards on Guanaja in 1516, some 500 natives were captured and shipped to Cuba. The natives, taking advantage of the drunken celebration party their captors were enjoying, overpowered and killed their guards and incredibly managed to sail back to Honduras using astral navigation. Unfortunately this only provoked a larger punitive force to be sent after them and most were recaptured and disappeared into the vast island of Cuba.

After the murder of the chieftain Mazatl and the deportation of Pizacura and the hundred hostages, the natives initially refused all attempts to pacify them and were still in open revolt when Cortez, after spending almost a year in Trujillo, left for Mexico in April of 1526. One Spanish expedition of 60 mounted soldiers sent into the neighboring province of Olancho (meaning land of rubber) was attacked and lost 15 men and all of its horses. One of those killed was Juan de

Grijalva, a 37 year old captain, who had been the first Spaniard to lead a failed expedition against Mexico in 1518. Before leaving, Cortez named as his successor and Governor another one of his cousins, Hernando de Saavedera. This was the second time in two years he had appointed an unqualified family member to an important position, the previous one being De las Casas. This initiated a long pattern of nepotism and cronyism, resulting in a succession of weak and incompetent men, most fresh off the boat from Spain, being put in charge of important towns and projects they were unqualified to manage. This pattern would undermine and prevent advancement in Honduras for centuries. The Spanish had a complicated caste system in their colonies based on racial purity. It started with pure-bred Spanish born citizens called *Peninsulares* followed by Spanish citizens born in the colonies, then those of Spanish and Native mixed blood known as *mestizos*. Since the conquistadores brought no women with them from Spain, they naturally took native wives and the mestizos soon became the majority of the population. At the bottom of the pyramid were the natives, who had no governing or political rights at all as they were considered to be no more than animals.

As first governor of Trujillo and Honduras, Hernan de Saavedra proved to be an incompetent martinet, who seriously abused the local natives' basic human rights despite Cortez's parting advice to treat them well. During his six months in power, the only positive action he took was to send soldiers into Olancho to successfully repel an invasion force sent by yet another conquistador with grand plans for self-advancement, Pedrarias Davila, the self-styled governor of the province of Castilla de Oro, in Nuevo Grenada, which is present day

Colombia. However, so poor was De Saavedra's leadership, that the new colonists rebelled against him and sent word to Cortez to remove him. His replacement Diego Lopez de Salcedo, a fallen nobleman deep in debt back in Spain, proved an even worse choice. His first act was to ship De Saavedra and five of his subordinates in chains to Santo Domingo to be tried for abuses of power and embezzlement.

With his rivals banished, de Salcedo immediately went about converting the new province surrounding Trujillo into his own personal fiefdom. By now the Spanish had sufficient forces to subdue any natives who had not fled and imposed the encomienda system upon them, whereby they were removed from their villages and brought into model settlements close to Trujillo. There attempts were made to convert them to Christianity and to work on agricultural and mining projects. These settlements were actually forced labour camps where the natives were made to exchange labour as well as "tax contributions" to the crown, in the form of gold, silver, pottery, feathers, shells and food. One of the most strictly enforced rules of governing the encomiendas was that the Spanish overlord who had been granted labour rights over these subjects was not allowed to sell them into slavery. However, de Salcedo suffered from serious financial problems in Spain and soon shipped 500 workers from his own personal encomiendas to the Antilles to be sold as slaves, a crime punishable by death. During his three year tenure as Governor of Trujillo, the acts of De Salcedo would cast a dark and bloody shadow over the province and do irreparable damage to Spanish and Native relationships. Almost immediately after he assumed office, he became locked in a power struggle for the whole of Honduras with

Pederias Davila down in Colombia, who had recovered from his initial defeat by de Saavedra and had sent a boat up from Nicaragua, with emissaries in Trujillo in February 1527, explaining that Honduras was now a province of Castilla de Oro with Davila as the Governor General. An infuriated de Salcedo immediately responded by jailing the three emissaries: Captain Diego Arbitez; Sebastian de Venalcazar, the chief registrar of the city of Leon, Nicaragua; and Juan de Espinosa, the chief scribe of Leon. He then assembled an invasion force consisting of 120 Spanish troops and 300 native slave porters, known as "tamanes," who each carried loads of up to one hundred pounds of armour, ammunition, weapons, provisions and iron bars from Trujillo, to be sold in Nicaragua. He also had his three prisoners brought along as hostages. On the march to Leon, the slaves were not fed by the Spanish and each night, after the march ended, were forced to forage for food in the surrounding jungle. Many were reduced to eating grass and leaves and dozens died. Those who managed to escape were hunted down and shot or hanged. One Spaniard, a Levantine captain named Agostin de Candio, killed a fallen native by running him through with a sword after pretending to offer him water and several nights later, was ambushed and hacked to pieces in an act of revenge by the native's outraged friends. Apart from needing to show force to Pederias Davila, the other purpose of the march was to double the size of his empire and subdue and terrorise the recalcitrant natives into total submission wherever they marched. Another of his captains, Alonso de Solis, was especially cruel and was in charge of burning towns and villages. In the town of Canolo, near Nanto, he hanged the chief and burned 14 natives alive at the stake for refusing to convert to Christianity - a horrendous

death. The entire town of Chequilta in Olancho was forced to join the trek, and in the valley of Guamira a further 400 slaves were rounded up. However, the natives fought back and near the present capital of Tegucigalpa, in a town called Agalteca, they arose in force, only to be beaten after furious hand to hand fighting. For this act of rebellion, the Spanish burned 70 of them alive, set their giant war dogs on another 70 natives, tearing them to pieces, and raped and tortured 60 women and young girls before killing them. Thus de Salcedo's "goodwill force" moved through Honduras to Nicaragua. Of the more than 2,000 slaves taken on the march, only 107 arrived alive in Leon and the trail from that town to Trujillo was littered with the bodies of natives hanging from trees or left rotting by the side of the trail. Only a very few had shrugged off their heavy loads to disappear into the jungles. However, this march of infamy did not tame the natives and only led to widespread general insurrection by the infuriated and exasperated natives. It would later take decades to bring them under Spanish domination. Upon reaching Leon, an exhausted de Salcedo found a much larger force than expected waiting for him. Pederias de Davila had received a royal charter from the King of Spain appointing him Governor of Nicaragua (but not Honduras). A chastened de Salcedo spent seven months in a dungeon in Leon's jail and was only released after a very large "fine" of 20,000 gold pesos had been paid. Returning to Trujillo, broken in spirit and in very ill health after this ordeal, he named the 38 year old Andres de Cereceda as his successor, before dying on Jan 3, 1530. More than one chronicler has speculated that he was poisoned.

de Cereceda found the fledgling colony to be in open revolt against the crimes and maladministration perpetuated by de Salcedo. He had a rival in one of de Salcedo's captains: Vasco Herrera, who had been appointed interim governor during the expedition. Herrera was reluctant to give up his position of power, especially after learning of a major gold find near the town of Juticalpa in Olancho, about 250 kms from Trujillo. He proposed to de Cereceda that the two jointly run Honduras and they had the pact formally sanctified in Trujillo's church by the Archbishop. However, upon leaving the church the two men began squabbling with each other in public and on hearing of yet more Spanish fighting, the natives in the mines around Juticalpa again rose up against the 70 odd Spanish overseers, killed many and disappeared into the mountains carrying large quantities of gold with them. The populations of all of the *encomenderos* around Trujillo also fled and Herrera would spend the last five months of his governorship leading punitive parties into the mountains in search of the runaways. A relief force under the command of Captain Alonso Ortiz restored Spanish hegemony to Juticalpa and forced the natives to return to the mines. The towns surrounding Trujillo were stripped of their inhabitants, who were either shipped to the Caribbean islands in the Antilles or to man more mining projects in the hinterland of Honduras. The town of La Haga, only a day's march from Trujillo was large, with over 400 houses and a population of over 1600, all of whom were captured and shipped overseas, as was the entire population of Papayeca, the Paya capital, with the exception of some thirty elderly people whose lives the Spanish amazingly spared. When he left on a mining expedition to Naco in 1532, de Cereceda took with him 1900 slaves of whom only some 50 eventually returned alive to

Trujillo. However, the natives must have felt some sense of divine vengeance against him when on his return by boat on Oct 29, 1532, a flash storm caught his boats as they entered the bay of Trujillo and 28 of the 70 new settlers he had brought with him, including the new governor, Diego de Alvitez, who had been named to replace him, were drowned when their boat capsized.

On his return, de Cereceda was confronted by new anarchy in the heart of Trujillo. While Herrera was on his roundup of runaway natives a Captain Diego Mendez, who had also briefly overseen Honduras during de Salcedo's long absence, now claimed the governorship. Herrera responded to this by sentencing Mendez and his subordinates to death. Mendez took refuge in the sanctuary of the church, where he waited until another large Spanish raiding party left town, leaving it lightly guarded. At night he and forty of his followers went to Herrera's house and stabbed him to death. Herrera's body was then taken to the plaza where it was strung up and displayed to the horrified Trujillanos. But Mendez was not long in power. A few weeks later a friend of Herrera's, Captain Juan Ramos, returned from Juticalpa where he served in the capacity as treasurer for the gold mines. Appalled by Mendez's treachery, he led a lynch mob to his house where Mendez and several of his followers were dragged back to the square and publicly hanged. More executions followed, after which de Cereceda managed to keep Trujillo under relative law and order for a further four years until his resignation on May 21, 1536. His successor was Pedro de Alvarado, yet another cruel and ruthless dictator, whose treatment of the natives in Mexico and Guatemala had earned him the nickname "The Scourge of the Indians." He would last until 1540 and

during his reign put down a general rebellion of almost all the tribes in Honduras including Paya, Chortis Maya, Tolupanes and Lenca, after 150 chieftains led by the enigmatic young Lenca warrior Lempira, had held a war summit meeting with the express goal of ridding Honduras of the hated Spanish. Lempira, leading an army of 30,000 warriors, made great progress and it appeared that he would lead the natives to victory. But he was murdered by two Spanish "peace emissaries" who ambushed him on a way to a meeting with them. With Lempira's death the resistance crumbled and the Spanish would again regain control of central and north western Honduras. Some regions, such as the huge remote province of Taguzgalpa to the immediate east of Trujillo (later known as La Mosquitia) would never see Spanish rule. Alvarado and his successor Francisco de Monteja, who ruled from 1540, managed to bully the natives into submission and an uneasy peace. It was now accepted that after 16 years fighting, both against the local population and amongst themselves, the Spanish now had a tenuous toehold on the rugged colony. No coin mint existed in Trujillo, the closest one being in Mexico city, and the gold and silver was shipped out of the town in ingots made at the minesites.

In 1544 large gold deposits started to be mined in the town of Gracias, close to the Guatemalan border, and that town was elected the new capital of Honduras. So Trujillo's importance was already on the wane, a mere 20 years after its foundation.

The sheer extent of the catastrophic damage that the Spanish perpetrated through their slave labour and deportation policies is incalculable. At the time of the initial conquest of Honduras, it is believed that the native population stood at a little more than half a mil-

lion people. Between their arrival in 1524 and the abolition of native slavery in 1548 (when they realised that their draconian policies would leave their new colonies a barren wasteland bereft of people), the Spanish shipped over 150,000 captured slaves to their colonies in the Caribbean from Trujillo and Puerto Caballos. A further 300,000 to 500,000 slaves from Nicaragua and southern Honduras were shipped to the mines of Bolivia and Peru starting around 1535. None of these people would ever see their native homes again and died in appalling conditions. The Spanish prioritised the extraction of gold over everything and in 1530, 12,000 *bateas* or wooden sifting pans were ordered by the governor of Trujillo just for that region and the adjoining state of Olancho. The Spaniards had a system of *cuadrillos* or mining crews consisting of four Spanish or black African overseers running a crew of twenty natives, although over time these squads would be increased to over a hundred. In the mines surrounding Trujillo and in the hinterlands, the slaves toiled twelve hours a day to extract gold and silver, as well as opals. These were hellpits several hundred feet deep from which tunnels were excavated, reached by rudimentary rawhide ladders. The miners worked stripped naked, waist deep in freezing cold water mixed with their own human waste in stygian darkness, lit by guttering candles made of cow tallow. They had to haul 100 pound loads of mineral bearing ore to the surface, where hundreds more workers manned water wheels, sluices, grinding mills and sifting tables. For the extraction of silver, settling bins with quicksilver were used in which mercury absorbed the metal from the crushed ore. Thousands of natives died agonising deaths from the mercury fumes. The mercury had been shipped back from Peru in empty slaving boats, along with coca

leaves grown and licensed by the Spanish Catholic church, which were used to give the mine workers the artificial stamina they needed to increase production .

No exact figures of overall native fatalities were recorded, although when the Spanish finally left Honduras in 1821, the population census of 137,000 people for the entire country, was about one fifth of what it had been three hundred years earlier. Human life was valued at two pesos per slave, considerably less than that of a pig, which was worth twenty gold pesos, 25 lbs of olive oil, which cost 6 pesos, or that of a horse, which commanded the price of 500-800 pesos. In time, as more workers were needed in the mines, the value of a slave was raised to one hundred and fifty pesos, especially as Honduras was devastated by smallpox and measles epidemics in the 1530's which further decimated the reeling local populations. In 1549, personal slave service was removed from the encomiendos and the Spanish Crown decreed that the natives would be paid one-eighth of a peso per day for their labour. However, it was decided that the natives had no concept of the monetary system and so were continued to be paid in cocoa beans until the 1680's, over 150 years later. The encomiendos would develop into the hacienda, or large cattle ranch and plantation system, and the cattle which Cortez had initially brought from Cuba would act as the breeding herd which spawned Trujillo's largest industry after the gold and silver mines stopped producing in the mid 1560's. Native labour was also used on the extensive rice, barley and wheat farms around Trujillo. These new plants were brought from Europe by the Spanish and were not indigenous to

the New World, nor was coffee, which was brought from Africa and planted in the hills around Trujillo.

It has been estimated that the Spanish stole or mined 10 million ounces of gold and silver from their Central and South American colonies during the three hundred year period: 1520-1820 . Of this, only 5% or 500,000 ounces came from Central America, so we can calculate that perhaps one Native died for every ounce of gold and silver extracted in Honduras and its neighbouring countries.

By the end of 1540, Trujillo was occupied by an administration staff of only fifteen Spaniards, defended by around fifty soldiers and with only 600 natives to work in the encomiendas around the town. Things were bad and would only get worse, with the arrival of an unwelcome phenomenon: sea-borne raiders known as pirates!

Chapter 3 - PIRATES, CORSAIRS, PRIVATEERS AND BUC-CANEERS

A merry life, and a short one, that shall be my motto! - Bartholomew "Black Bart" Roberts, pirate.

Trujillo is the poorest port I have seen in all the Indies. - William Jackson, pirate.

The letter which Columbus wrote to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain upon his return from the Caribbean in 1493, became, after the bible, the most widely bootlegged and distributed document of the 15th century. His descriptions of a New World, full of untold riches, a mere six weeks sail from Europe, sparked a scramble amongst the other seafaring nations of that continent. The only countries apart from Spain who boasted any kind of naval capacity were England, Holland, France and Portugal, who under the Treaty of Tordesillas were kept out of the Caribbean and had to settle for Brazil and territories east of her. Until the 1620's only Holland had an actual navy, which was tied up most of the time defending her coastline. All three countries decided to send expeditions to the Caribbean to share in the considerable treasures which Columbus had rashly boasted about, and to break the Spanish monopoly in the region. As neither France nor England had an actual standing navy at the time, and Holland's naval force was fully occupied defending the country against Spain, the idea of the privateer system came about, whereby a wealthy nobleman, usually of seafaring stock, would be

backed by a group of rich and influential friends and business associates, often the King or Queen themselves, and outfitted with boats, crew, food and equipment for long range raiding parties thousands of miles into Spanish claimed waters. These expeditions would be officially sanctioned by a letter of marque, signed by the King or Queen or one of their official administrators, giving legal permission for the raiders to attack foreign flagged vessels and towns, but normally only in time of war with that nation. In France the letter of marque was known as the "*lettre du course*" giving rise to the name Corsair. Upon returning from the Caribbean and later the Indian ocean, these licensed pirates were obliged to deliver all captured ships, treasure, slaves and other captured goods back to their home port, where the booty would be split, usually at a rate of 50% for the backers and 50% for captain and crew. Backing privateers became a very popular investment scheme, and one group who put up their money for Sir Francis Drake's raid on Panama in the 1580's got an excellent return of forty eight pounds for every pound invested! It was a very lucrative business in which major players from banking shoguns to royalty participated. The privateers received no salary or wages, and were recompensed only after returning home with their loot. To arrive home empty handed would be embarrassing and ruinous and that is why the raids on Spanish towns and shipping in the Caribbean, along what was to be known as the Spanish Main, were so bloody and violent, with no quarter expected or given by either side.

The first recorded major pirate attack on Trujillo occurred at midnight on July 7, 1558, when three French flagged vessels arrived

commanded by Francois Le Clerc and his two captains Jaques Sorel and Robert Blondel , containing over two hundred "arquebusters" or musket-bearing troops. Le Clerc was originally from Normandy where he had been born into minor nobility, winning honours fighting the English in 1549 and losing a leg in the action. It is thought that he was the first pirate to wear a wooden prosthesis and his nickname among the French was *Jambe de Bois* or "pegleg". The Spanish knew him as *Pie de Palo*, meaning the same. In 1553, King Henry II gave him a royal charter or letter of marque and two large warships. He supplemented these ships with seven other boats of his own and along with Sores, a protestant known as "The Exterminating Angel" for his policy of killing all captured catholic Spaniards, and Blondel, spent five years terrorising the Spanish Main. This included sacking Santiago de Cuba and stealing 100,000 pesos, a fortune of over 20 million in modern valuation. They attacked the town and after killing the guards at the gatehouse the French stormed the town, torching the church and killing its curate, Hernando Ocrama. The thirty Spanish soldiers were outnumbered seven to one and fled to the surrounding jungle, leaving the town undefended. Le Clerc and his gang then broke into the bonded warehouse and stole 14,000 gold ducats (worth \$450,000 in 2014) then left, but not before burning the rest of the town. They sailed off without sustaining one casualty. Eight years later, Le Clerc would be killed near the Azores while chasing a Spanish treasure boat. His fortune when he died was reported to be \$8.1 million dollars in current value, making him the thirteenth most financially successful pirate of all time.

The Spanish gained a small measure of revenge in 1561, when they surprised and captured thirty French corsairs engaged in careening their boat on the island of Guanaja, thirty-five miles from Trujillo. The privateers were at their most vulnerable during the careening operation, done to remove marine growth and repair worm holes on the hulls of their boats. The boats had to be taken out of the water and beached to do so. Of the thirty men captured, those who professed to be Catholic were sent to work in the mines of Comayaguela, the other fifteen were publicly hanged after being shipped to Cuba. If these harsh punishments were meant to act as a deterrent to piracy they didn't work. The lure of large gold and silver caches in Trujillo waiting to be shipped out would make the town a honeypot for sea borne raiders.

The next men to make significant attacks on the town were Francis Drake, originally from Devon, England and his cousin John Hawkins, who were the first slavers to illicitly sell human cargo from Africa to the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Hispaniola. With the death of Le Clerc, his right hand man Robert Blondel switched his allegiance to Drake and Hawkins and became their navigator, leading them back to the same ports he had raided a decade earlier. After a year of looting the Spanish main, including Puerto Caballos and Trujillo, Drake, Hawkins and Blondel were almost wiped out by a surprise Spanish attack in Vera Cruz, Mexico, while provisioning for the return voyage to England. Drake lost some five hundred men killed or captured in what he perceived to be an illegal attack, as Spain and England were not officially at war at the time - although this state of peace had not prevented him from illegally abusing his Letter of

Marque. He lost his boats Angel, Grace and Swallow, as well as most of their plundered treasure. The action at Vera Cruz was the first major sea battle fought in the Caribbean. The resounding Spanish victory in which they lost only twenty men and the subsequent brutal treatment of the English prisoners, set a precedent for the hatred the two would have for each other over the next two hundred and fifty years.

The economic damage caused by Le Clerc's rampage of 1558 was so great that King Philip had decreed that a new convoy system would operate from Spain to the New World, comprising of a minimum of twelve boats, led by a flagship manned by two hundred soldiers and armed with forty bronze cannon, with a similar boat defending the rear. Bronze was a much more expensive alloy than cast iron but it didn't warp or explode in the heat of battle. The flagship was so heavily armed that she gained the nickname *Cagafuego* or "Shit fire" from those who sailed in her.

The sailing of the *Flota de las Indias* would consist of two outward bound convoys bringing cargo and settlers, sailing together until reaching Hispaniola. They would then split up, one convoy going directly to Cartagena, Colombia and Portobello in Panama, the other heading for Vera Cruz, Mexico, stopping at Trujillo, Puerto Caballos and Rio Dulce, Guatemala along the way. This convoy system eliminated much of the guess work for the pirates, and from now on the Yucatan channel down to the Gulf of Honduras became a favoured hunting ground for them.

Having learned his lesson not to be caught at anchor in a hostile port, Drake returned with Blondel to the Caribbean in his ship "Judith" in 1570 and attacked shipping off Trujillo both that year and in 1573. He never entered the bay, but prudently stayed outside Punta Castilla eight miles from the town, waiting for cargo boats to leave the port. It was Drake's policy of lurking outside the range of the town's cannons that prompted the Spanish to build two watch towers – one called *El Mirador* (the lookout post) on the bluff in town and another at Punta Castilla, with a huge mound of brushwood available which would be lit upon the approach of the enemy. The job of the four watchmen at the end of the remote mosquito and sandfly ridden spit cannot be envied. Drake, or El Draque as he was known to the Spanish, would eventually amass a fortune of \$124 million dollars in current day value, making him the second most successful pirate of all time. This failed to impress King Philip the Second of Spain who put a bounty of four million dollars (in current value) on his head - dead or alive - and who declared a full scale war on England in 1585 in retaliation for Drake's and his cohorts' incessant attacks on his shipping in the Caribbean and Pacific oceans.

After Drake moved his operations to the Pacific, his place in the Caribbean was taken by an old friend of his, William Parker, the mayor of his home town of Plymouth, Devon. Equipped with a letter of marque from Queen Elizabeth, Parker would raid Trujillo at least five times over a seventeen year period between 1578 and 1595. In 1594, accompanied by the Cherbourg born French corsair Jeremie Raymond and equipped with a fleet of eight boats, Parker waited at the entrance to the bay of Trujillo and intercepted the personal vessel

of the governor of the town and province of Honduras, Francisco Rodriguez. Letters on board Rodriguez's boat informed Parker that Puerto Caballos was poorly defended and awaiting reinforcements. They also told of two treasure boats taking on silver bullion. Assisted by one of the galley slaves from the Spanish boat, Diego el Mulatto, who acted as his navigator, Parker and Raymond's fleet swept down on Puerto Caballos, some three hundred miles to the west, captured the lightly defended boats and sailed back to Plymouth to a hero's welcome, where he was handed the keys to the town. His French partner Raymond would be less fortunate and lost his life along with those of his crew the following year after being chased down by a Spanish anti-pirate fleet, known as *La Flota de Barlovento*, after he raided Trujillo on his own in 1595. England and Spain were now engaged in a state of almost constant war, making privateering legal and profitable.

Drake and Hawkins died after contracting dysentery or "bloody flux" in 1595. Their places were taken by among others Sir Christopher Newport, another salty Devonshire dog, who at forty years of age had roamed the Spanish main for twenty years and despite losing an arm fighting in Cuba, had prospered. He had under his command the warships "Little John," "Golden Dragon" and "Margaret". Backed by a wealthy London consortium of bankers, he teamed up with Sir Michael Geare and three French captains. Newport and his group left their base at Tortuga in present day Haiti and sailed for Trujillo where informants had told them of two large boats taking on cargo in the port. One was the 600 ton "Nuestra Señora de Rosario" captained by Juan de Monasterio, the other was captain Francisco Ferrufino's

400 ton "San Juan Bautista." Both were laden with indigo, silver, sarsaparilla and cattle hides and had set sail for Puerto Caballos. Newport allowed them to pass his ambush at night unmolested, preferring to attack them once they had filled up with more cargo in Puerto Caballos. On the night of February 17, 1602, his fleet swept into the port to fight what was to be known as the Battle of Puerto Caballos. During heavy fighting both sides lost about thirty men killed. However the Anglo-French raiders won the day by taking both boats and over two hundred prisoners. After spending eighteen days sacking the town, Newport returned home a wealthy man and used his share of the proceeds to found the Virginia Company, which would back England's first permanent colony in America.

Up to the 1630's privateering operations had to be funded, outfitted and operated from home ports in Europe, a costly business involving large financial backing, but as first France then England and Holland gained territorial footholds in the Caribbean, the Golden Age of Piracy began and lasted the next ninety years. Amazingly, as of 1631 England's only two possessions in the Caribbean were the tiny island of St Kitt's in the Lesser Antilles and the even smaller Providencia Island, lying 220 miles off the north coast of Nicaragua, about 400 miles east of Trujillo. The island, despite measuring only eight miles in circumference, was the site of a bold colonizing project funded to the tune of 100,000 pounds sterling (or a staggering \$17.6 million in modern money) by the Earl of Warwick and some wealthy investors, known as The Providence Island Company. Its first settlers were some two hundred and fifty Puritans, a zealous, stiff-collared, pious protestant religious cult, who grew sugar and tobacco to be

shipped back to England, with the work being done by African slaves. The island lay very close to the shipping channels which the Spanish used to transport gold and silver from Columbia and Panama up to Honduras and Mexico, for trans-shipment back to Spain, so the island soon became a haven for privateers, corsairs and buccaneers. They settled in a village on the far leeward side of the island three miles from the tee totaling, chaste, non-gambling Puritans, who tolerated their presence as they provided muscle to defend the island against the ever present threat of attack from the Spanish. The Earl of Warwick had issued letters of marque to them, specifying that 20% of any booty they captured go to the Providence island company coffers.

In the meantime, the Dutch had founded the Dutch West Indies Trading Company in 1621 and had soon established themselves on ten islands in the Lesser Antilles, close to the coast of Venezuela. Having a professional, well-trained navy, the company would do serious damage to Spanish commerce in the ensuing years, and in the short span of fifteen years between 1621 and 1636, captured or sank an incredible 547 Spanish trading vessels, at a rate of close to one a week. As protestants whose country had recently been invaded by the Spanish, they showed zero compassion or mercy when dealing with their hated Catholic enemy and the policy of no quarter given or taken was practised on either side. At the same time, the French operated out of the island of Tortuga, on the western side of Hispaniola in a part of what is now called Haiti, before expanding to occupy Guadelupe, St Barts, Martinique and several other small islands. The Spanish were now surrounded on all sides by their enemies.

Trujillo enjoyed a relative period of calm during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. However, with the advent of a new war in Europe the 1630's saw the beleaguered outpost again become the target for an onslaught of pirate attacks, many of whom, coming from Tortuga, now called themselves buccaneers after the Arawak native term for a green twig smoking grill they used to jerk their meat with, called a Boucan. By the late 1590's all the easily mined gold and silver had been extracted from the mines of Honduras, and there were only a few natives left for slave labour. The only goods left which were profitable for export, were cowhides for leather work and sarsaparilla, a plant indigenous to Central America that was used as a hugely popular health tonic and was thought to be a general cure-all for many diseases including syphilis. Nowadays, it forms the main flavouring for root beer. In addition, before the advent of synthetic dyes in the 1890's, the extracted juices from various tropical plants were used for staining clothing. These were an extremely sought after and valuable commodity with the primary source for blue, purple and violet dye being a flax like plant called Indigo (*indigofera*), which grew in profusion on the hot Pacific coast of Honduras. The main source of red dye came from Logwood (*haematoxylum Campechianum*), a stubby tree which grew in marshy coastal regions. The heart of the tree was used for a fixative dye, valuable in Europe for making lasting colours of yellow, orange, red and black. Its leaves and bark were and still are, used for medicinal purposes. The claims for logwood cutting territory on the Mexican Yucatan coast and in Honduras would be the cause for much conflict between the English and Spanish in later years, and the countries of Belize and Brazil would be founded by logwood cutters. At the start of the 17th century, English

political economist Sir William Petty estimated that the average value of merchandise carried in a boat was between one thousand to fifteen hundred pounds sterling, whereas a single load of 50 tons of logwood was worth five thousand pounds! The other source for red dye came from an unlikely source: the Cochineal beetle, which was harvested by native workers from plantations of Nopal cactus (prickly pear), which were the preferred feeding and breeding grounds of the beetle. To make one pound of the dye, seventy thousand of these insects would be collected, roasted in open pans and ground with a mortar and pestle. Although precious metals were no longer being shipped out of Trujillo, her outward bound cargoes of Indigo, Cochineal and Logwood made tempting and valuable targets for the pirates. In 1627, the forty-three year old maverick Dutch pirate, Hendrick Lucifer, made one of the luckiest blunders in pirate history off the coast of Cuba, by accidentally colliding his boats with the Honduran treasure fleet from Trujillo, although it would cost him his life in the process. He was so nicknamed because he entered the battle with his ships shooting fireworks, rockets, smokepots and fire bombs, giving the impression that the Devil himself was arriving! The heavily armed Spanish cargo boats had left Trujillo for Spain by way of Cuba, when they accidentally encountered Lucifer and his three boats in heavy fog in the Gulf of Mexico. After a furious fight in which Lucifer was twice shot in the chest, one of the Spanish boats was captured. It contained 1,404 chests of indigo, 4280 animal pelts, 32 jars of balsam and some silver, which was sold in Rotterdam for 1.3 million guilders, making it a very valuable prize. Lucifer, reeling from his wounds, took to his bed with a bottle of rum telling his crew that he

was going to "rest up for a little while". He was found dead the next morning, having died from loss of blood.

Trujillo's weak adobe and wooden fortifications were still pitifully undermanned, with most able-bodied men working as cattle farmers on large haciendas inland from the town. In 1630, the governor of Trujillo, Francisco de Rivamontan, requested and obtained an additional fifty soldiers from the Regency of Guatemala. These new recruits took part in an action on July 15, 1633, when they repulsed an attack by Dutch "Sea Beggars" who arrived in eight boats. However, shortly thereafter they were much less effective against an attack by another Dutchman, Cornelius Jol, yet another wooden-legged pirate known as *Houtebeen* or "Pegleg". His men ransacked the town, burning it, the church and the fort, whose six artillery pieces were loaded onto their boats. The Spanish hated Jol so much that a song was written about him and sung in taverns around the western Caribbean. It went: "*Patapalo es un pirata malo, que come pulpo crudo, y bebe agua del mar*" or "Pegleg is a very bad pirate, who eats raw octopus, and drinks seawater"! After Jol's rampage, it was decided to build another wooden fort called La Fortaleza de Arturo, guarded by six cannons, on the hillside half a mile behind the beaches where today's airport now sits. An underground tunnel running almost a mile connected it to the town and another tunnel connected both the forts on the hill overlooking the bay. In times of extreme peril the tunnels would be used to evacuate fleeing townsfolk and their possessions out of harm's way.

Two factors now contributed to the further rise of piracy in the Caribbean. In 1654 England's leader Oliver Cromwell, a staunch pu-

ritan who despised everything Catholic and especially the Spanish, launched his "Western Design", a plan to destroy Spanish domination in the New World. He sent an invasion fleet of over thirty eight ships with three thousand highly trained marines on board. Unfortunately, it also included 35,000 rank and file soldiers, who were convicted criminals freed from England's over-crowded jails and pressed into service. One British officer described them as "The dregs of society, a wide range of bullies, common cheats, thieves, and lewd persons". These men were to become England's first permanent colonial settlers in the Caribbean. Cromwell's plan mostly failed. His force didn't capture Cuba and Hispaniola but settled for Jamaica, which he felt was "The dagger pointed at the heart of the Spanish Empire". Many soldiers now found themselves unemployed and when sugarcane replaced tobacco as the region's primary export, hundreds of new settlers and sharecroppers found themselves evicted from their farms and moved to coastal settlements. With hundreds of young men now without gainful employment, and not wishing to return home, they turned to piracy.

The second contributory factor to the rise of piracy was life in the English Royal Navy, which was certainly no picnic for the men who served in the 17th century. Most had been press-ganged or kidnapped from their coastal homes with no prospect of returning to their families for years. The men were paid one quarter of the pay of a merchant seamen. Their wages, which stayed at the same rate for one hundred and fifty-five years, were often not paid for up to two years to prevent desertion. The food was rotten, the punishments draconian, with men being flogged with the dreaded lead-tipped cat

o' nine tails for simple offenses and keel hauled or hanged for more serious ones. Unsurprisingly, many decided to abandon this hellish existence and become pirates. As famed buccaneer Bartholomew Roberts said: "Better a short and merry life, than one of drudgery."

Before the capture of Jamaica in 1656, Providencia and the Bay Islands of Honduras were the main pirate lairs, and in 1639, the governor of Providencia, the sixty-two year old Nathaniel Butler, who had spent several years in charge of Bermuda, decided to try his hand at privateering. He set sail in his boat the "Warwick," but disaster soon befell him on the way to Trujillo when the captain died. His place was taken over by the inexperienced James Reiskinner, who being unfamiliar with the region, meandered lost for months between May to September before locating Trujillo, where Butler and his crew captured a large cargo boat containing a load of indigo. He then ransomed the boat back to the Spanish in return for 16,000 pesos, a common practice, which saved the town from being sacked and burned. Even at his rather advanced age, Butler had found Trujillo easy to take and his men roamed free, taking what they wanted because, as noted by the town's governor that year, the town only had thirty-nine able bodied men and twenty-two firearms to defend it. Two years later in 1641, Captain William Jackson, also operating with a letter of marque issued by the Providence Island Company, raided Trujillo capturing a large transport boat full of African slaves. He ransomed this back to the Spanish for four tons of indigo, two thousand pieces of eight and two gold chains which took his fancy.

The same year a half black, half Spanish pirate from Campeche, Mexico, known as Diego el Mulatto or Diego Lucifer, arrived at Tru-

jillo with four boats loaded with escaped Spanish convicts and slaves. He was the illegitimate son of a Spanish nobleman and a black slave girl, but because of the strict Spanish caste system his colour prevented him from attaining any decent position in Mexican society. He developed a hatred for the Spanish and their system of racial segregation and took to piracy. Taking the town easily, he stayed for twenty five days, roaming the countryside looting haciendas and farms as far away as Olanchito. The governor of Trujillo, Don Melchor Alonso de Tamayo, fought back and managed to rally a platoon of twelve soldiers who ambushed Diego's men as they returned through a narrow jungle pass, killing thirteen of them and forcing the remainder to return to their boats. This infuriated el Mulatto, who torched the entire thatch roofed town of Trujillo, including the church, digging up graves and defiling the bodies of the Jesuit missionaries who had been murdered in La Moskitia fifteen years earlier.

Another attack on the town by one Hendrick Lucifer (so known because he used a massive firework show while attacking boats and ports, thus creating an image of approaching hell) caused much damage. However, little was taken and he left to attack the Veracruz convoy bound for Cuba, where he had considerably better luck.

The Spanish had tolerated enough of raids from Providence Island and on May 21, 1641, a massive fleet carrying 1,400 soldiers and 600 marines sailed from Cartagena, Columbia, under the command of General Diaz Pimento, with orders to take the island, which was protected by a tricky reef system and sixty cannons firing from nine fortified positions. The islanders were outnumbered almost eight to one and after suffering three days of constant cannon bombard-

ment, they surrendered the island on May 24. The Spanish captured three hundred and fifty settlers, three hundred and sixty one African slaves. Upon searching the warehouses they found stolen indigo, cochineal, gold and silver to the value of 500,000 ducats, an astonishing 22 million dollars in modern day value. The Providence Island company had been a very successful business venture for ten years. However, despite capturing the island and its settlers, the real objects of Spain's wrath, the "pestilential pirates," had quietly slipped anchor on the night of May 23 and sailed to what was to become their undisturbed lair for the next one hundred and forty years, La Moskitia, on mainland Honduras and Nicaragua.

Having lost Providence Island, the following year the English illegally settled on Roatan and Guanaja, establishing the town of Old Port Royal on the former. In 1643, the Spanish responded by sending a raiding party from Trujillo, which destroyed and burned the homes of the English as well as the villages of over seven hundred Paya natives living on the islands. The natives were then rounded up and deported, together with any other natives living in the vicinity of Trujillo, to work in mines in Guatemala in order to prevent them from aiding the English. This would signal the end of the native presence in the Bay islands and Trujillo. Indeed, it is surprising that they had survived for one hundred and nineteen years after the initial Spanish conquest.

Meanwhile, the resolute Captain Jackson had sailed to England and with his share of the money from the stolen indigo, had equipped a massive raiding party of over twelve hundred men recruited from Barbados and other islands in the lesser Antilles, along with three

former employees of the Providence Island Company: Captains Samuel Axe, William Rous and Lewis Morris. They sailed to Guana-ja, now an unofficial English possession, in fourteen boats and after resting up for a few days, crossed the channel to Trujillo. There they attacked the town full on, storming up the ramp leading to the fort causing the fifty defenders to scatter into the jungle or into the underground tunnels. No casualties were recorded on either side. Jackson and his men then spent two weeks leisurely looting the town, taking anything they considered valuable, including some indigo and silver plate, as well as all the townsfolk's clothes that were being washed in the laundry. However, Jackson was denied a second prize boat and left, disappointed with the lack of loot and prize money, writing in his logbook that Trujillo was, "The poorest port in all the Indies." He did however prevent his infuriated men from burning the town, bent as they were on revenge for the loss of Providence Island and frustrated by the lack of anything of value. As he was leaving, when a delegation of the town's women appeared on the beach in their underwear and pointed out that it would be another year before a cargo boat arrived from Spain, he graciously returned their stolen clothing!

Jackson's logbook also states that he released 120 captive Paya natives, who asked him to return them to Roatan. The captain obliged them, then led his raiding party to Jamaica where they captured Spanish Town and gained considerably more treasure than had been found in Trujillo. They spent a month on the island enjoying the fruits of their success, some of his crew liking Jamaica so much that they deserted to stay and live with the Spanish.

By now it was common knowledge among pirate circles that Trujillo was very weakly defended. Another massive Dutch attack destroyed the town a mere three months after Jackson's raid, despite one hundred and thirty-two soldiers having been sent by the Viceroy of Guatemala to bolster the town's defenses. The church and graveyard were once again desecrated by the Catholic-hating Dutchmen, provoking the governor to issue a decree ordering all Dutchmen to be summarily hanged, whether they bore a letter of marque or not. After being subjected to pirate attacks almost constantly for over one hundred years, including the two major ones of 1643, the understandably frightened and nervous population began to migrate inland. They went chiefly to the towns of Olanchito, Sonaguera and Jutuigalpa where they dedicated themselves to agricultural projects far from the coast, leaving only the military garrison and government officials behind.

Despite a total ban by Spain on trading with any non-Spanish flagged vessel, the impoverished and beleaguered colonists of Trujillo, whose closest foreign port to trade with was in Cuba, had no choice but to start fraternising with the enemy in order to augment the meagre existence they made: selling goods to the Spanish New World fleet which only showed up once a year. Trading with the English, Dutch and French was also a better alternative than having the town burned to ashes almost every time they arrived.

The British captured Jamaica in 1656, giving them a power base to raid towns and shipping as well as start new trading routes, plus a "dagger to strike the heart of the Spanish Main". Many foreign flagged boats took advantage of the *arriba maliciosa*, a Spanish mar-

itime law that allowed non-Spanish flagged ships to put up in ports in times of emergency, when damaged or in bad weather, and sell off sufficient goods to pay for repairs and refitting while under the protection of Spanish authorities. This loophole in the law attracted ships of many nationalities including Spanish, who brought in undeclared cargo to sell in Trujillo. Everyone, from the Governor, the military commander, soldiers, the mayor and lesser flunkies, became engaged in smuggling of one sort or another and corruption and bribery became common practice. Every time a boat docked to be unloaded, the town held a carnival, with musicians, a circus and drinking and dancing for a week. Everyone profited and it relieved the boredom of being stuck in one of Spain's poorest and most far-flung outposts.

The next notable pirate attack on Trujillo was by probably the most infamous of them all - Henry Morgan. He was born in Wales around 1635 and by 1664 was living in Jamaica, where his uncles Edward and Thomas served in the government and army respectively. By age twenty-nine, he was serving as a navy lieutenant under Captain John Morris. That year the first meeting of a syndicated group of pirate captains calling themselves "The Brethren of the Coast" was held in Port Royal and included Morgan, Morris, Captains Jackman and Freeman, the Dutchmen Captains David Marteen and Yankee Willems, plus Moises Cohen, the first Sephardic Jewish pirate to operate in the Caribbean. Morgan was great friends with Sir Thomas Modyford, who had succeeded Morgan's uncle Edward as governor of Jamaica and became handy at issuing letters of marque to the privateers, even though England and Spain were not at war. Modyford

would be severely reprimanded for this and eventually replaced, but not before he and Morgan had made several million pounds.

Leaving Jamaica with false papers, the group sailed for the Grjalva river on the east coast of Mexico and after making a fifty mile forced march inland the raiders successfully attacked the town of Villahermosa, making off with a large cache of gold and silver. However, upon returning to the cove where their four boats were waiting for them, they found that a Spanish coast guard patrol had captured the boats and crew, thereby leaving them stranded on the beach. But at a small village they managed to steal two small coastal trading barques, plus four native fishing canoes which they towed behind the larger boats, and slowly made their way down the Yucatan channel to the Bay of Honduras.

Upon reaching Trujillo, Morgan led a surprise night attack by canoe on a large Spanish galleon moored in the bay awaiting cargo. Cutting her anchor line, Morgan and a skeleton crew rowed her out to the mouth of the bay where his overjoyed and relieved companions were waiting.

They sailed their new prize over 300 miles to the mouth of the San Juan River, Nicaragua, picking up Miskito native mercenaries on the way down the coast. Morgan, Morris and their crews then paddled by canoe upriver to Grenada and successfully plundered the town, arriving back in Jamaica to a hero's welcome.

It was this outstanding act of seamanship that made Morgan well respected and elevated him to captain of his own boats. Accompanied by a flotilla of warboats and his own private army, he would spend

the next fifteen years roaming the Spanish Main with impunity, becoming infamous in the annals of piracy for his cruelty towards the prisoners he took and tortured during his attacks on Portobello and Panama. He retired to Jamaica to become its wealthy governor but died from dropsy, tuberculosis and alcohol related problems in 1688 at age 53.

By now, Roatan had become the largest pirate base outside of Jamaica, with towns such as Frenchman's Cove and New Port Royal springing up. By the mid 17th century it was estimated that upwards of five thousand pirates, sailors, tradesmen and their slaves lived on the island. Another Spanish attack by four men of war ships was repulsed in 1650 and the island would remain occupied by the English and their friends until 1782, during which time it attracted some of the most violent psychopaths to sail the Caribbean.

Daniel Montbars (known as Montbars the Exterminator), Francois L'Ollonais and Roche Brazilliano were all cruel captains shunned by their peers, who frequented the island when not hiding in swampy lairs in La Moskitia. One of Montbars favourite tortures was to slit open a captive Spaniard's belly, extract a piece of intestine, nail it to a tree and then make the man dance until he died by beating him with a burning log. L'Ollonais was known for cannibalism and would eat the livers of captive Spaniards, while Roche Brazilliano was an alcoholic madman who would chop arms and legs off or shoot any passerby who refused to drink with him.

In 1683 all three of these anti-socials were present at one of the largest gatherings of "The brethren of the coast," which was hosted

by Sir Henry Morgan (who had been knighted after his 1670 attack on Panama) on Roatan. Also in attendance were his old friend Yankee Willens, two other Dutch captains: Michel Andriezoon and Laurens de Graaf, plus the Frenchman Michel Grammont.

Michel Grammont was a disgraced nobleman, forced to flee France after killing his sister's suitor in a duel. He also bore a grudge against Spain and was known to summarily execute any prisoners taken.

Laurens De Graaf was thirty years old and had already had a successful privateering career, earning him the name of *Gesell de west* or "The Scourge of the West." Morgan considered himself "A great and mischievous pirate," while the Spanish despised him as the devil incarnate. In 1679 he had turned the tables on the Spanish anti-pirate pursuit fleet hunting him: the "Armada de Barlovento". He captured a twenty eight gun boat which he renamed "The Tiger" and which boasted his "Winged Avenger" ensign. After only a few months however, he gave this boat to his first lieutenant Michel Andriezoon, after capturing an even larger boat from the inept Spanish pursuit fleet. Equipped with two formidable, multi-cannoned Spanish gunboats, De Graaf and his crew holed up on the island of Guanaja 37 miles from Trujillo, with plans to seize two large cargo vessels loading up with indigo there. Unfortunately, their plans were upset by the arrival in Trujillo of a mercenary Dutch pirate, forty eight year old Nicholas Van Hoorn, who was on the loose in the western Caribbean in his massive boat the "St Nicholas Day", containing his personal three hundred man army. He had custom constructed the huge boat in Rotterdam with some of the 2 million gold French Livre coins

he had stolen several years earlier on a raid off Puerto Rico after being paid to guard the treasure fleet. Van Hoorn was not a popular figure in the Caribbean, and was known for torturing and killing all of his prisoners.

The St Nicholas Day entered the bay of Trujillo expecting to find the two cargo boats fully laden with indigo. When the rogue Dutchmen found them to be empty and the bonded customs warehouse on shore containing only a paltry 479 *tostones* (half peso silver coins) and four reales, Van Hoorn and his men went on a murderous rampage, killing all of the soldiers in the fort as well as anyone else they encountered. They then set fire to the entire town including the church (burned yet again).

Sailing to Guanaja, he rendezvoused with the enraged De Graaf and Captains Grammont and Andriezoon. Initially refusing his offer to join them on a combined raid on Vera Cruz, Mexico, they relented when they realised that Van Hoorn, when his large boat, men plus the two empty Spanish merchantmen he had captured in Trujillo, would be useful in the raid.

The group sailed from Guanaja with a combined force of 1300 men and instigated what would become known as "The rape of Vera Cruz," resulting in the robbery of six million French gold livres. Van Hoorn sanctioned the rape and murder of innocent townsfolk and burned the city to ashes over the protests of a furious De Graaf, the expedition's leader. After splitting the booty on a beach south of Vera Cruz, De Graaf challenged Van Hoorn to a duel with swords and killed him, which can be considered fitting justice for such a man.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who died at the end of a rope, from a bullet or sword wound, or who drank themselves to death, De Graaf would go on to marry one of the few female buccaneers, the beautiful Anne Dieu le Vent (Anne who God wants) after she threatened to shoot him for flirting with her. Remarkably, he ended his days peacefully in The United States after he helped settle the French colony at Biloxi, Mississippi.

However, the total and complete destruction of Trujillo by Van Hoorn was the last straw for the Spanish crown. After sustaining so many attacks in such a short period of time, it was decided not to rebuild the fort and church but to pull out, so after struggling for one hundred and fifty eight years to maintain this small outpost of a failing empire, Trujillo was abandoned to the elements. Ten years later, all that remained were some crumbling ruins. The departure of the Spanish presence in Trujillo did not however, stop piracy in the Gulf of Honduras and points east of it.

A new menace grew around the turn of the 18th century. They were neither privateers nor corsairs operating with letters of marque, but disenfranchised crewmen who had learned their trade with seasoned pirate captains before going independent, buying small fast sloops for raiding coastal traffic, quickly moving up the pirate food chain in short, spectacular careers that lasted a year or two at best.

The most famous of these flash in the pan sea bandits, was Blackbeard, who was probably born Edward Teach (or Thatch) in Bristol, England in 1680. In his twenties and early thirties, he served

on several privateer missions in the Caribbean before settling in the Bahamas.

In 1716 at the age of thirty-six, he joined Benjamin Hornigold as lieutenant in Hornigold's so called "Flying Gang", a loose knit consortium of minor pirates and scallywags. They included Stede Bonnet of Barbados and Englishman Calico Jack Rackham (so called for his preference of wearing women's calico long johns which kept him cool under the hot sun), engaging in robbing small cargo boats and any turtle and fishing vessels.

Teach had by then acquired the nickname "Blackbeard" and was described as "a tall, spare man, with a long black beard, tied with multi-coloured ribbons," presenting an image "that no fury from Hell could look so frightful".

Lt. Teach and Capt. Hornigold started to prowl the Bay of Honduras in their boat "The Ranger" looking for unarmed shipping. They stopped and boarded an English trading boat in the channel between Trujillo and the Bay Islands. The understandably petrified crew and passengers of the captured boat, in fear for their lives, were much relieved when Hornigold sheepishly apologised to them, explaining that the pirates had had a big party on their boat the previous night and during the drunken revelry, had thrown all their hats overboard. On account of the searing hot sun, they were in need of replacements. After relieving the astonished seafarers of all their hats, Hornigold and Blackbeard returned to "The Ranger" and allowed their captives to sail on otherwise unmolested.

The following year the pair split up and Blackbeard began an eighteen month reign of fear in the Caribbean (although no known reports of his cruelty to captive crews exist), roaming across a span of some fifteen hundred miles from the Bahamas to the Dutch East Indies and back. He now owned a captured French 36 gun man of war which he had renamed the "Queen Anne's Revenge", along with two smaller boats, one a ten gunner, plus a formidable gang of some 350 men.

Sailing down from Belize he entered the unprotected Bay of Trujillo on April 9, 1718 and stole a cargo boat and four sloops which were unloading contraband cargo. He also captured, unloaded and then burned another English merchant vessel called "The Protestant Caesar" which he found in the channel between Trujillo and Guanaja.

Heading to the Cayman Islands and then on to Charleston, South Carolina, he blockaded the harbour and caused further irritation to the British authorities. He was hunted down in November and killed in a firefight with a British Naval party sent to capture or kill him.

None of The Flying Gang would live to see their fortieth birthdays. Teach was shot and then beheaded, Hornigold died when his boat sank in a hurricane, and Rackham and Bonnet would both be hanged.

Their places were replaced for a very short period of a year or two by a gang of seaborne anti-socials operating from the Bay Islands off Trujillo.

Ned Lowe was known for his "savage and grotesque brutality" and was the worst of the bunch, leaving treasure worth around six

million dollars hidden on Roatan. His accomplices included George Lowther, Francis Spriggs and the unpopular Charles Vane, who spent a year marooned on the eastern side of Roatan before being picked up by a British naval boat, taken to Jamaica and after languishing in a dungeon for a year was hanged.

With peace declared between the four major European powers in the Caribbean and the area policed by larger, better armed naval patrols, the so called "Golden Age of Piracy" was all but over by 1720. Although piracy would continue to exist in many forms in and around the Bay of Trujillo for centuries to come, no large scale raiding parties of over a thousand men would ever again enter the port to plunder the town or raid boats moored in her harbour.

Chapter 4 - LA MOSQUITIA AND THE ENGLISH

Englishmen and his Miskito brethren shall band together and have another go at the Spanish - Henry Morgan, pirate.

To the east of Trujillo, spanning half of Honduras's and all of Nicaragua's Caribbean coastlines and running over five hundred miles to the Costa Rican border, lies the provinces known to the natives as Tagucgalpa and Tegalpa. It was the ancient kingdom of the Miskitos, descendants of fierce seaborne Carib natives, who bore no relationship to the Paya, Lenca, Maya or other natives of Honduras, either in resemblance or linguistically. This vast tangle of impenetrable jungle, swamps, river deltas, and savannas is second only to the Amazon region of Brazil/Ecuador/Peru as the largest tract of virgin rainforest left in Latin America.

The western part of it, contained in Honduras and making up 7% of that country's land mass, measures some 16,400 square kms. In the 16th and 17th centuries it proved too hard a nut for even the Spanish to crack.

Lope Aguirre, who had sailed past Trujillo with its colonists provisions on board his ship in 1524, had spent years lost in its jungles searching for the fabled "Ciudad Blanco" or White City.

Cortez's expeditions had been repulsed by its sheer magnitude...no real roads into the region exist even now, five centuries later, and boat and plane are the only real options of entering its vastness.

Five further attempts were made to convert its natives to Christianity by parties of Franciscan monks, between 1604 and 1675, but these all ended up in either the murder or expulsion of the missionaries. After being introduced to the brutality of the conquistadores by "El Loco" Aguirre, La Mosquitia's residents wanted nothing to do with the Spanish, who simply did not have the manpower or equipment to deal with this vast morass of jungle.

Because the Spanish exercised zero influence in the region, it was fiercely independent of their control. There were no Spanish settlers or towns to manage there, and the entire region was "governed" by a Royal Cedula from Antigua, Guatemala, over 700 miles away. For all intents and purposes, although they claimed it, the Spanish simply didn't exist there. This allowed the indigenous peoples (of which the Spanish claimed may have been up to 30 different tribes) to continue living as they had before the arrival of Columbus and Cortez and to receive, and most importantly, trade with visitors from other regions and countries.

As more northern Europeans visited the area, particularly the English, Dutch and French pirates and privateers who sailed back and forth along the Spanish Main, the region became increasingly popular on account of its myriad of hidden canals, estuaries, and deltas, where anybody who wasn't Spanish and didn't try to enslave them was welcome. Those that had some guns and rum to trade, were welcome to refit and careen their boats there using the exceptionally good hardwoods which grew there, as well as the Honduran pine, much prized for mast and deck making and with a very high pitch tar content.

From the 1630's to present time, the region would become known to these Europeans as La Moskitia, or The Mosquito coast.

Coming into contact with the inhabitants of the area, the sea rovers naturally began seeking social and commercial intercourse with them starting in 1629, when an English privateer, Daniel Elrith and two Dutch brothers Abraham and Willem Blauveldt (who would lend their names to both Bluefields, Nicaraguan capital of La Mosquitia, as well as Bluefields bay in western Jamaica) explored and mapped the region from their base of operations on Providencia Island.

This tiny settlement, together with the other small island of St Kitts over a thousand miles away, was the only territory which the English laid claim to in the Caribbean, over a hundred years after the Spanish had colonised most of it. Now the English wanted to expand their tiny, unimpressive foothold lying 220 kms off the Nicaraguan coast, which measured a mere 7 kms by 4 kms, a total landmass of 17 square kilometres.

In 1633 one of the privateers, Captain Sussex Cammock, was sent to Cape Gracias a Dios, where Catarasca lagoon lies on the Honduran/Nicaraguan border, with instructions to establish a colony. Tension had unsurprisingly been brewing between the lush living pirates and the religious zealots back on the island (where even games of dice and cards were banned). The Miskito natives who populated the coast welcomed the new buccaneer settlers as their first real trading partners. Things initially went well for Cammock and the company was pleased to hear of his progress in establishing a settlement on the

coast, where a small fort and several houses were built. Cammock began shipping mahogany, other hardwoods, Honduran pine pitch (prized for caulking boards on boats), turtle shell, and flax back to Providencia, from where it was transshipped to England and America.

Before plastic was invented in the late 19th century, turtle shell was much prized for use in eyeglass and picture frames, as well as for inkpens, jewelry inlay, and surgical instruments. The Moskito Cays were the most plentiful turtling grounds in the Caribbean, the natives worshipped The Turtle Mother as a goddess, and the profusion of turtles would later attract hundreds of turtling boats each year and lead to their virtual annihilation. The Moskito king charged the English a 10% tax on turtle hunting.

By the early 1700's so many turtles were killed that they were in danger of becoming extinct, so the natives started de-shelling the turtles while still alive, by heating them over a fire and then separating the shell from its connecting membrane with sharp knives. The animal was then allowed to go back into the sea where in time it would grow another shell to be harvested.

The flax or silk grass found on the Miskito coast was plentiful and used for the extraction of Linseed oil, much valued by cabinet makers for fine cabinet work finishing. Furthermore, its fibre was used to make linen and its seeds were edible....The company named it Cammock's grass.

Cammock brought back Miskito Native chiefs with him on his trips to Providencia and on one visit in 1639 happened to meet The

Earl of Warwick, who persuaded, the most senior chief to allow his son to be sent to England to meet King Charles the First. The boy, known as Oldman, made the voyage and was welcomed into the Royal Court, where he was invested with a fine lace hat, a sword and other instruments of insignia. Invested as the First King of the Miskito Shore, he started a lineage of eleven kings that would continue until 1896.

The kings were educated in English ways and language and were crowned amidst great pomp and ceremony in either Belize or Jamaica. This act would cement what was to become 250 years of commitment on behalf of England to ostensibly protect the Miskito people from the vagaries of the hated Spanish. However, more than anything it gave England access to the considerable natural resources of the region, which they gleefully exploited, buying off the Miskito natives with guns, gunpowder, rum, pots, pans and cheap textiles.

As no mention of the word Miskito occurs in any writings before the 1630's, some people have assumed that the natives gained their name from the guns or muskets which the English traded with them, leading them to be called the Musketeer Natives, abbreviated to Miskito. However, according to Miskito legend they were named after a powerful ruler - King Miskut - who inhabited the Sandy Bay region of Nicaragua centuries earlier.

Around 1640, two Portuguese slave ships heading for Trujillo from Africa, were taken over by the captives, the crews killed and the boats beached near Duckwarra, south of Cape Gracias a Dios. Over 400 black Africans were thereby assimilated into the Miskito nation,

giving birth to a new hybrid race called the Sambu-Miskito tribe. A fierce, obstinate and warlike people who, when allied and armed by the English, would cause considerable cause for concern for not only the Spanish, by whom they would be likened to psychopathic boogymen, but to their neighbouring native tribes who they would capture on raids to be sold in Jamaica as plantation workers.

A hurricane destroyed Cammock's settlement in 1635 and he and the surviving settlers returned to Providencia, a mere two years after beginning the enterprise. However, the English and Dutch continued trading with the Miskitos on the coast and a strange mutually beneficial alliance was formed, with natives being recruited to man raiding parties on Trujillo and Granada, and even as far as Guatemala. Slave raids almost wiped out the coastal Mayan native population around the mouth of the Rio Dulce, sending the captives being shipped to work plantations in Jamaica.

After suffering ten years of privateering raids from Providencia, the Spanish had attacked and captured it in May 1643.

The refugees from Providencia soon attracted other sailors, runaway slaves, traders, escaped convicts and other buccaneers to the Miskito coast. Within a few years settlements were set up from just east of Trujillo. The English claimed all the territory from east of Puerto Castilla, 10 miles to the east of Trujillo, to the Costa Rican border, ignoring Spanish claims.

Small settlements sprang up bearing names such as Haulover, Monkey Point, Evans Lagoon (now Ibans), Bragman's Bluff (present day Puerto Cabezas), Bluefields, Sangrelaya (a Moskito approxima-

tion of Zachary Lyon, an English trader), Brewer's lagoon (now Brus lagoon), and most importantly Black River on the Rio Sico, approximately 80 miles east of Trujillo.

The natives were partial to rum, which was much stronger than their corn beer and palm wine. When boats came to trade with them, weeklong drinking orgies would take place on the beach, with English crew members taking Miskito "wives" for the duration of their stay. Their favourite pastime was the two weeks long celebrations at Christmas known as "The Big Drunk." For the next 250 years, the English, along with other Europeans and their vital alliance with the Miskito natives, would control the region and would lend their names to the natives with whom they fraternised and had children.

The names Robinson, Goff, Haylock, Mannister, Webster, Conoxen, Green, Woods, Morgan, Hardy, Patterson, Shepherd, Haley, and Wycliffe are still found throughout eastern coastal Honduras and Nicaragua, reflecting the English centuries long presence there.

Over the years the native adapted European dress, English religious practices, cuisine and absorbed over 300 English words into their vocabulary. A new form of pidgin English developed, although not having the letter "F" in their alphabet meant that "P" was substituted, so confusingly fork became "pork" coffin became "kapen" and beef morphed into "bip."

The Miskito nation incorporated the Union Jack flag into the top corner of their own blue-banded pennant and "God save the King" was sung as their national anthem. Miskito natives were prized for their hunting and fishing abilities. Two natives were able to provision

turtle and fish for a boatload of one hundred men. Their seamanship was also much respected and they were recruited to man pirate boats.

Black Sam Bellamy's massive "Whydah Galley" was crewed by Miskitos, including 16 year old John Julian, who was the navigator and one of only three survivors when it sank in a storm off New England in 1717, taking down Bellamy and most of his crew.

After looting Trujillo in 1695, William Dampier along with John Watling - known as the pious pirate because he would not raid shipping on the sabbath and banned drinking and gaming on his boat - and Bartholomew Sharp, led a raiding expedition down the coast of South America in 1695 with Miskito crew members, one of whom was a native the pirates had christened Will. He was unfortunately left behind by Dampier while hunting goats, when three Spanish pursuit boats appeared on the horizon from the uninhabited San Fernando Island, 400 miles off the coast of Chile. Dampier, outnumbered, set sail to escape certain death, leaving Will behind, but returned to find him four years later. The miskito had hunted animals until his powder ran out, then melted his musket over a fire and fashioned a knife and fishhooks from the metal, thus surviving alone. Will was so pleased at the return of Dampier and his Miskito friends, that he welcomed his rescuers with a meal of roast goat, potatoes and cabbage "cooked in the English way" on the beach. The exploits of Will the Native were used later by Bluefields Daniel Defoe as the basis of his character "Man Friday," for his book "Robinson Crusoe".

More than anything the hostile Miskitos were prized for their ability at waging constant warfare against their enemies, especially

the Spanish. Apart from raiding Trujillo, Granada, Puerto Caballos, Rio Dulce, and other Spanish coastal settlements, the Miskito-Sambos were also engaged as mercenaries to sail their war canoes to Jamaica 300 miles away, to put down slave rebellions and fight the Maroons in the Cockpit country.

Traditional Miskito society was highly structured, with a defined political system. The King, often crowned in adolescence, held a mainly titular role and did not have total power over his subjects. A traditional council of elders, including shamans, made the most important political decisions and the running of the country was split between the king, a governor, several generals, colonels, and by the 1750's even an admiral of the fleet. The king commanded great respect from neighbouring tribes who were taxed by him in return for his protection.

English writer Charles Napier Bell (who had been raised and educated with a Miskito king in the 1850's) wrote in his memoir "Tangweera," that while on a hunting trip as a boy he encountered 20 Smoo natives who were taking two canoes to the king as tribute. One of these was a splendid boat over 36ft long with a 7ft wide beam, hollowed from one tree and without a crack along its sides. The canoes were loaded with huge piles of fruits, vegetables, woven baskets, and large quantities of deer, ocelote and jaguar skins and great cakes of rubber.

This tax system, combined with military help and constant supply of modern weapons from the English, allowed the Miskito people

to retain their independence from Spain throughout their 300 year long occupation of the rest of the region.

Their advanced weaponry allowed them to rule their territory and fight, tax and enslave the neighbouring native tribes they called *Alboawinneys*, who they considered themselves superior to. The Paya, Rama, Sumo, Kukras and Tawakas living in La Moskitia were hunted and harried to the point of extinction and many fled back to Trujillo or south to Costa Rica to seek protection from the dreaded Spanish, who were deemed to be better neighbours than the Miskitos. Men captured on slave hunts were shipped off to British colonies, while the women were assimilated into Miskito society, where polygamy was accepted and practised. Not content with this, they raided Spanish towns throughout the region, releasing any captive Miskito natives and capturing other native slaves for themselves.

The British established a huge unofficial colony running down some 550 miles of coastline, with Bluefields in Nicaragua serving as the capital. Writing in 1840, the English trader and writer, Thomas Young noted that "Any Englishman could traverse from one end of the country to the other, without the expense of a yard of cloth, for the Miskito king's orders were to feed and lodge them, and to provide them with horses when they needed them."

In 1732, the first permanent British settlement was founded about 80 miles from Trujillo on the Sico or Black river. Its founder, 37 year old William Pitt (who was a distant relative of British prime ministers Pitt the elder and Pitt the younger) was a timber trader, who had worked for years in what is now known as Belize before being

expelled by the Spanish. Pitt's father was probably Thomas "Diamond" Pitt, who had bought a huge 420 carat diamond weighing 81 grams in India, which he sold to the French court for 135,000 pounds in 1706 (over 30 million pounds sterling in 2014 prices). The diamond still resides in the French Royal crown jewels. William Pitt's father died in 1722, and William used his share of his inheritance to start what would become the most successful (if ultimately, short lived) colonising project on the Honduran coast.

Pitt realised that he was trespassing on what was Spanish crown property, but calculated that the constantly shifting bar mouth of the Sico river would make any Spanish naval assault virtually impossible and that the dense, pathless jungle surrounding him would prevent any land borne attack. The Moskito natives were more than happy to have an English trading post in their midst. Wild game was abundant and Pitt found that the rich quality of the soil meant that the settlers could immediately clear the savannahs and plant sugar cane, set up saw mills for pine, mahogany, rosewood and cedar cutting, and a shipyard for building boats to transport merchandise to Jamaica. The hidden rivers connecting the settlement to Spanish towns in Olancho and Colon made illicit trade easy and British goods were popular and easy to dispose of. Shortly after arriving Pitt met, rescued and married a Spanish noble woman, who was the survivor of a shipwreck along the coast and had been captured by the Miskitos. Her connections would facilitate and expand Pitt's future smuggling operations to Trujillo and into the hinterland.

With Trujillo abandoned, Black River, and its satellite settlements Evans Lagoon (now Ibans), Nasty Creek, Brewers lagoon,

Limehouse (now Santa Rosa de Aguan on the mouth of the Aguan river) and the Plantain river, became the premier entry port in Central America, with no irritating Spanish authorities to impose the 20%-40% import duties on taxable merchandise. Under Pitt's careful guidance, the settlement grew and prospered, backed by the British governments necessity of having a power base on the Central American coastline. On March 16, 1740, "The treaty of friendship and alliance" was signed in London by the Miskito King Edward the First. This made the entire kingdom of La Moskitia a British protectorate, ruled overall by King George the second of England and subject to English laws and discipline, and ensuring a British military presence in the area.

Although the natives probably didn't know it, the English through guile, persuasion and bribery were gradually assimilating the Moskito kingdom into their expanding empire. By 1756, according to Spanish reports, the Black River settlement had grown to a town of 213 dwellings, at least four of which were of two stories and with balconies. The town spanned either side of a mile long boulevard which connected it to 15 miles of sugar cane and tobacco plantations surrounding the town. The town boasted sawmills, a sugar making plant and a boatyard. Twelve boats ran cargo back and forth to Jamaica. There were over two hundred white settlers, six hundred black slaves and close to three thousand Miskito natives living in villages around the town. A small fortress known as Fort Dalling guarded the river mouth and was manned by thirty regular British soldiers and half a dozen officers. The lagoons, rivers and forests around the town teemed with wildlife and the soldiers amused themselves with hunt-

ing, especially pig sticking from horseback. They did not go hungry and a menu for a mess dinner for the officers of the 3rd Buffs, assigned to the Miskito Shore in 1770, showed the following bill of fare:

1. Calipash (turtle fat)
2. Soused Manatee
3. Warree (wild pig) steaks
4. Barbequed monkey
5. Armadillo curry
6. Turtle soup
7. Parrot pie,
8. Roasted Antelope
9. Smoked peccary
10. Stewed hicatee (river turtle)
11. Caliper (giant mullet)
12. Boiled native rabbit

In 1757, the military commander of Black River, Colonel Robert Hodson, who was married to one of Pitt's daughters, sent a report to his superiors in London stating that the combined value of imports (lace, shoes, liquor, wines, clothing, hats, guns, cutlasses, ammuni-

tion, pots, pans, cutlery, silver plate, linen, tools, etc) and exports (mahogany, pine, flax, turtle shell, sugar and tobacco) had exceeded 25,000 pounds, or some four million dollars in modern terms...a staggering amount of commerce for so small an outpost. With most of the gold and silver in Honduras having long since been mined and the golden age of piracy over, the British were content to leave Spanish shipping alone and concentrate on simple but profitable trade.

Pitt and his associates controlled all of the trade around Trujillo, Olanchito, Tocoa and Sonaguera all the way to the capital of Tegucigalpa, where popular, cheap, British goods and wares were openly sold at market. This did not escape the attention of the Spanish who in 1762 sent representatives to oversee the demolition of Fort Dalling and the expulsion of the English. Only the intervention of Pitt and Hodson prevented them from being torn to pieces by the Miskitos. They left without dislodging the Brits, who were left alone to focus on their ever expanding business interests, the most lucrative of which was the cutting and exportation of mahogany and other hardwoods for the burgeoning American and European markets.

Honduran mahogany has always been prized by cabinet makers and boat builders all over the world for its beauty and quality. However, a Royal decree made by the Spanish in Havana in 1622 had given Spain an absolute monopoly to trade in wood products from her Caribbean colonies. English timbermen had always worked clandestinely in Belize and the Miskito shore, but now had a huge 550 mile coastline to harvest wood from, with Black River as its centre of operations. In 1740, a mere 525 tons of mahogany was exported from Honduras to Britain. By 1785 this had reached 30,000 tons per year,

with the tiny settlement of Black River coming in third as the chief hardwood exportation centre in the world.

The cutting, transporting and shipping of mahogany was no easy task in the age before chainsaws and bulldozers existed. The life of a mahogany cutter was one of the hardest and toughest professions in the world. To get to "The King of the forest" (as mahogany is known) scouts would be sent out to find a valley where suitable trees could be felled, with river access to the sea. Then accommodations for the workers needed to be built to last for the eight-month dry season, when mahogany could be felled and transported. Cattle fodder needed to be collected as well as provisions for the crews of men. Sometimes the oxen had to be driven through many miles of thick and untracked forests dragging chains and supply wagons, or shipped upriver in ferry boats through shallows and rapids.

Once a site had been determined, the temporary dwellings erected and the cattle and work crews assembled, the labourers - nearly always black slaves - were split into gangs of between twenty and fifty men each under the command of a gang captain, who assigned daily tasks to his men. After slavery was abolished in 1834, the workers were paid on a "piece work" scale according to their productivity. Each gang had a "hunter," whose job was to search the jungle for trees to cut. Huge cross saws manned by three men at either end, were used to cut the giant trees which were more than 300 years old, around eighty feet high and on average, twenty-seven odd feet in diameter at their base (the English never cut a tree less than eight foot in diameter at its base). All the other bush and trees were cleared to make way for the mahogany and once clearcut these "avenues," some

thirty feet wide and miles long, made excellent hunting areas for the loggers to pot wild game.

Teams of twelve to thirty oxen were used to haul the great tree trunks down to the river, where they were manned by a pair of steersmen and floated downriver to the sawmills of Black River.

In his book "Honduras" published in 1870, the former American Consul to Honduras, E.G. Squier wrote:

"Nothing can present a more extraordinary appearance than the process of trucking, or drawing down the mahogany to the river (which was done at night, on account of the heat). The six trucks (wooden wagons with huge 6ft diameter wheels) occupy an extent of road for a quarter of a mile. The great number of bellowing oxen, the drivers, half naked (clothes being inconvenient from the heat of the animals, and weather, and the great clouds of dust) and each bearing a blazing torchlight, the wildness of the forest scenery, the rattling of chains, the sound of the whip echoing through the woods; then all is activity and exertion, so ill corresponding with the silent hour of midnight, makes it seem more the appearance of some theatrical expedition than what it really is, the pursuit of industry, which has fallen to the lot of the Honduran wood cutter."

The wages for the Shoremen or Baymen loggers as they called themselves were: for the Captain of the team, \$30-45 per month (\$500-\$675 in today's value); the fifty members of the logging team were split into thirty first class workers, who earned \$15 a month

(\$225 today); ten second class workers and third class workers who made \$10 a month or a mere \$150 by today's standards. It must be remembered that these men were slaves, the massive profits of their labours going to their English masters.

By 1770 some 70 percent of all slaves of African origin in Belize and the Miskito coast were engaged in the mahogany and logwood cutting business, the profits of which gained fortunes for their English masters.

Logwood, or the Dragon's Blood tree, supplied most of Europe and America's needs for a strong red dye (the red uniforms of British soldiers were dyed with the sap of the logwood) and many pirates gave up chasing ships to become logwood cutters (William Dampier was briefly one). The nation of Belize was founded by the money created by the industry (two cutters can be seen with their saws on the national flag).

William Pitt's empire expanded along the 80 miles between Black River and Trujillo and a road connected the two towns, a bold move considering that everything Pitt did was considered highly illegal by the Spanish. With Trujillo in ruins and all but abandoned, and with no military presence at all, his ships used the deep waters at Puerto Castilla to load and unload cargo.

He also had a large cattle farm on the edge of the Guayomareto lagoon, a mere six miles from Trujillo, where he assembled cattle bought from all over the region to ship to Jamaica. Beef was needed there because most arable land on the island was given over to sugar cane production. The farm had five houses, between two and three

hundred mules, horses, oxen and over forty wagons and harnesses for transporting contraband.

Trujillo became the number one port for contraband in Central America. Business thrived and by 1770 it was estimated that 2600 non Spanish Europeans lived in the region of Black River and along the long Miskito shoreline. Pitt died a prosperous and wealthy man in 1771, aged seventy-six years of age. He is buried with his wife and children in a cemetery near Black River, where their worn, engraved headstones can still be found under the spread of a mango tree, close to the rusted remains of a huge iron cauldron used for boiling molasses which, along with a few cannons, is all that remains of the Black River settlement.

Winds of change began blowing in 1776 when the United States declared its independence from Britain. Spain, her own colonial fortunes in serious decline due to gross mismanagement and corruption, with her treasury depleted by the constant wars she waged, took a gamble and joined the Americans, Dutch and French in a combined effort to rid the English from the region.

One of the main reasons Spain joined the fight was to regain her seriously reduced hegemony in the Caribbean, and this would eventually spell the end for the tiny settlement of Black River and the English presence on the Miskito Coast.

Chapter 5 - THE RETURN OF THE SPANISH

It is time to rid the English from our country. - Matias de Galvez, Commander of Guatemala and Honduras.

Throughout this period, Trujillo languished undefended and in ruin. A massive earthquake in July, 1764 had destroyed 108 houses, or nearly all of the town, and the English had dismantled the fort to use the bricks to build one of their own at Port Royal on Roatan. The entire Audiencia of Guatemala, Honduras and especially Trujillo had become "a forgotten outpost of a declining empire." As early as 1738, the President of Guatemala, of which Honduras was a province, had proposed repopulating the strategic coastal ports of Omoa - close to Puerto Caballos (also in ruins) - and Trujillo and building forts to defend them and to stop the contraband trade along the coast.

Finally, in 1743, a 50 year old military engineer named Diez Navarro, with twenty-five years of army service behind him, was sent from Spain to plan the building of two forts. He was to spend close to two years conducting a full study of the defenses of Central America, the only one ever conducted during the 300 year colonial occupation. Because of the huge size of the bay of Trujillo, Navarro picked the town of Omoa to build a massive fort that would serve as a naval base to protect Spanish shipping coming both from Guatemala and Honduras. A gunboat manned by 120 men would sail between Rio

Dulce, Guatemala and the mouth of the Rio San Juan in Nicaragua, on the lookout for smugglers.

He saw Omoa as becoming the centre of commerce for the north coast, leaving Trujillo as a poor cousin, with almost zero population to harvest products for export. The plan initially worked once the fort was finished in 1779 and several contraband running ships were captured, although the British captured the fort soon after its grand opening and held it for five weeks. However, greed and corruption prevailed, and the fort that had been built to stop smuggling soon became a base for illegal trade, with its own commander participating in illicit dealings with the English, a treasonable offense punishable by death by garroting.

Attention next turned to Trujillo, abandoned for over seventy years. In the mid-1700s the new Bourbon dynasty in Spain decided, for economic reasons, to reopen the long disused silver mines in Honduras. Fifty-three had been in production around Tegucigalpa and Comayaguela, with the silver being brought by mule train to Guatemala to be shipped from Rio Dulce. Trujillo was a much closer point to ship from. For this to work, the town had to be repopulated and a fort built to defend it from English threats.

With war clouds looming and with the return of the hated Spanish to Trujillo, the Miskito King George the First visited Jamaica in 1774 and placed his kingdom under British sovereignty, pledging an army of 5,000 fighting men to fight any kind of insurrection in North America. To prove his loyalty he sent a barrel of soil from the Miskito kingdom to London.

Meanwhile, war had indeed broken out between Britain and her thirteen American colonies in 1776. When the tide had turned in the favour of the Americans, Spain sensed a golden opportunity to expel England from the Caribbean and joined France in declaring war on her in 1779. Work on renovating the ruined fort in Trujillo, which was over two hundred and forty years old, began in 1760 using hundreds of African slaves. The impressive new fort, albeit a lot smaller than its sister in Omoa, but replete with thirty nine cannons and manned by 200 black soldiers (refugees from Haiti known as the French blacks, who had sailed to Trujillo) opened in 1780.

But then England made a preemptive strike capturing the new fortress at Omoa a mere two months after she was opened, causing the disgraced commander to shoot himself. The Spanish acted quickly. A large relief force was assembled in Guatemala under the command of the Governor of Guatemala, 57 year old Matias de Galvez, with the sole objective of kicking the British out of Honduras and Nicaragua. Omoa was recaptured after three days of fighting, five weeks after she had fallen.

Negotiations over the return of Gibraltar by the English to Spain had prevented De Galvez's expedition from continuing down the coast that year. Fourteen months later, on December 17, 1782, a strike force consisting of 1600 men including 200 battle-hardened stormtroopers, left Guatemala City to march to Trujillo. The army reached Olanchito in February, then took the winding old native trail known as *La Culebrina* (the little snake) from Sonaguera to Trujillo, arriving at a small bay three miles from town at the beginning of

March. There they encamped and rested up for three days. This place is still known to this day as " Campamento" (the campsite).

Meanwhile, the small British force in Trujillo had learned of the large invasion force heading their way and had slipped out of the ruins of Trujillo and sailed to Roatan, joining the island's garrison commanded by Colonel Dalrymple. De Galvez and his troops formally reoccupied Trujillo on March 8, 1782 exactly 99 years after she had been abandoned. He stayed for one week, then sailed with 600 men in three frigates - the Santa Matilde, the Antiope and the Santa Cecilia - for Roatan, arriving on 15 March. Despite initially vowing to fight to the last man, Dalrymple was outnumbered 10 to 1, so put up the white flag after a two-day cannon bombardment which had reduced his fort at Port Royal to rubble.

The Spaniards then spread out over the island, capturing runaway slaves, destroying farms and burning crops and torching any English house they found, a total of over 500 dwellings. On March 21st the eighty-one surviving British soldiers and one hundred and thirty-five settlers were transported to Havana, Cuba as prisoners of war and their weapons, cannons and furniture shipped back to Trujillo. The three hundred captured slaves were auctioned off in Havana. The Spanish had lost only two men killed and four wounded, while the British had casualties of two dead and two wounded. Next in De Galvez's sights was the "tiny thorn in the foot of the Spanish Empire," the settlement at Black River.

Galvez sailed from Roatan with some 600 men at the beginning of April, while another 800 force marched the 80 miles from Trujillo

to Black River. With the majority of the soldiers and male population of Black River away fighting under Horatio Nelson in Nicaragua, the town was lightly defended by twenty British regulars under the command of Colonel James Lawrie, another of Pitt's son in laws. After briefly resisting, he saw his position as hopeless and his men took to the jungle, making their way to Cabo de Gracias a Dios and sailed for Jamaica to seek reinforcements. None were available as the island was under imminent attack from a joint Spanish/French invasion force of 15,000 men. A four month stalemate ensued with the Spanish entrenched at Black River suffering the summer heat, with no medicine for malaria and dengue fevers. The French fleet was soundly defeated at the Battle of the Saintes off Dominica in April, taking away the threat of the invasion of Jamaica. It would not be until August that a task force was assembled for the retaking of Black River.

Under the command of Lawrie and Colonel Edward Despard, an Irishman, over 1180 men were mustered including over 500 Shoremen (known as the Rattan (Roatan) and Black River Volunteers), 80 Loyalist American soldiers and 600 Miskito warriors. These were backed up by twelve Royal Navy frigates which ferried them back to Cabo Gracias Dios where the force was split. Despard and half the troops sailed on down to Black River, while Lawrie marched overland and started harassing the Spanish in guerrilla skirmishes. By now, the Spaniards had lost over 400 men either dead or incapable of fighting, to tropical disease, and after two days of fighting, the settlement was recaptured on August 23, 1782. Both sides suffered around sixty men killed, the Spanish losing a third of their army to disease, while over four hundred men, twenty seven Spanish officers and sev-

en hundred and fifteen regular troops surrendered to Despard and Lawrie, along with a further one hundred reinforcements who were captured by the Royal Navy as they arrived by boat from Trujillo.

The British captured 33 canons and three Royal ensign flags, which were sent back to King George in London as trophies. All the Spaniards were released and sent to Omoa after signing articles pledging not to take up arms against the British again. Over six hundred black slaves who had escaped during the fighting (and had offered to join the Spanish) were rounded up and put back to work. Lawrie stayed on as governor and Despard took over the military defense.

For his actions during the Black River campaign Despard would be awarded the Governorship of the new colony of British Honduras. He was unpopular with the settlers on account of his black Jamaican wife and favoring land grants to slaves. He was removed from office, unjustly prisoned on trumped up embezzlement charges in London and eventually publicly hanged in 1801 for allegedly being part of an Irish plot to overthrow the King. He would become known to historians as The Unfortunate Colonel Despard.

The Spanish returned to Trujillo to brood over their humiliating defeat and to lick their wounds, but as they began to reestablish themselves, they made clear that the problem of Black River had still not been resolved. Their fortunes changed considerably with victory for the American colonists over the British the following year in 1783 and they renewed their claim over Black River, not on the battlefields, but in court. Amazingly enough, this tiny town of around 3,500

people warranted an international convention held in London on July 14, 1786.

Much to the settlers horror England signed the treaty, known as the Anglo-Spanish Convention, promising to abandon and evacuate the entire Miskito Coast region in exchange for logging rights in the unoccupied Spanish claimed region of the Yucatan peninsular in Mexico, eventually becoming known as British Honduras. Matters dragged on for another year, before William Pitt's grandson, William Pitt Lawrie, formally handed over Black River to the Spanish on August 29, 1787, with most of the 2,600 settlers relocating to Belize, while some chose the Cayman Islands or Jamaica. A handful were invited to stay on to help the Spanish deal with the Miskitos in the re-named settlement. It was to be called *Palacios*, or Palaces in English, on account of the magnificent houses the English had left behind.

With Black River now in their power, the Spanish set about re-colonising the area in earnest. Matias de Galvez had planned shipping the elements of an Iberian master race comprising modern conquistador soldiers, accompanied by skilled farmers, builders and tradesmen, to resettle the area for Spain. However, he had fallen out of favour after his defeat at Black River and had been sent home. He was replaced by Don Tomas Vila, who was named Governor and Minister of Reconstruction for Trujillo and given a salary of eight hundred gold pesos a year.

The expected armada of supermen and women never arrived from Spain. For two centuries, Trujillo and the Miskito coast had rightly gained the reputation as *La mas infeliz en las Americas* (the

unhappiest place in the Americas) and few people willingly signed on for the adventure. As an incentive the new colonists had been promised large land grants, pre-built homes, cattle, provisions, tools, clothing and seeds. The first two boatloads of new settlers for Trujillo, comprising one hundred and ten impoverished families (462 persons) willing to relocate from their overcrowded slums in Spain, set sail from Grand Canary and La Coruna, in May and July 1787. A third boat - La Infanta Carlotta - transported forty-two families from Asturia and Galicia to resettle Roatan and Black River. They would unfortunately arrive to a ruined town with little or no shelter, poorly provisioned, just in time for the monsoon season.

The first boat - La Sacra Familia - arrived in Trujillo on July 15 and when they landed, the passengers immediately demanded their promised land, grants and houses. Unfortunately for them, the skeleton government officials had not been given any prior knowledge of their impending arrival and messengers had to be sent to Guatemala City, over six hundred miles away, for instructions. Back came a promise that each new colonist was to receive food and clothing for one year, as well a plow and plowshare for each family, three oxen to pull them, one horse and one mare, three goats, one hog, one heifer, six chickens and one rooster. Each family was also to be given fifty pounds of seed corn and twenty-five pounds of beans for planting. Each man and boy capable of handling firearms was to get a rifle with twelve bullets and powder.

It all sounded great but in reality, the only things to ever be given to the new vanguard of settlers were the goats, hogs, seeds and a few chickens. It was far too little and especially with the lack of

firearms for hunting, the new colony quickly began to starve. Between July 1787 and early 1788, a total of 1,400 new settlers arrived, the majority of whom were weakened from the long sea voyage and, unaccustomed to the tropical heat, diseases and lack of decent food, began to die like flies. Before the end of 1787, forty-seven were dead, and the casualty rate kept mounting. The administrators of Trujillo begged Guatemala for more African slaves to do the construction and agricultural labour for the weak and sick newcomers. However all slavery had just been abolished in 1785 and all slave chains and shackles had been ordered returned to Guatemala City to be destroyed. In their place were sent fifty convicted criminals, charged with the task of rebuilding Trujillo. Housing conditions were terrible, with only thirty-seven mud-walled, thatched houses, averaging eight persons per home, existing in the town in 1791. The hospital, church and municipal buildings were in a general state of decay and in one seven year period between 1791 and 1798, fires ravaged the town, mostly destroying it each time. The original 1400 new settlers had been reduced by disease and famine to a mere 489 and the settlements at Roatan and Cabo Gracias a Dios abandoned completely, while at Palacios (Black River), the situation was about to get worse.

The Miskito-Sambos had never accepted the Spanish and their "stupid little gifts." They called them "All preach, no grog, no good" even though they were given two barrels of raw cane liquor and one each of red wine, white wine, madeira and sherry per year. These were not sufficient to appease over 3,500 natives camped around the region. The Spaniards allocated an allowance of 2,000 pesos per year for the entire Miskito nation, while the fish hooks, game shot (never

real bullets), small amounts of gun powder, a couple of pots and pans, were nothing in comparison to the thousands of tons of smuggled British goods they had played a part in smuggling and trading in.

Moreover, the Spaniards had made every effort to suppress their contraband trading. The population at Black River stood at just 87 settlers and 120 militia, when in the early hours before dawn on September 4, 1800, a raiding party of Miskitos, led by the appropriately named General Perquin Tempest, rowed their canoes silently down the Rio Tinto. They killed the guards and murdered everyone in the town except Robert Sproat, the town's doctor, five other British residents and fifty colonists. They fled overland to Trujillo semi-naked in their nightshirts, the women wrapping scarves around their breasts, surviving off wild fruits during the 80 mile trek. Thirteen years after the Spanish takeover of Black River, it lay in smoldering ruins and along with it their feeble efforts to recolonize the north coast. Back in Trujillo, the only bright star in the ever black firmament had been the arrival in April 1797 of some new, unexpected colonists.....the Garifuna!

Chapter 6 - THE COMING OF THE GARIFUNA

Garinuga, seremein waya lun bungiubaba seremein waya houn wayunagu, sermein wayanagu, sermein waya lun warugute Joseph Satue, garinugu wagiyaia maduleida wamamugu mabuiga nia houn tia sun garinagu hinga

Garifunas, thanks from us to Father God, thanks from us to our ancestors, thanks to us to our grandfather, Joseph Chatoyer. We are Garifunas and let us not forget that. Greetings to all Garifunas, you heard.

By the 1680's the island of St Vincent in the lesser Antilles had become a haven and refuge for runaway slaves from the eastern Caribbean, especially the islands of Barbados, Dominica, Grenada and St Lucia. The runaways were accepted by St Vincent's original inhabitants, the Carib natives, and they integrated and interbred with them. The Caribs were known for their ferocity and for whom the entire region was named. They also lent their name to the description of a person who eats human flesh: cannibal, derived from *caribal*. They had repulsed two centuries of European efforts to tame them and colonize the island. However, they had allowed a couple of small French communities dedicated to sugar planting to exist on the leeward side of the island.

Around 1675 a slave ship (most likely Dutch), carrying human cargo from Benin in the Gulf of Nigeria, foundered on rocks close to the islands and some four hundred survivors managed to swim ashore. They were rescued and quickly assimilated by the locals, who

presented the men with Carib wives, as it was taboo for women to remain unmarried in their society. By 1710 there were over five thousand "black caribs" living on one side of the island and several thousand "red caribs" who had not intermarried with the blacks living on the other side. The blacks called themselves Garinagu (later changed to Garifuna, meaning proud and brave people) and their beloved island Yurumein.

In 1719, a French invasion force was sent from neighbouring Martinique to colonize the island. It was defeated and repulsed, as was an attempt by a British naval force four years later. The island was then declared a neutral zone by both countries.

Unbeknownst to the English, more French sugar planters moved onto the island. These settlers were welcomed by the Garinuga who adopted many French words as well as their counting system and Catholic religious practices into their culture.

Life on the island could have continued peaceably if the Treaty of Paris in 1763 had not awarded the island to Britain. An uneasy peace lasted for three years, until Britain sent a survey party to St Vincent in 1769 and tried to convince the Garifuna and Caribs to sell their land cheaply to British settlers and planters. These proposals were unacceptable to the Garifuna and led by their charismatic young chieftain, Joseph Chatoyer (a French approximation of his name Sature), the British were expelled from the island.

Annoyed by this show of non compliance a full military expedition was launched against the island in 1772. The Garifuna and their Carib allies took advantage of the mountainous terrain which they

knew well, and fought the British to a standstill. Realizing that they could not win a guerrilla war with the natives, the British reluctantly signed a Peace Treaty in 1773, which delineated Carib and British controlled zones on the island, the latter to be used for sugar cane planting. This was the first time the British had ever signed a treaty with a native population and like many others since, they were to break it.

The Griffin and Caribs lived on the north and windward side of the island along with their French allies, while the British settled the south and leeward side, where they established a capital called Kingstown. Twenty two years later the native population and the Garifuna tired of the bullying Brits and their petty laws, and inspired by the recent French revolution, as well as by the declaration of independence by black slaves on Haiti, declared war on their unwelcome neighbours. This time French revolutionary advisors and militia assisted them. By March 1795 the Garifuna/Carib/French force, once again led by Joseph Chatoyer who was now in his late forties, had taken control of most of the island and had surrounded Kingstown, on which they were poised to swoop.

Unfortunately and unbeknownst to them, the largest British military force to ever operate in the Caribbean, led by General Ralph Abercrombie, arrived to save the capital and squash the rebellion. Chatoyer's soldiers were billeted on a place called Dorsetshire Hill, recently captured by his younger brother Duvalle, when they were surprised by an attack on the moonless night of March 14, 1795 by a huge force of British regular army soldiers, colonial militia and loyal, armed slaves. They routed the sleeping Garifuna after Joseph Cha-

toyer was shot and killed by a Major Alexander Leigh. The aftermath of the battle would mean defeat and deportation of the proud Garifuna people.

Chatoyer, along with his contemporary Toussaint L'Ouverture in Haiti, had fought a successful guerrilla war against a much larger, better equipped military force, in Chatoyer's case for twenty-six years, and had gained the respect of the rest of the world. A statue of him stands on the site of the battle and over two hundred years later he remains St Vincent's only national hero. The National Garifuna Folk Ballet company in New York city is named after him and the first play written by an Afro-American, "The Drama of King Shot-away " by William Brown, was performed in London in 1823. He remains the most important, iconic figure in Garifuna history and when asked who their National Hero is, any Garifuna child will answer..."Satue!"

Despite Chatoyer's death, the war on the island went on for another year until the French withdrew their military aid, so the Garifuna were forced to surrender in April 1796. The British decided to separate the "Black Caribs," who they considered to be the chief troublemakers, from the "Red Caribs," who were herded into resettlement camps.

Unfortunately for the Garifuna, the new governor of St Vincent, Sir William Young, owned two sugar plantations on the island, which had been closed during the war. He had also inherited some \$170,000 in debt (\$17 million in modern money) from his father Sir Thomas, who had been imprudent with his investments. Young decided to

evict all the Garifuna from their lands to make room for new sugar plantations. Some five thousand of them were rounded up and forcibly removed to the tiny island of Ballicaux in the Grenadine islands, where they were interred for eight months in unsanitary conditions, with little shelter, and without adequate food or their traditional medicines. More than half of them died in what can only be called a British genocide. In early 1797 the surviving 2,300 were deported in three former slave boats by way of Jamaica to the island of Roatan, which the British were attempting to recolonize and where it was thought they could be used as agricultural indentured servants.

While crossing the channel between the Bay Islands and the mainland, a Spanish naval vessel captured one of the boats and brought her to Trujillo. She remained about a week before being captured by a British task force, which briefly took the town for two days, April 27-28 1797, before being evicted with the loss of eight dead, including their fourteen year old bugler. The British left with the boatload of Garifuna captured by the Spanish.

The British plan of resettling Roatan with the deported Black Caribs backfired when the new arrivals found that there were no adequate accommodations for them, the Spanish having destroyed them all fourteen years earlier. In addition, the soil was too acidic for planting their traditional crops, especially yucca which is one of their chief food sources. The Spanish were keen to recolonize the north coast around Trujillo and realizing that many of the Garifuna were practising Catholics with a bitter hatred of their mutual enemy the British, invited them to settle on either side of Trujillo.

In September 1797, transport ships left Trujillo and sailed thirty-seven miles to Roatan, where they picked up 1,256 of the Garifuna refugees, the remainder of which chose to remain and fish on the north coast of Roatan at a settlement known as Punta Gorda, where their descendents remain to this day.

Upon arriving in Trujillo, the overjoyed Garifuna were immediately awarded Spanish citizenship and deeded property on either side of Trujillo in the area of Rio Negro and Rio Cristales. They came equipped with tools which the British had given them including hammers, saws, hoes, spades, pots and pans, griddles and graters for cassava, their staple dish. The Spanish supplemented this with a daily allowance of five head of cattle to slaughter, seven ounces of rice per day for the women and children and ten ounces per day for the men, two hundred of which were quickly recruited into the army and trained to garrison the new Fortaleza de Santa Barbara. They adapted quickly to their new environment, immediately clearing land to build their villages and for the cultivation of crops. The bay and its mountains provided fish and game and unlike the Spanish colonists who had completely failed to adapt to their new Caribbean home, the Garifuna perfectly integrated into Trujillo and its environs. They brought with them their pulsating drum-driven music and dance, their bush skills and seamanship, plus their religion, a mix of Catholicism and African Obeah, known to some as Voodoo or Dugu.

Still, the early years were not without hardship and an American writer, Daniel McKinnon, wrote upon visiting Trujillo in 1802 that: "The total extinction of the Garifuna is near at hand." This rather pessimistic statement fortunately proved to be completely erroneous. In

fact, the Garifuna flourished, thanks mainly to their old African custom of polygamy and a prodigious birthrate. The 1801 census listed 4,000 Garifuna living around Trujillo, an increase of 137% in just four years! They soon spread further west along the bay of Trujillo and established settlements at Santa Fe, San Antonio and Guadalupe. Their progress suffered a setback in 1820, when the Declaration of Independence of the Central American states from Spanish rule swept through the isthmus.

Although Honduras gained its freedom after three hundred years of Spanish oppression with relatively little bloodshed, the new fortress of Santa Barbara in Trujillo would be severely tested in its first taste of action. Simon Bolivar sent twelve warships from the Columbian navy under the command of Providence Island based thirty-two year old French corsair mercenary, Louis D'Aury, to capture the town and assist the revolutionaries across Honduras. Flying a flag of horizontal blue and white bands designed by D'Aury (and later adapted by Honduras as her national flag) the boats entered the harbour at sunrise on April 21, 1720. A small boat was dispatched to the dock and an ultimatum given to the town's commander Jose M. Palomar to surrender within one hour. Palomar refused and gave orders to the gunners in the fort to prepare for action. D'Aury moved his fleet to the mouth of the Guymareto lagoon two miles to the east of the town, to prevent being subjected to the full force of the thirty nine cannons in the fort. The battle commenced at 9 am and continued for five hours, during which time over twelve hundred cannon balls were fired by both sides. At 2 pm the Colombians retired out of range and the following day attempted to land foot soldiers at Castil-

la. However, Palomar had foreseen this possibility and sent several platoons of men to deal with the attack. Over forty Colombians were killed as they landed and upon seeing this humiliating defeat, D'Aury pulled anchor and sailed for his next objective, the even more heavily defended town of Omoa, where his forces were again repulsed.

By now disillusioned with revolutionary fervor he retired to his own fort on Providence Island, where he continued to attack passing Spanish shipping for a year, until dying after falling from his horse in 1821.

Feeling bound by loyalty to the Spanish who had rescued them from the British and given them lands and citizenship, the Garifuna chose to fight for what would be a losing cause. When Honduras finally gained her independence in 1821, many were jailed and disenfranchised. Feeling unwelcome in Trujillo, many fled persecution further along the coast to remote communities to the west, such as Sambo Creek, Triunfo de la Cruz, Miami, Travesia and Bajamar and as far as Belize. In the east they went to Santa Rosa, Limon, Sangrelaya, and Plapaya, even as far as Nicaragua, where the Miskito King, impressed by their fortitude, friendliness and work ethic, deeded them lands.

Chapter 7 - THE AGE OF FILIBUSTERS, BRIGANDS AND CONMEN

*I want to rule the five countries of Central America, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador.....my motto shall be FIVE OR NONE! -
William Walker, filibuster*

Honduras gained her independence in 1821 after being choked by the Spanish yoke for 297 years. But her new freedom did not bring wealth and prosperity. With Britain flooding the international markets with cheap indigo grown in India, Trujillo had little of value to export. Its chief trading partners in the years following independence were Cuba and the young colony of British Honduras to which cattle, leather and Sarsparilla was shipped in small quantities. The port did become a popular trading zone for boats from as far afield as Boston, Liverpool and London who, with the hated Spanish trade monopoly now broken, could trade in dry goods, clothing, linen, wines, and liquors without fear of capture and confiscation. As Trujillo struggled to keep its head above water in the early 1820's, one of the most colourful brigands in her history was about to perpetrate one of the boldest and cruelest real estate scams in the history of the Caribbean. The setting for the fraud was William Pitt's old settlement of Black River.

David McGregor was born in Glengyle, Stirlingshire in 1786, the year England relinquished her claim to the Miskito coast to Spain. He became a mercurial career soldier and rose rapidly through the ranks, sometimes through bribery, and at the age of only twenty-three had attained the rank of major. By 25 the vain, cigar smoking and hard drinking McGregor had moved to London, where he invented the rank of colonel for himself and frequented the gaming rooms and clubs around Picadilly. He furthered his cause with a bogus claim that he was the chieftain of the venerable McGregor clan, changing his name from David to Gregor to add gravitas to his lies and furthermore claimed that his mother was an Inca princess!

With the independence movement sweeping South America, he sold up in Scotland and moved first to New Grenada (Colombia) and then Venezuela, where at only 26 years of age he promoted himself to the rank of Brigadier General and joined Simon Bolivar's army. He served without much distinction in the rear lines during several battles against the Spanish and married Bolivar's beautiful young cousin Josefa Antonia Anstegueta, who came from a prominent and wealthy family from Caracas. After furthering his reputation as a liar and braggart, McGregor sailed on a military expedition to Florida where he briefly served with Louis D'Aury and captured Fort San Carlos on Ameila island from the Spanish, before being forced to hand it over to the Americans. With the advent of Independence for the Central and Southern American states and the end of hostilities with Spain, McGregor found himself at a loose end. He knew that the vast region of the Miskito coast close to Trujillo in Honduras was ripe for exploiting, especially with the Spanish gone, and in 1820, McGregor

visited the area and made friends with the current King who had the grandiose title of George Frederic Augustus the First.

The Miskito king had been educated in Jamaica and had inherited the crown from his father, who had been poisoned by his brother Stephen. George Frederic's rule would be marred by drunkenness and sex scandal (he was accused of raping the wife of one of his naval officers), ending in 1824 with his murder by his exasperated wife who strangled him and threw his body into a river.

He was the perfect puppet for McGregor to manipulate. The Scotsman returned to London claiming that he had been made the Cacique or Chieftain of the country of Poyais, a mythical, independent country within the Miskito region that McGregor had invented. The name came from the fact that some Paya or Poyers natives still lived there. He also obtained title deeds to an incredible 12,500 square miles of land which King George Frederic had somewhat rashly signed over to him.

McGregor and his exotic wife now set up court in the "Poyasian Embassy" in London, where he entertained politicians and foreign ambassadors, as well as senior military officers. He was even honoured as a Prince at an official reception party organized by the Lord Mayor of London. McGregor explained to would-be investors that he had been given the country - which he had now magnified to over eight million acres, or the size of Wales! - in return for personally expelling the Spanish from the region. Using the long defunct Black River settlement of William Pitt as a template, he painted a tempting picture of a bucolic, English speaking country with its own govern-

ment, army, navy, and a capital city of 25,000 people which he named St Joseph. The country was perfect for hunting and fishing, the rivers were full of gold, the soil was so fertile and the climate so lush, that an amazing three crops of corn could be grown per year.

With the Spanish trading embargos now gone along with their control of Honduras, British merchants and investors were keen to tap into the Miskito coast's resources, so McGregor and his fantasy claims became the toast of London society. His publicity machine went into overdrive and he published a 350 page book singing the praises of Poyais. (In all fairness to McGregor, who wrote the book himself under the pen name Colonel Strangeways, it is a fairly accurate description of the Miskito coast). Posters were stuck up in all the major cities in England and Scotland and flyers and pamphlets were distributed throughout the land. Special ballads and poems were composed, all praising the new utopian country of Poyais. A flag for the country was made and currency printed. It was called "The hard Poyasian dollar," and several hundred thousand notes were printed.

At the time, England was reeling from the cost of the Napoleonic wars and unemployment was high. Many people, especially Scots to whom the flamboyant and seemingly wealthy McGregor was somewhat of a hero, were lured into the promise of a wonderful life in his new country, and hundreds of them bought into the dream of starting a new life in the Caribbean. Tens of thousands of acres of land were sold at between three and four shillings an acre, which was cheap as the average weekly wage in 1820 was around one pound, with twelve shillings to the pound. Government positions were sold, as were commissions in the fictitious Poyasian army. Based on pro-

jected sales, McGregor raised a huge loan of 200,000 pounds (16 million dollars in modern money) in the form of 2,000 Poyasian bearer bonds sold at 100 pounds each.

In September, 1822, the transport ship "The Honduran Packet" left England with seventy settlers. This was followed in January, 1823 by "The Kennersly Castle" with a further two hundred emigrants on board. Most of these, acting on McGregor's advice, had changed their pounds into the worthless Poyasian currency at his "embassy" in London. The self-styled Cacique of Poyais did not sail with the colonists, nor was he waiting on the dock of St Joseph to greet them. Instead, they found themselves dumped on the beach after crossing the treacherous bar mouth of the Black River. After tramping through the jungle, instead of the prosperous city of St Joseph with its boulevards and opera house, they found the burned out ruins of William Pitt's settlement. Among this they pitched some tents and went to work on constructing rudimentary houses with the help of some friendly Garifunas.

The whole venture was a total disaster and the settlers found themselves abandoned in a strange country with no infrastructure to support them. Their transport ships had taken off with most of their supplies and ammunition. The captains said that McGregor had not paid them in England, telling them their transport fees would be settled in the non-existent St Joseph. When they returned to England and complained to authorities of the scam, British naval ships were sent into the English channel to intercept five further transport boats which had left for Poyais. The ships returned home, except one which was lost at sea with two hundred settlers on board.

To add to their misery, the Miskito natives refused to accept the bogus Bank of Poyais dollars and King George Frederick decided to rescind the land grants he had drunkenly signed over to McGregor. Many of the colonists succumbed to disease and at least one man was killed by alligators. The Scotsman who had sold up everything he had to take the appointment of the St Joseph opera house, committed suicide by shooting himself in his tent. Finally, after five of the settlers sailed up the coast in a homemade craft looking for help (during which two of them were murdered by their Miskito guides), a rescue boat - "The Mexican Eagle" - arrived from British Honduras and took the bedraggled and dispirited survivors off the Miskito shore. However, disaster had turned into tragedy: of the two hundred and seventy souls who left Britain to settle in Poyais, fewer than fifty returned home to England alive.

When the survivors returned, news of the fraud broke, the London newspapers exposed the scam and law suits started to fly. McGregor however, was nowhere to be found. He had fled to France, where incredibly the next year, he tried to pull the whole scheme off again to unsuspecting Parisians. This time, he and his fellow fraudsters were undone after French officials became curious when an unusually large number of people applied for passports to travel to Poyais.

McGregor was jailed for ten months in France before returning to England, where he once again tried to promote his non-existent principality, this time issuing a loan bond scheme valued at 800,000 pounds. There were no takers, and McGregor spent another eleven years working the hoax under a number of different names before re-

turning to Venezuela with Josefa and dying in 1845 aged fifty-nine. He was buried with full military honours close to Simon Bolivar, in the Pateon National Mausoleum in Caracas, leaving Black River to once again return to the jungle.

However, McGregor's creditors did not give up as easily as he may have hoped. For over thirty years after his scam unraveled dozens of people he had duped out of their life savings arrived in Trujillo under the guise of the Rio Tinto Commercial and Agricultural Company, which was another bond lease boondoggle. After this failed, the Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company took its place and sent its directors to Guatemala city to get the approval of the newly formed Central American Federation, in order to add some legitimacy to the latest fraud scheme. They were much surprised when the President of Guatemala, eager to attract British investors and settlers, awarded them a huge thirteen million acre land concession in the Rio Polochic region. More Poyais investors tried to recoup their lost capital under the guises of the British Central American Land Company and the Yorks and Lancashire Land Company, but these also failed.

In Trujillo by the start of the 1850's, there was a population of just 2,500 people, two-thirds of whom were Garifuna. Thomas Young, visiting the town in 1841 while acting as an agent for one of the Poyais land companies, had previously observed that the buildings in Trujillo "were in a general state of decay, and that the town has little attraction." Over forty years later, William Bouchard, the United States Consul to Roatan, wrote that "Wars, revolutions, and

earthquakes, have made ruins of its public buildings, and it is left with few vestiges of its ancient wealth and prosperity."

By the mid 1840's the United States "Manifest Destiny" policy was in full swing, with many North Americans believing that it was their divine right to colonise the entire region of the Americas. They attacked Mexico and successfully arranged for her to relinquish several states to the U.S.A, including Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona and Nevada. In the wake of this incredibly successful show of bullying, other maverick adventurers tried their hand at conquering and colonising Central and South American countries, all of whom had weak or non existent armies and corrupt and inefficient governments. One of them was William Walker, known as "The grey-eyed man of destiny," who was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1824 and was a child prodigy, graduating with "summa con laude" from the University of Nashville at the age of fourteen. He then went to France to study at the Sorbonne where he received a medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Next he moved to New Orleans to be a journalist and briefly served as editor and co-owner of the "New Orleans Crescent" newspaper.

The diminutive five foot three inch Walker's penchant for aggressiveness became apparent, when after moving to San Francisco to become a journalist, he challenged and fought three men to duels of honour, being wounded and losing two of the fights. In 1853, the twenty-nine year old Walker decided that large areas of Central America were up for grabs and made three unsuccessful expeditions to capture remote states in western Mexico. Two years later, the Lib-

eral Democratic party of Nicaragua invited Walker to aid them in a civil war that they were fighting against the Conservative party.

Walker assembled another ragtag army of mercenaries recruited from the bars and taverns of San Francisco's Barbary Coast and accompanied by notorious swindler and conman, the self appointed "Colonel " Parker French departed San Francisco in May 1855, accompanied by sixty ruffians. He landed at San Juan de Sur and recruited another hundred Americans, who had been drawn to Nicaragua for the fighting, and a hundred and seventy Nicaraguan soldiers who were fighting for the Democrats. Walker won a major skirmish at what would be called The first battle of Rivas, as well as two other battles.

He then captured Granada and after rigging the election, declared himself President of Nicaragua in May 1856, a post that was recognised by the United States and several European countries. It was now that the over ambitious Walker outreached himself.

He devised a plan to conquer the other four Central American countries - Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador, turning them into a giant Walker-ruled English speaking empire where slavery would be legal, governed by southerners fleeing the impending American Civil War. His first step was to raise capital for this ambitious enterprise. He did this by annexing and nationalising the Accessory Transit Company, a transport company owned by multi-millionaire tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt. The company operated a steamboat and stage coach line crossing Nicaragua's giant Lake Nicaragua from coast to coast. With the California gold rush in full

swing, it offered the quickest and cheapest passage for travelers wishing to cross from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, with fares from New York to San Francisco going for \$200. Some three thousand people made the journey each month, so Vanderbilt's transit company was worth over six and a half million dollars per year in revenue, more than enough to finance Walker's Central American takeover bid.

Vanderbilt however, was not a man to be trifled with and after closing the steamboat routes to and from Nicaragua, engaged the Costa Rican government to declare against Walker and attack him. The governments of Honduras and El Salvador, realizing that their future liberty and independence was at stake, also sent armies to simultaneously attack him. The Honduran army was commanded by General Florencio Xatruch, who was of Catalan descent. The Nicaraguans, who hated having an American as their president, were overjoyed to welcome Xatruch's soldiers but, unable to pronounce his name, yelled "*¡Vienen los Catrachos!*" The name stuck and has become the adopted moniker of all Hondurans, who to this day call themselves *Catrachos*.

Walker, outnumbered, was routed and fled down the San Juan river in one of Vanderbilt's commandeered steamboats, pursued by the armies of three countries. Upon his hasty retreat, he shamefully razed the beautiful colonial city of Granada to the ground by burning her, leaving behind a note tied to a lance saying: "Here was Granada." He was rescued by the U.S navy and repatriated to New York.

Walker didn't give up his goal and attempted another failed expedition to Nicaragua six months later, where he was again picked up by the American Navy and deported before he got off the beaches.

Three years later, while in New Orleans brewing up another invasion plan of Nicaragua, he was approached by delegates of the Honduran Bay Islands - Roatan, Utila and Guanaja - which had been returned to Honduras the previous year after thirty years of unofficial British occupation. The islanders wanted to become an independent state and offered to pay Walker to win them their freedom.

He left New Orleans with ninety-eight mercenaries in his boat the "Taylor" and sailed for the Swan Islands of Honduras. There he was intercepted by a British naval squadron who had been instructed to stop him from meddling in sensitive international affairs. With his plans for liberating the Bay Islands scotched, he decided to gain some glory by attacking Trujillo on the mainland and holding the town ransom until the islands were given independent status.

He landed his men near the Guyamoreto lagoon at 4 am on the morning of August 6, 1860 and marched on the town, which fell in just fifteen minutes. The military commander of Trujillo, Norberto Martinez, sadly noted that most of his men fled when confronted by the wild eyed mercenaries from Kentucky and Tennessee. That left himself and only six men to put up a fight, during which a Garifuna soldier called Antonio Sorrel died after being shot by Walker's second in command, Captain Rugler. Most of the town fled for the hills, leaving Trujillo mostly abandoned for the two weeks Walker held it. The United States consul, who stayed in his post, noted that Walker

and his men "behaved themselves and did not molest or rob anyone or do any damage to buildings."

After fifteen days, the Honduran militia had regrouped and with reinforcements from Tegucigalpa attacked the town, backed by the British Navy who cut off Walker's ability to escape by sea. Walker's "invasion" of Honduras was poorly planned as his men, including himself, carried only twenty cartridges apiece for their rifles. After incurring the loss of several casualties, Walker was forced to abandon his ship and flee Trujillo on August 20th, making an eighty mile forced march to Black River. After living rough in the jungle for thirteen days and surrounded by Honduran land forces and the British navy, he surrendered unconditionally on September 3rd to Captain Nowell Salmon.

Walker expected to be once again escorted back to the safety of the United States. However, Captain Salmon shipped him and his surviving soldiers of fortune on the appropriately named "HMS Icarus" back to Trujillo. Salmon convinced the head of the Honduran forces to allow the seventy-five surviving mercenaries, which included two Irish, three Germans, one Canadian, one Pole and an Englishman, to be sent home after signing an oath that they would never again take up arms against Honduras or any other Central American state. Walker spent the next two weeks confined within the Fortlaleza of Santa Barbara, where he prepared his defense case against charges of filibustering and acts of aggression against Honduras. His hand written defense brief can still be seen in the Trujillo museum, but it did him no good. He was deemed too troublesome a menace to the

region so was sentenced to death on September 20th. His second in command, Rugler, got four years for killing the Garifuna soldier.

The day following the trial, his men were loaded onto her Britannic Majesty's steamer "Gladiator" for repatriation to New Orleans. Walker as a practising Catholic was given the last rights in Trujillo's church and then at 8 am shot by a firing squad consisting of three men. He died "like a Christian and a man," according to the United States consul. The consul paid for Walker's casket (with trimmings), which cost ten pesos and two and a half reales and he was buried in the town's old cemetery. His grave can still be seen in the old cemetery in Trujillo, surrounded by a white wrought iron fence. The inscription on the gravestone simply reads:

WILLIAM WALKER SEPT 21, 1860 FUSILADO (shot).

It is a humble marker for a megalomaniac who dreamed of ruling the whole of Central America.

Chapter 8 - GREEN GOLD – A RUM BUNCH

I could have made more money digging ditches in New Orleans, but I came to Honduras for the freedom and adventure. – Guy “Machine Gun” Malony, American mercenary

After Walker’s death, Trujillo languished in a tropical torpor for the next twenty years. With the Spanish gone, Honduras struggled to find its feet and because of the problems of transportation and virtually no road system, had very little available to export. This was not so in the case of fruit growers on the north coast. They could bring their pineapples, bananas, coconuts, mangoes, lemons and oranges by mule, ox-cart, river raft or sea canoe to the ports of Trujillo, Tela and La Ceiba to be loaded on schooners bound for the USA.

Starting in 1884 the O’Glynn family ran a fleet of sailing ships from New Orleans to Trujillo. By the late 1890’s, three steam powered cargo boats a week left New Orleans for Trujillo and one boat per week made the voyage from New York. They would bring cargoes of brandy, whisky, wine and other spirits, as well as general wares and building supplies. The passenger ticket cost \$35 in gold for a round trip ticket, for a voyage that took from four to six days.

Although bananas were not unknown in America and Europe, the coming of fast steamships with ice laden cargo holds meant that the fragile fruit could be shipped a lot quicker than in the days of sail, with a staggering profit margin of 1000%. Bananas were popular in America as they were tasty, nutritional and cheap. At the close of the 19th century a dollar bought you forty-four bananas yet only eight ap-

ples. The fruit became so popular that stories abounded of Honduran north coast farmers dancing through the port towns, their pockets and hats full of dollars. As of 2014 bananas are still the fourth most valuable food crop in the world behind rice, maize, and wheat.

American and European fruit companies began flocking to Mexico and Central America looking for deep water parts surrounded by large expanses of cheap, arable land and ideal climate. Trujillo was one of only 5 ports in Central America to fit the bill and soon became busier than she had ever been for the preceding 350 years.

Almost anyone with a little capital could join in the fast profits of the “banana game” according to US Consul William Burchard. In the 1880’s a small 4 hectare farm cost \$250. It contained 3,000 plants and under favourable circumstances generated \$1,500 the first year and anywhere from \$3,000-\$5,000 in subsequent years. Banana cultivation was relatively simple and clearing was accomplished by burning underbrush during the late dry season. Planting was done when the first rains came in May.

With as simple a tool as a pointed stick plants were sown three to four meters apart and the only labour involved between planting and harvesting (some 10-12 months later) was weeding with machetes. The whole process was simple and didn’t involve complicated tools or equipment. The Bay islands had been Honduras’ principal source of banana export, but were struck by a major hurricane in 1877, shifting cultivation to the mainland.

Although Spanish conquistadores had encountered *platanos* or unripened bananas upon their arrival in Honduras, the sweet “Gros Michel” banana was introduced to Honduras (and American banana

companies) in 1836 by French botanist Francois Pouat. The variety was known as “Big Mike.”

In a 1899 census it was found that 1,000 independently owned banana farms existed along the north coast. This meant that out of a population of 100,000 people, 10% owned plantations. This was to change with the arrival of three different fruit companies.

The first of these, the Standard Fruit company, was started in New Orleans by three Sicilian immigrant brothers. Joseph Felix and Lucca Vaccarro with their cousin Salvador D’Antoni bought large land holdings around La Ceiba and started large scale pineapple and banana plantations on either side of the town. With the arrival of the railways, they would eventually stretch 100 miles down the coast. The Vaccaros and D’Antoni were the first of a hard breed of ruthless foreign businessmen lured to Central America for fame and fortune. It is said that they burned the land registry office in la Ceiba to prevent disputes over land grabs they had made on dormant farmland and later, they bought every ice factory in New Orleans to ensure their monopoly on shipping fruit from the north coast.

Of interesting note is Honduras’s favourite beer - Salva Vida - owned by the Standard Fruit company. It was named by Salvador D’Antoni when with his cousin Vidal Vaccaro, they were traveling on a steamboat from New Orleans to La Ceiba and were discussing what to call the new beer they were going to sell their workers. D’Antoni’s eye fell on one of the ship’s life preserver’s called a Salva Vida (life saver in Spanish). They named the beer after Salvador and Vidal: Sal-sa Vida!

Their tactics may have been rough and ready, but the Vaccaros and D’Antoni turned la Ceiba into the prosperous and thriving port

town she is today, living up to her nickname as *La Novia de Honduras* or “Honduras’ Girlfriend.”

The second Company competing for the north coast “yellow gold” was Sam Zemurray’s Cuyamel Fruit Co. operating out of Puerto Cortes, with holdings as far as the Guatemalan border. Zemurray became a legend in the world of bananas with his rags to riches life. He was born to a Russian Jew and christened Schmuel Zmurri. Emigrating to America at aged 14 his name was anglicized to Samuel Zemurray. At 18 he bought a handcart and started selling ripe bananas in New Orleans, which he had bought cheaply after they were discarded by the steamships. Zemurray, later to be known simply as the “Banana Man”, profited on the popular new fruit and amassed a \$100,000 fortune by the age 21. With that he bought his own steamships, sailed for Honduras, and purchased 5,000 acres of prime land on the Cuyamel river. The Banana Man was soon to play a large part in Trujillo’s and Honduras’ fortunes.

The third major player in the valuable Banana Game was the United Fruit Company, formed in 1899. This company would grow so rapidly that with the exception of the Standard Fruit company, it would establish a virtual monopoly in Central America, coming to be known as *El Pulpo* - The Octopus - or more affectionately amongst the banana workers as *El Uni*.

These three had a deep and long lasting impact on the political and economic development of several countries in the Caribbean for over a century. Zemurray merged his Cuyamel Fruit Company with United Fruit and later become its president, leading *El Pulpo* into dark and nefarious meddling in Central American politics. This in-

cluded the 1954 military coup in Guatemala that ousted Jacob Arbenz and started a civil war that caused approximately 100,000 deaths.

Before refrigeration, fresh meat and vegetables were unavailable and the workers lived on canned meat and vegetables bought on the steamers. There was no electricity or gas illumination, the latter coming to Trujillo in 1903. And Trujillo was not to have a regular electricity supply until 1980, some 478 years after Columbus first landed.

Compared to the interior of Honduras, where a state economy made life somewhat drab and dreary, the north coast banana ports of Tela, Puerto Cortez, La Ceiba, and Trujillo, were much livelier places to live. Banana workers made three times the wages of other workers, and with the vibrant Garifuna culture and influx of other Natives to work the railroads and then the plantations, life in Trujillo was tolerable. Trujillo became a jaunty, lively town where music, drinking, and dancing ruled the weekends. Gramophones and long playing records were imported from New Orleans and made their way by rail along the coast, livening up the tropical nights. After years in the doldrums, the town began to prosper, and by 1903 over 2 million banana stems were exported from the North Coast. Shipping had increased from four steamers a month to eighteen. A fine hotel called the Central was built in 1901 and overlooked the park. Its second floor rooms, the bay, bar, restaurant, and dance floor soon became the mecca for all of Trujillo's businessmen and ex-patriot population, the latter of which began to grow.

At the turn of the 20th century, Honduras had no extradition treaty with any country in the world and this, coupled with its favourable climate and cheap steamer passages, made it attractive to

adventurers, tropical tramps, hustlers, conmen and assorted human flotsam and jetsam, who had been forced to leave home without time to say goodbye.

Honduras became a popular respite for bank embezzlers and fraudsters, including “Cashier” Brown, who had ruined a bank in Kentucky, fled to La Ceiba and taken work as a steamship clerk. Another was Alex Olendahl, who’d scammed several New Orleans banks out of \$200,000 and arrived in Puerto Cortes in a white duck suit to start a new life.

But probably the most infamous of these rascals was Major Edward D. Burke. He was the former Louisiana state treasurer bilking the State out of a reported \$2 million, and who had earlier been involved in a pistol shootout with Governor William Pitt Kellogg. Burke, upon hearing of a federal indictment against him for embezzlement, fled to Honduras where he remained a fugitive for over 40 years (bringing with him a fortune of \$8 million to invest in mining ventures). As was becoming his numerical calling, he wound up as assistant supervisor and chief auditor for the National Railway of Honduras.

The Trujillo that O’Henry described in his book “Of Cabbages and Kings” had, according to a 1895 census, a population of just 1,540 people. Just over half of these were Latinos, forty-four percent were Afro-Caribe Garifuna, with a foreign community consisting of 68 people, including 22 Cubans, 16 British, 12 French, 9 Americans, 4 Germans and 1 each from Canada, Ethiopia, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. Sadly only one Pech/Paya Native appeared in the census.

New Orleans became the main transit point for people looking to better their lives by the quickest of means in Central America. Soldiers of fortune, adventurers and mercenaries gathered in the French quarter of New Orleans, waiting for news of revolutionary activities. They milled around the bars of Bourbon St and in the lobbies of their two favourite hotels: the Hotel Montelone, or uptown at the St Charles.

Between 1895 and 1934 Honduras averaged no less than 5 or 6 revolutions per year, including three full-scale civil wars, so there was no shortage of fighting for American mercenaries made recently unemployed by the end of the Spanish-American wars. With basically a one crop economy and foreign control of the bananas, the ensuing large scale corruption involving government officials from low level ministers up to Presidential level was endemic. O'Henry wrote: "Honduras was a wise choice for any fugitive. It was indulgent towards the American bank presidents, swindlers, confidence men and gold mining."

There was a common saying on the coast that only two kinds of Gringos came to Honduras - the wanted and the unwanted. Trujillo's most famous man was William Sydney Porter, who would later gain literary fame as the most popular American short story writer of the first decade of the 20th century under the pen name of O'Henry, a name he borrowed from one of his jailers. Before starting a writing career, Porter had been working as a cashier for the first National Bank of Austin, Texas and in 1896 was indicted for embezzlement. He was arrested and his father-in-law posted bail, but instead of keeping his court date, Porter fled to New Orleans and hopped a boat to

Trujillo, arriving shortly before the arrival of infamous Texan bank bandit Al Jennings.

Jennings was on the run for robbing a bank in Houston of \$32,000. \$1,000 of this he paid a steamboat captain carrying a load of brandy, to take him to Trujillo. Jennings (who would go on to become a Hollywood stuntman, have a movie made about him, write a book, and even appear on Groucho Mark's "What's my line") buddied up with Porter and along with the U.S. consul, got drunk on July 4th 1896. They repeatedly fired their pistols in the air, supposedly disrupting yet another low level revolution that was in the making. During his time here, while staying at a shabby hotel, Porter wrote what would become his most popular work "Of Cabbages and Kings," a wry, amusing account of local and expatriot shenanigans and boondoggles in a sleepy banana port. It was Porter who first coined the term "Banana Republic", which became a sobriquet to describe any small, politically unstable Latin American country. The following year Porter would reluctantly return to face the music in Texas, where his wife was dying of tuberculosis. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment of which he served three.

To describe Honduras as politically unstable at the turn of the 20th century would be a major understatement. Nine out of ten presidents between 1874 and 1911 had been ousted and forced to flee the country by acts of revolution, or in one case invasion by Nicaragua. The United States on several occasions sent gunboats to keep the peace and make sure no harm came to the 2,000 U.S. citizens living in Honduras and, more importantly, to make sure the lucrative banana trade wasn't interrupted by the constant internal wars in the country.

In 1903, two officers arrived who were to become the most decorated men in the U.S. Marine Corps' illustrious history. Smedley Butler, under command of John Archer LeJeune, arrived with a 600 man marine battalion on the converted banana steamer USS Panther from Puerto Rico. They came to ensure that American interests along the north coast were protected, during a revolution led by General Manuel Bonilla. Bonilla felt that the presidential elections he had just participated in had been fixed by his rival Juan Arias Boquin. Bonilla's soldiers were rampaging along the north coast when the marines arrived. As Butler describes it, "It all seems like a Gilbert and Sullivan war. The supporters of the government wore blue and white hatbands, and the revolutionists red and white hatbands. At a critical moment in the fighting, a man could quickly shift allegiance by turning his hatband inside out."

Not finding any U.S. citizens in need of rescuing in either Puerto Cortes or La Ceiba, Butler and LeJeune turned their attention to Trujillo, where a full-scale war had broken out in the middle of town. All the other northern coastal towns in Honduras had fallen to the rebels, but the government troops were determined to make a last stand in Trujillo. A message was sent to the Panther, anchored out of range in the bay, that the US Consul was under siege, so commander LeJeune sent a shore party to the beach and up into the town to rescue him. Upon the arrival of U.S. troops the fighting stopped and both sides came out to see who the newcomers were. The consul was found hiding under his house, trembling and shaking and wrapped from head to foot in a large stars and stripes flag. He was carried by his rescuers back to the "Panther."

Butler then turned his attention to the leader of the government troops. The fort having fallen to the rebels, he was holed up in “a dingy little house near the town plaza. The plaster was falling from the walls, the ceiling was sagging down, and wounded men with rags tied around their heads and arms were lying groaning on the dirty mud floor.”

Despite Butler’s urgings the commander refused to surrender, saying that he would be shot anyway, so he might as well go down fighting. Butler had the greatest admiration for “this obscure commander of a lost cause, who refused to change his hat band.” The fighting lasted more several days until Trujillo fell to the rebels or *Bonillistas* as they called themselves. The government forces went over to the rebels and as their red flag was raised over the fort the gallant commander was taken out and shot by a firing squad. According to Butler, it was just another tiny tragedy at the end of the world.

The coast, the mountain region and the capital had fallen to Manuel Bonilla, who installed himself as President for the next four years. With American interests protected and the consul safely restored to the consulate, Butler, LeJuene, and the 600 marines sailed for Panama. However, it would not be the last time that Manuel Bonilla would attack Trujillo.

Butler described his thirty-three years of overseas marine corps service as being like an Al Capone-hired muscle for the major fruit companies and was disillusioned with the U.S.’s policy and exploitation of third world tropical countries. Butler stated: “I spent 33 years and 4 months in active military service and during that period I spent most of the time as a high class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capi-

talism. I helped make Mexico (and especially Tampico) safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American Republics for the benefit of Wall St. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking house of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American Fruit companies in 1903. In China I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was operate in three districts. I operated on three continents.”

The fruit trade and influx of all foreign investment created expanded growth in Trujillo. A central park with fountains was installed along with gas lighting in 1904. The gas lamps were lit between 6 and 10 pm. A huge influx of money hit the town. It was common knowledge that the fruit companies in Honduras influenced every area of everyday life. They built the railroads (a lifeline for commerce in a country with no paved roads), bought as much arable land as possible and established banks like Banco Atlantida. The North Coast’s largest banking concern was founded and owned by Standard fruit company and bribed government officials at a “dizzying pace.”

Butler continued on to say in his autobiography: “Bananas were everywhere. I almost hated bananas. A little fleet of banana boats unconcerned about the revolution was coming and going.” This didn’t much impress him much and he noted: “The town was unattractive and dirty, an impenetrable jungle filled with wild animals was pushing in on the town and, without the vigilance of the inhabitants,

would have swallowed it up. The native population was enlivened by a sprinkling of foreigners who had left their own countries without bothering to say goodbye.”

The railroads in Honduras merely served the plantation zones and did not stray from the coastal regions inland, as they had promised. Huge land concessions demanded by and given to the fruit companies enabled them to manage their own plantations and deep water ports with an iron grip. The fruit companies manufactured and controlled everything including soap, cigarettes, rum, canned goods. In fact, they made their own employees wage slaves to their very bosses. This was neo-slavery. However, it must be said that the fruit companies did provide subsidized housing, schooling, and medical care to their employees and families.

Fruit companies became such an integral part of Central America's economic life that they had total control of the gas, water and electricity and telephones systems. In 1899, the United Fruit company was even given control of Guatemala's postal service. The first radio transmitting stations were built by the fruit companies. The station run by United Fruit in Bluefields, Nicaragua, cost a whopping \$50 per word to broadcast, but the managing director of the company said it was worth it to maintain their monopoly in the region.

The Banana companies held so much power that they were not adverse to toppling Central American Governments who did anything to impede their capitalistic aims. In 1907, President Bonilla was ousted in an invasion by Nicaraguan President Jose Santos Zelaya (over a border dispute in La Mosquitia). His replacement was Miguel Davila, who inherited a government mired in 120 million dollars of overseas debt, chiefly in loans from the US and Britain to finance a trans-

oceanic railroad between the ports of Puerto Cortes in the Caribbean and San Lorenzo on the Pacific. Planned as far back as 1857, only 56 miles of track had been laid by 1910. With millions of dollars embezzled and stolen by Honduran ministers and overseas contractors, the project had become an expensive white elephant. To pay off the huge debt, Davila was pressured by the U.S. and British governments to impose a 5 cent export tax on every stem of bananas exported from Honduras and a tax of 2 cents per pound weight on imported railway equipment and rolling stock. The banana companies were not amused. The bank of JP Morgan was owed so much money by Honduras that plans were made to install tax collecting agents in the four major Caribbean ports. These measures did not sit well with the fruit companies. The previous year 6 million stems had been exported meaning the new tax would cost them \$30,000 a year.

Plans were made to oust Davilla and replace him with Bonilla, who was not enjoying life away from the action and put out to pasture on his farm in Belize. He gave his word to annul the taxes which pleased Sam Zemurray, who planned to extend not only the operations of his Cuyamel Fruit company, but also the company's railroad track. He was highly motivated not to pay any taxes, and decided to finance a revolution.

Once again, New Orleans became a hot bed of gossip and intrigue, and soldiers of fortune, mercenaries and adventurers gathered. The New Orleans' Daily Picayune gleefully announced the gathering of armed adventurers, speculating on which Central American country would be their target. Even the New York Herald sent a reporter to find out where the revolution would take place.

Bonilla and Zemurray (known only as the shadowy “El Amigo” for his adventure) chose the enigmatic Louisianan and revolutionary veteran of several earlier wars, Lee Christmas as the leader of the coup. Why no one ever made a movie about Lee Christmas is a mystery, because of all the mercenaries to fight in Central America he was the most colourful. He was, during his 25 years in Guatemala and Honduras, variably a railway engineer, General of the Armed forces of Honduras, Chief of Police of Tegucigalpa and Chief Customs Inspector for Puerto Cortez. When he died in 1924 in New Orleans at age 64, his obituary appeared in Time Magazine. At his funeral a letter was read from the mayor of New Orleans praising him as “the perfect ideal of manliness and courage.”

Born on a cotton plantation in Livingston Parish, Louisiana in 1863, Christmas worked as a railroad engineer throughout his twenties before winding up in Honduras in 1891, where he ran a freight train out of Puerto Cortez. Captured by rebels who took his train at gunpoint in 1897, Christmas started and won a sequence of important battles by fighting on both sides, using his armoured train to great effect. He was tough as nails and reportedly chewed on broken glass to impress new recruits. The story that did most to create the macho mystique surrounding him was that, after being captured on the battle field by Nicaraguan forces while again fighting for Bonilla, he was told that he was to be summarily shot by a firing squad. The infuriated Christmas who, upon being asked for a final request by the officer in charge of the squad, asked that his body not be buried, but be left out in the sun.

When the Nicaraguan officer queried the odd request, Christmas fixed him in the eye and told him that he “wanted the buzzards to eat

his corpse and fly over his enemies and shit on them.” Both surprised and impressed by this bold reply, the officer ordered Christmas untied and asked if he would be willing to change sides if his life was spared. Christmas readily accepted this offer.

At the time of Bonilla’s request Lee Christmas was 47 years old and was working as the chief engineer for the Guatemalan railway. He was a serial womaniser, living in the capital with one of a succession of three Honduran wives some 30 years younger than himself. Christmas traveled to New Orleans in December 1910 to assemble an array of sharpshooters and crack shots. As right hand man he chose an old comrade in arms, the imposing Guy Maloney, six foot nine inches tall and a native of New Orleans.

Maloney was born in 1884 and at 16 ran away from home to fight for the British in the Boer war. Next he served a stint with the US army in the Philippines, before deciding to go freelance. During his time in the army he had learned to strip, reassemble and operate almost any machine gun given to him. Due to this skill with modern firearms he earned the nickname “Machine Gun Maloney,” which was to stay with him the rest of his life.

Maloney together with life-long friends and mercenaries Tracy Richardson and Sam Dreben (later to become a legendary and highly decorated WWI hero) plus Boer War veterans Victor Gordon and William Pittman, these hardened fighters made up the core of the Christmas/Bonilla/Zemurray army.

With rebel troops waiting on standby on the Honduran borders with the El Salvadoran and Guatemalan frontiers, it was time for Zemurray and Bonilla to make their move. “The Banana Man” had fronted the ex-president \$40,000 (out of a total revolution budget of

half a million dollars) to purchase a decommissioned US Navy gunboat - The Hornet - which was 180 feet in length with a beam of 24 feet. She was capable of carrying one hundred men and most importantly, had a top speed of fifteen knots meaning she could outrun the only gunboat the Honduran Navy had in service on the North Coast, the lumbering, decrepit "Tatumbala". The US consul in la Ceiba cynically noted that the gunboat "was only good for getting away in."

With the Hornet loaded with two hundred rifles, three thousand rounds of ammunition and a pair of gas powered Colt-Browning 7 mm machine guns, the stage was set for war. There was so little discretion in the actions of the coup plotters that journalists from the New York Herald and other newspapers had left for Honduras anticipating the coup a week earlier. Under surveillance from President Davila's spies and a U.S. secret service agent, Christmas and Bonilla spent their last night in New Orleans carousing in its largest and most famous brothel, owned by Madam May Evans in the Storyville district.

By 2 am, It was time to slip out the back door and rendezvous with Zemurray on Lake Ponchastram. The irrepressible Christmas downed his whiskey and announced "This is the first time I've gone from a whorehouse to the White House. Let's go!" The heavily laden Hornet, accompanied by the two other boats comprising the Standard Fruit Company's revolutionary navy - The Centinella and the Emma - they steamed through the Gulf of Mexico only to find that the British and U.S. Navies had sent gunboats to block the harbours at Puerto Cortez and La Ceiba. Undeterred, the mini armada steamed on to Roatan, taking the island easily without loss of life on New Year's Eve 1910. During the huge celebrations, it was decided by Christmas

and Malony to take Utila, which also fell without casualties. The commander of the tiny garrison on Utila was then forced at gunpoint to dance a jig in his underwear shouting, “Viva Bonilla!”

Next up was Trujillo, where 200 government soldiers waited nervously in the fort. Although fighting was prohibited in Cortez and La Ceiba, no provision had been made for Trujillo so Bonilla and Christmas sailed in on the morning of January 9th, 1911, after being blockaded in Roatan for a week by the US Gunboats “Manetta” and “Tacoma.” Bonilla wanted to take the town in style by attacking the fort in a full frontal naval assault with guns blazing. Christmas and his Honduran officers pointed out the imprudence of this action, in view of the fort being armed with an impressive 39 cannons, including a rapid firing Krupp’s 3 lb gun.

Before dawn shore parties commanded by Christmas and his friend Ed McLaurie, another railroader turned mercenary, landed on either side of the town with their machine guns and marched towards town in a pincer movement. Bonilla sailed around the bay in a provocative manner, just out of range of the fort’s guns, gleefully pulling the chain on the boat’s steam whistle every time a cannon ball landed harmlessly in the sea in front of his Presidential yacht.

Upon hearing that Honduras had been simultaneously invaded by rebels from Guatemala and El Salvador, and in no mood to face Christmas’ Colt machine guns, the commander of the government forces, having been promised safe passage, quickly surrendered. The town’s garrison happily changed the red armbands of President Davila’s liberal party for the blue armbands of Bonillas’ Nationalists. With the Hornet confiscated by the U.S. Navy for being a weapon of war, the rebels were now forced to march overland to La Ceiba.

Trujillo had fallen easily, but a week later government forces in the neighbouring banana port 80 miles away put up a stiff fight. Over four hundred men on both sides were killed in a day's fighting at the mouth of the Cangregal River, before Christmas' and Malony's twin machine gun fusillades won the "Battle of La Ceiba" on January 25th. Much to the rejoice of the United Fruit Company, Honduras fell to the rebels in February and Manuel Bonilla again assumed the Presidency, abolishing (as promised) the banana and railroad taxes, and rewarding Lee Christmas and Guy Maloney with the posts of Commander of the Armed Forces and Chief of Police respectively.

This was a huge victory for Sam Zemurray and the fruit companies and he and his Cuyamel Fruit Company were awarded a massive 34,000 acre concession for cultivating bananas west of Puerto Cortez.

This banana revolution was not the first that occurred in Honduras, nor would it be the last time that Zemurray's Cayumel/United Fruit company meddled in the country's politics.

In 1975, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission exposed a scheme by United Fruit Company to bribe President López with US\$1.25 million, with the promise of another \$1.25 million upon the reduction of certain banana export taxes. Trading in United Fruit stock was halted, and on 22 April 1975 López was ousted in a military coup led by his fellow General Juan Alberto Melgar, in the 1975 Honduran coup d'état. This scandal is known in Honduras as "Banagate."

By 1910 bananas constituted 88% of all Honduras' exports and the big companies were looking to expand. Zemurray and United Fruit controlled the western-located banana lands and the port at Puerto Cortez, the Vaccarro brothers and Standard Fruit dominated

La Ceiba. That only left the ports at Tela and Trujillo free, so the United Fruit Company decided to go after both of them. Two subsidiary companies were formed: one in Tela called “The Tela Railroad Company” and one that was to ship out of Puerto Castilla on the eastern tip of the bay of Trujillo to be called “The Truxillo Railroad Company.” With bananas costing a mere 6.5 cents a bunch on the inland plantations and fetching 75 cents a bunch in Trujillo, it made perfectly good sense to build a railroad to go and retrieve them. During the years 1914-1924, United Fruit invested over \$26 million in constructing the two railroads (compared to only \$9 million and \$6.5 million spent on Costa Rica and Colombia respectively during the same time period). Along with the railroads went workers’ housing, roads, bridges, hospitals, water, electric plants, and port facilities.

Puerto Castilla was chosen because it has the deepest water in Central America, with a drop off of 15 meters right from the dock.

The first attempt at an independent railway there was made in 1909 by an American - James P. Henderson - who was to be given 500 hectares concession for each km of railway built. His company actually completed eight kms, before going broke and forfeiting the 10,000 gold pesos he had deposited with the government as a guarantee to carry out the contract.

On April 29, 1914 United Fruits subsidiary the Truxillo Railroad Company, won the concession for the railroad from Trujillo. It was stipulated that the company build a new dock at Puerto Castilla and run a terminal from there. They were required to lay 20 kilometres of track for the first five years, then 12 kilometres each year until the line reached Juticalpa and the capital of Tegucigalpa, both several hundred kilometres inland of Trujillo. All materials to be used in con-

struction of the port and railroad could be imported free of taxes and a whopping 10,000 hectares were to be given by the Honduran government to the company for every 20 kilometres of line laid. The goal of reaching Tegucigalpa was never attained but the new railway did comprise 146 kilometres of track as far as Iruya in La Mosquitita to the east and another 96 kilometres to Olanchito to the west.

More than five thousand men were hired to build the railroad with permission given to United Fruit to import men from Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Honduras to supplement the work force. At one point 400 West Native workers were emigrating to Trujillo per month and a new town sprang up in Rio Negro known as Jamaica Town. In its heyday over 1,500 West Natives lived with their own bars, dance halls, restaurants and an English speaking social club known as Liberty Hall. Over 4,000 men were treated for malaria in the first year of construction. Records for the year 1914 show that out of a total of 99 men who died building the railroad, 33 died from fever, disease or snakebite and 61 died from accidents or acts of violence. The workers were paid in teams of gangs not individually, so sometimes an unpopular co-worker would be murdered the day before payday and the rest of the rail gang would split his wages. The work was hard and all done by hand (bulldozers and chainsaws not being available until 1920) and close to 300 kilometres of line had to be laid and thousands of acres of jungle had to be cleared. The railway was completed and opened on Honduras' independence day, September 15th, 1922, with a massive firework display and parties and bands playing long into the night.

Work on what was to become the busiest banana port in the world had already begun in 1914 with workers beginning to use the port to load cargo in 1917.

Puerto Castilla was divided into four sections from West to East: Radio Park, with antennas long enough for overseas communication (as previously mentioned, at an initial cost of \$50 per word per broadcast); an upper section that included housing for the American supervisors and the office workers, a schoolhouse and the hotel and clubhouse with a small golf course; the commercial section encompassed the dock, railyard, workshops, commissary and administrative buildings; and finally “Labor Town,” the crowded housing area for the workers and stevedores.

This section was separated from the Americans by a high wooden fence. To keep law and order in Labor town, strict anti-gambling laws were enforced and in 1914, three West Natives were deported, after being caught playing dice in Puerto Castilla. In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Honduras supplied one quarter of U.S. bananas. Trains would pull right up to the dock where an average 6,500 stems on hour were loaded onto US born steamers, known as “The Great White Fleet.” Garifuna workers who sailed their canoes to Castilla every morning from Santa Fe, Cristales, Guadalupe and San Antonio were known as the “Little White Fleet.” A steam turbine generator was installed at Castilla providing power for Trujillo for the first time, light being provided from 6 pm to 10 pm. Steam whistles throughout the port sounded the hour every hour and 292 telephone lines were installed for the bay and the Truxillo Railway Co. network. In 1923 a 13 kilometre, 8 inch pipe was laid from a reservoir in Trujillo out to the port which, being on a sand bar, had no fresh water. By 1925, 600,000

gallons were pumped to Jerico, Capiro, Coyoles and Castilla (note ; the author's house is connected to that system, receiving 30 lbs psi). An ice plant capable of producing 250,000 lbs of ice per month opened in 1926, and the 30,000 sq ft commissary had a supermarket, bakery, and butcher for the first time in Trujillo's 400 years of history.

Trujillo was up and running as the biggest banana port in the world with work for everyone in and around town. The outlying plantations were served by ten porter and twelve Baldwin locomotives, a total of 22 trains ranging in size from 22 to 50 tons. Bananas, cattle and freight were carried in 537 cars, 247 of which were double stacked. The carpentry shops in Puerto Castilla constructed 13 of the 15 passenger cars out of native mahogany, one of which held a strongbox for delivering workers pay. This car also acted as a mail car, which improved postal service considerably in Northern Honduras, an area which had been previously served by postmen on mule back. The trains were ready to roll and the first left Trujillo in 1922.

The 53 stations connected to Puerto Castilla and Trujillo served as pick up points for the banana farms. Life on the camps was spartan, hard and tedious. The single men lived in wooden barracks, while couples had one room huts, none of which had electricity or running water. The camps became incredibly ethnically diverse.

The famous Honduran author Ramón Amaya Amador wrote of his experience of life on a plantation in his book *Prisión Verde* or "Green Prison", describing an environment in which "whites, blacks, natives, yellows, salt merchants from the Gulf of Fonseca, tobacco merchants from Copan, horsemen from Olancho, Miskito zambos from Colon, the Bay Islands, and La Moskitia, West Natives and people from all over Central America congregated to work planting,

cultivating, and harvesting the Green Gold.” Probably the most famous Honduran novel, *Prisión Verde* really shows the animosity between the corrupt North American plantation owners and the wretched conditions of the virtually enslaved workers whom could be jailed, beaten or murdered on the whim of white overseers. Amador describes the *veneneros*, or “poison sprayers”, an intoxicating job of spraying pesticides on bananas bound for the United States and Europe. As a result of this literally poisonous job, countless children would be born with serious defects and pesticide sprayers would die at an abnormally young age.

The Truxillo Railroad route was as follows:

- Puerto Castilla– Corocito – Olanchito
- Puerto Castilla - Empalme – Los Cuartos – El canal- Bernardez- Chapagua-Pires – Durango – Corocito – Tiaca – Quebrada de Arena – Salama – Sonora – Taujica – Yucatán – Tocoa – Cayo – Guapinol – Colima – Cuaca – Lerida – Prieta – Tuburones – Copete – Achote – Saba – Monga – Tepusteca – Balsamo – Jaguaca – Maloa – Mame – Mendez – San Carlos – Uchapa – Agun – Olanchito
- Corocito – Sico
- Corocito – Tepic – El Paso – Bonito – Florencia – Piedra Blanca – Concordia – Tabasco – Francia – Limoncito – Farallones – Vallecito (101.7 km)
- Cusuna, Irión, Sangrelaya, Sambito, Tinoco, Sico (120 km)

In addition to the United Fruit workers, the *finqueros* or independent growers would bring their bananas to the stations by boat or mule cart and then stay and spend their money, carousing, drinking

and partying. Paydays were festival, carnival occasions with vendors of everything from clothing and shoes to gramophone records playing their trade.

After languishing for 400 years in total obscurity, Trujillo finally basked in the warm economic glow of being the largest banana port in the world. But despite this new legitimate business of bananas, Trujillo still served as a smuggling mecca, with cheap goods being sold to the thousands of workers not willing to pay top dollar to “El Uni.”

William Melhado, the British consul, owned one of Honduras’ largest coconut farms, outside of Trujillo in Betulia. Six million coconuts per year were once shipped from Trujillo. During the years of Prohibition in the U.S, which lasted from 1919 until 1934, Melhado’s family shipped hundreds of thousands of coconuts which had been drained of their water, filled with good Honduran rum and then plugged. It seemed that a golden era had begun, but then disaster struck.

Panama disease, or Fusarium Wilt, had first been discovered on the North Coast of Panama in 1910. The disease enters the banana plant through the roots and destroys the vascular system, causing the plant leaves to yellow, wither, and die. There is no known cure for it. Once it destroys the plantation, a growers only option is to move to new, unaffected property. Another disease known as Sigatoka (named after the valley in Fiji, where it was first discovered) also racked the plantations. It caused yellow streaking on the leaves and reduced production by up to 50%. Unlike Panama disease, Sigatoka could be controlled by extensive spraying both by hand and by plane, but the combination of the two diseases simply proved too much and by the

late 1930's banana production was way down, a mere 16 years after it had started with a bang.

In 1933, the peak year of the Truxillo Railroad's production, over 4.6 million stems of bananas were produced for export. By 1938, this figure had fallen to a mere 176,782 stems, a drop of over 99%, coinciding with the Great Depression around the world.

The sinking of eighty banana ships in Honduran waters and the Gulf of Mexico by Nazi U-boats was the final straw and caused United Fruit Co. to cease operations and pull out of the area. This caused an economic holocaust of epic proportions. The Truxillo Railroad Company ceased its operations in 1942, a mere 20 years after serving the largest banana port in the world.

First to suffer were the West Native immigrant workers, 1,500 of whom lived in the Rio Negro district. In 1934 an immigration act was passed banning West Natives from entering Honduras (along with Chinese and Jews).

In 1937, with the Banana industry in ruins, hard line Honduran Dictator Tiburcio Carias (known as the Hitler of Central America) issued an edict to deport all black West Native workers. This led to rioting in Trujillo where hundreds of workers attempted to storm the British Consulate. As British passport holders, they expected to be given sanctuary from the armed militia sent to deport them. Incredibly, they were refused entrance and turned away. Instead they were rounded up and placed on three passenger boats which sailed off to their countries of origin, where their prospects of work were extremely poor.

Next to go was the railway itself. Although it ran more or less a reduced schedule through 1938, in 1939 all 123 kilometres of rail be-

tween Corocito and the last stop in La Moskitia, Punta Rieles, were removed, as was all rolling stock and equipment. The export of rubber was essential to the war effort and with Honduras aligned with the allies in World War II, rail cars with rubber ran down the line from Olanchito. But the last train rolled in 1942, and by 1944 all the tracks that had been laid down a mere 22 years previously were taken up and shipped out of Honduras. The Truxillo Railroad Company simply ceased to exist and the town entered a new phase of mass unemployment and gloom.