

Soaring
with wings like eagles
to **Colombia**
and **Chile**

Raul Ries leads a group of Calvary Chapel pastors through guerilla-held territory in Colombia, and then on to Chile to encourage and strengthen the brethren.

The warring factions in Colombia have long used the people as pawns to keep the country in chaos. The drug cartels ply their billion-dollar trade with little opposition. Constant civil war allows guerillas and their foes, the paramilitary groups, to kill without consequence. The perception of Christianity as an unacceptable American influence arouses religious persecution. Calvary Chapel pastors and those in their fellowship have been threatened; some even murdered. Fear reigns.

Ana Maria, an 11-year-old Colombian girl, had tasted terror before. Months ago, her father had been killed, caught in the crossfire of civil war. Now, as she watched the dozen Calvary Chapel pastors wait for their plane on this isolated jungle-top landing strip, she feared the same fate awaited them.

Almost two years ago, Ana Maria's parents were at their farm discussing the need to leave the area because of escalating violence. Both of her parents had accepted the Lord while attending Calvary Chapel Villavicencio. A few days earlier, they had received a visit from a guerilla faction.

"You have many cattle here," the leader told her father. He waved his automatic weapon toward the livestock. "My men are fighting for your freedom from this corrupt government. We need to take one." Ana Maria's father protested, but to no avail. The leader insisted, "You are lucky you have not been killed for at-



Pastor Lance Cook, CC La Habra, reacts to take-off in a DC-3 cargo plane flying out of El Secreto.

Story and Photographs by Tom Price CCMM

tending the gringo church." The guerillas took what they wanted and left. "Thieves and drug runners, all of them," her father commented. This coercion would continue. Soon the paramilitary suspected Ana Maria's family of willingly supporting the rebels.

As Ana Maria's parents discussed the dangers they faced, a uniformed officer from the paramilitary arrived with a group of armed men. They commanded her father to come outside. Ana Maria huddled in the house with her younger sister and mother.

"You are helping the enemy!," shouted the officer. After an argument, they put Ana Maria's father in the back of his own truck. As they began to drive away, she ran after them.

"What are you going to do with my Daddy?," the young girl screamed. The officer assured the family they would return him in three days. Three days later, her father was found with a bullet through his head.

Children come to meet Raul Ries as he visits the small town by the CC Bible College in El Secreto.



"Colombia has survivors, not inhabitants. My vision is to give my people the eternal hope of Jesus to break this terrible cycle of violence." Pastor Hector Martinez, Calvary Chapel Villavicencio, Colombia

Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors just before take-off to the Bible college at El Secreto. (left to right kneeling) Lance Cook, La Habra, CA; Raul Ries, Golden Springs, CA; Randy Walls, Upland, CA; David Rosales, Chino Valley, CA; Pancho Juarez, Montebello, CA; Ray Jaramillo, Rio Grand Valley, NM; Lloyd Pulley, Old Bridge, NJ; (standing left to right) Bob Grenier, Visalia, CA; John Milhouse, Moreno Valley, CA; Gino Geraci, South Denver, CO; Jim Orate, Rancho Cucamonga, CA.





An anxious Ana Maria (right) is comforted by Hallie Martinez, wife of Pastor Hector Martinez, as the DC-3 leaves the jungle landing strip. The experience brought back painful memories of the death of her father who was a casualty of the continuing conflict that has devastated the South American country of Colombia.

Now, Ana Maria prayed to Jesus that He would deliver the pastors off this runway before the guerillas found them. As she prayed, a small plane began to circle overhead. Pastor Raul Ries, the group's leader, cautioned her. "This isn't our plane. I'm not sure who this is."

Before coming to El Secreto, the American pastors taught at the Pastors' Conference in Villavicencio. They modeled expositional teaching through Ephesians for the pastors who, in spite of all of the threats, are boldly telling their countrymen about Jesus Christ.



Pastors Pancho and Bob have their documents checked by security forces in Bogota.

The pastors had been in El Secreto, a Calvary Chapel Bible College, located 250 miles southwest of the capitol city of Bogota. The students' eagerness to learn the Word enabled them to cope with the primitive conditions. They listened intently as the pastors spoke, honored that their visitors had come despite the ever-present danger. Pastor Raul, overseeing pastor of this CC ministry, had journeyed here before, but last year's outreach to Colombia had been cancelled because of the dangers. This year, however, Pastor Raul realized that the Colombians needed to know that they had not been abandoned.

In their free time, a few Americans dared to venture into the nearby treacherous Upia River with students and the local pastors. Together, they hunted alligator and returned with a young one, his powerful jaws bound with rope.

The morning had been spent visiting the small village of Sabena Large near the Bible College. Ana Maria overheard the pastors agree to keep a low profile, so as not to attract undue attention. She quickly noticed that was impossible for most of them, especially the gregarious Pastor Raul. With great animation, he performed comical tricks while wearing a fake tooth. He seemed to be a magnet for every schoolchild as they raced across the plaza to see him. Once he had their attention, he talked to them about Jesus.

Ana Maria felt the fear rise in her throat again when she heard the local men comment on the pastors' visit. "The guerillas would love to get their hands on you,"

warned a villager. "I can guarantee someone is running to contact them right now, eager to reap the rewards they would receive."

The DC-3 cargo plane scheduled to pick them up was already two and a half hours late. The pilot, Lozano, had accepted Jesus as his Savior only months before. Two of the airplanes that he piloted were destroyed; one had been shot down, and the other mysteriously exploded on the ground.

Lozano listened to the chatter coming over his radio while waiting to take off. A massive firefight had erupted in the nearby towns of Mitu and Puerto Inirida early that morning. Government troops had attacked the guerillas the night be-



Gino Geraci (left), was one of four CC pastors who accepted the challenge to hunt alligators at night with only a flashlight. They were escorted by several students and teachers as they waded chest-deep into the river at El Secreto during their search. On the way back from the hunt, in the darkness, Gino slipped off a steep embankment. He was rescued by Bible college teacher Luis Mera (right), who holds the alligator that Pastor Gino pretends to kiss.



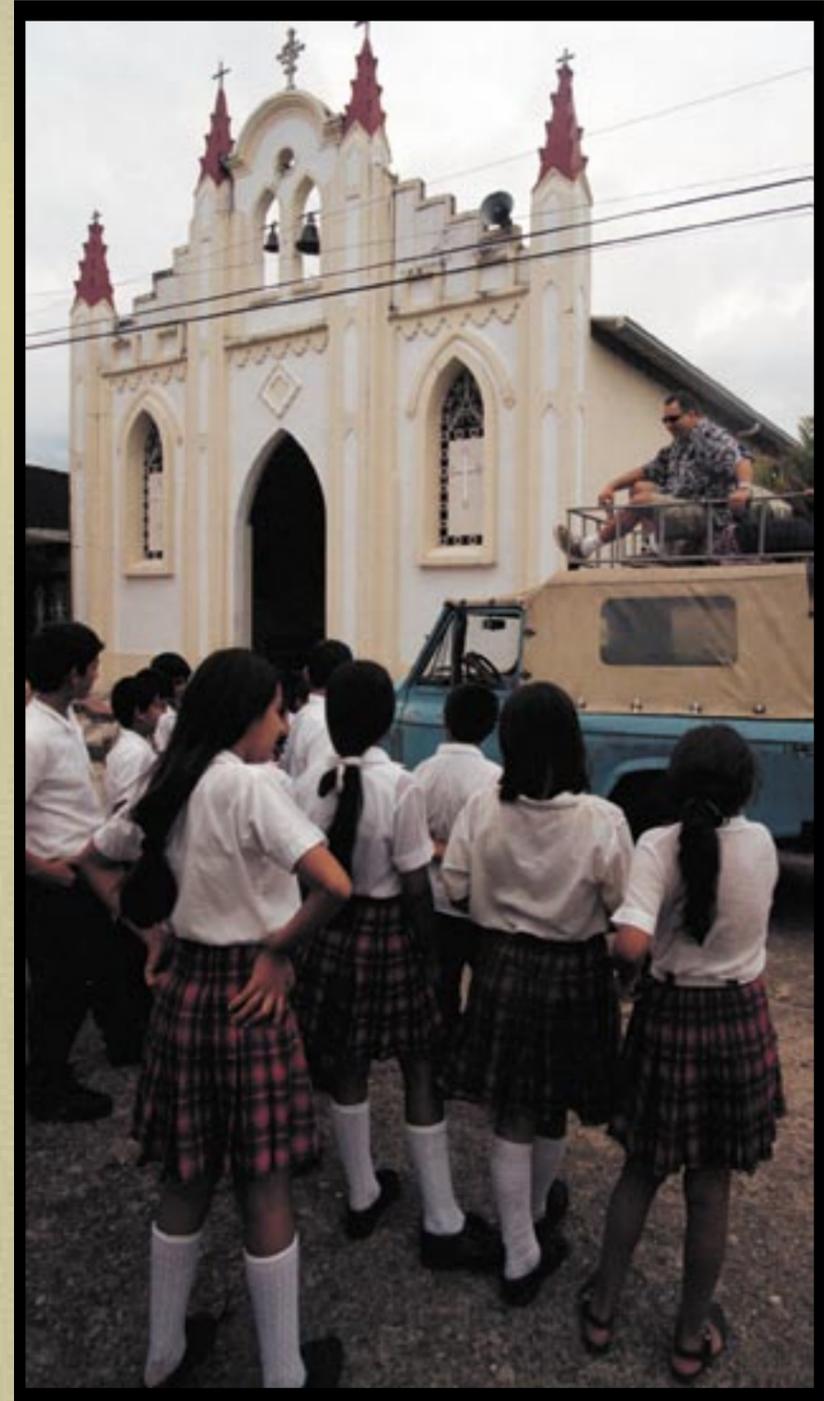
David Rosales (left), acknowledges the applause after falling for a practical joke by Pastor Bob Grenier (right) and Raul Ries.

fore. There were 37 casualties.

As he listened, he began to pick up a conversation between the pilot of a plane and someone on the ground. Lozano realized that the pilot he heard was actually flying over the landing strip close to El Secreto where the pastors waited.

The pilot of the small plane radioed his contacts on the ground. Accustomed to buzzing the landing strip to chase the cattle off, he was wary about all the people he saw there. He radioed, "Who are these people? Are they armed? What are they doing here?" If this were a typical transaction, the ground units would have probably communicated a time for the plane to pick up a shipment of drugs.

Pastor Raul Ries, who headed the expedition to Colombia, rides atop a truck on the way to the landing strip.





A Colombian cowboy, known as a vaquero, works with his horses in the village next to the Calvary Chapel Bible College in El Secreto.

The plane would land, the guerillas would load the drugs quickly, and cash would be exchanged.

The guerillas were apparently hidden in the nearby brush as a contact point for the pilot. They watched the people, dressed like North American tourists in shorts, flowered shirts, and tennis shoes. Two men seemed to be doing some sort of demonstration as others watched. Some laughed together as they tossed items toward a wall. One man chased cows around the field. Several carried

bags. The pilot advised to call for reinforcements.

After hearing this conversation, Lozano knew he had to take off, and quickly received clearance. In short order, he brought his DC-3 through the cloud cover. The airfield came into view.

Pastor Lloyd Pulley and Pastor Lance Cook entertained everyone with card tricks. Pastor Pancho Juarez and Pastor Jim Orate engaged their Colombian escorts in a friendly game of peso tossing. Pastor Gino Geraci amazed one and all with his

many impersonations. The other pastors: Dave Rosales, Bob Grenier, Ray Jaramillo, John Milhouse, Randy Walls, and Raul Ries watched in amusement.

Hector Martinez, head of all the Calvary Chapels in Colombia, watched nervously. He alone understood the dangers of this war-torn country, where situations could change in an instant. Though everyone had been briefed on the dangers of the journey, Hector felt personally responsible for their safety. He breathed a sigh of relief as Lozano's plane began its descent.

As soon as the tires touched the ground, Lozano leaned out the window and waved for everyone to run for the plane. Lozano began his takeoff as soon as everyone had thrown their luggage in and scrambled aboard. Seconds after clearing the trees, Lozano banked the plane hard to right and headed home, a vicious storm hovering on the horizon.

Pastor Hector finally relaxed as the plane cleared the mountains. His wife, Hallie, comforted a distraught Ana Maria by holding her hand.



The group traveled in the back of trucks in route to the landing strip.

Pastor Hector understands responsibilities. He oversees eight Calvary Chapels throughout Colombia, as well as seven Christian educational facilities.

"Many of my people are learning for the first time that they can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that they never thought possible before," said Pastor Hector. "Despite these threats on their safety, more people are coming to the Lord daily."

The Bible College in Villavicencio is thriving. A new class graduated during the Pastors' Conference in a moving ceremony led by Pastor Hector. As the electric lights flickered on and off, Hector told of his journey from atheist to born-again Christian.

"Only the Lord could have orchestrated this chain of events," Hector said. "I had



Raul examines property surrounding the Bible College at El Secreto (in background)



View from the Calvary Chapel Bible College at El Secreto

learned about Jesus from Raul Ries' in-laws years before." Years later, after Hector was a Calvary Chapel pastor, everyone realized that Hector's grandmother had worked with Raul Ries' in-laws.

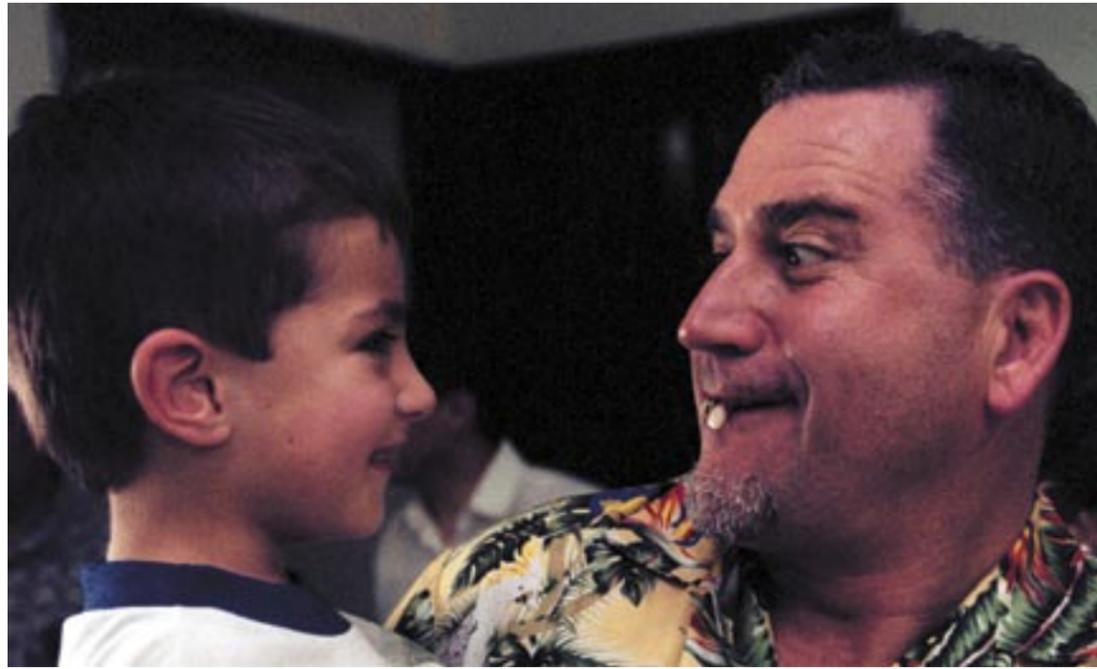
Raul Ries' wife, Sharon, had grown up in Colombia, one of two daughters of missionaries Ed and Naomi Farrel. Her parents had journeyed through Colombia by horseback over high mountains and through rivers in the early 1940's. They had been promised free land to build a school in Casanare, a remote part of Colombia. The land was known as El Secreto, or "The Secret Place."

They faced persecution from conservatives that resented American influence. The locals were encouraged to ignore them.

Ed had brought some rudimentary dentistry tools from America for emergencies. Someone noticed these and began spreading the rumor that Ed was a dentist. Though he claimed he was not a dentist, the people insisted that he pull their bad teeth. By trial and error Ed became proficient at this, pulling as many as ninety-seven teeth one Christmas morning.

Through Ed's newfound fame as a dentist, he and Naomi were able to spread the word about the school, which they had started in 1943. It grew to enroll 80 pupils between the ages of 7 and 18. American and Colombian teachers were able to use the school as a vehicle to share the love of Jesus Christ with the people of the region.

First-aid was also administered on a daily basis. Ed even had to amputate a man's arm that had been bitten by a poisonous snake. They gave him local anesthesia and held him down as they sawed off his arm, dead with gangrene. Grateful to be alive, the man came back for years to hear the Gospel. He brought huge stalks of bananas each time for both missionaries and children to enjoy. To this day, old-timers refer to the mission as "the hospital."



Pastor Raul Ries amuses the Colombian children with his fake tooth.



Children of all ages enjoyed Pastor Raul's antics.



Pastor Gino Geraci, with his usual dramatic flair, teaches in Ephesians as Pastor Hector Martinez interprets. The senior pastors modeled teaching verse by verse through the Bible for the Colombian pastors. Pastor Gino entertained everyone with his impersonations that transcend language barriers. While delayed at the Bogota airport for several hours, the Calvary Chapel pastor had the passengers laughing at his comical routine.

Organized religious persecution soon began in earnest. In 1949, the Farrels were forced to Bogota. Later in Villavencio, Ed was paraded through the town on his way to prison. The people respectfully lined the streets, however, and nodded their appreciation for his bravery. The Farrels were eventually forced out of the country. Many other missionaries lost their lives.

They soon began another ministry in Chile. Many Calvary Chapel outreaches there today are the result of the Christian foundations laid by this family back in the 1950's.

Their hearts, however, always remained in Colombia. Ed and Naomi were able to return in 1981 as Calvary Chapel missionaries, under Pastor Raul's ministry, and started an English class in Villavencio. Young Hector Martinez, a socialist and atheist, enrolled in their free class. No one made the connection that



I-r clockwise-Naomi Farrel with her two daughters, Shirley and Sharon. Students pose with the Farrels. Ed Farrel travels on horseback to El Secreto. Ed Farrel amputates a man's snake-bitten arm, dead with gangrene. Soldiers march into El Secreto. Ed poses with his amputee patient after recovery.

Hector's grandparents, decades earlier, had been the Farrels' administrators at the adjoining mountain ranch, where cattle were fattened to meet the growing needs of the school.

He immediately ran to Ed and Naomi's Bible study and gave his life to Christ.

Soon Hector had finished Bible School with Raul's ministry and gone through all

Hector Martinez had wanted no part of the Bible study that followed the free English class given by the missionaries. However, a female friend latched onto his arm, refusing to let him go. Not wanting to hurt her or cause a scene, he sat down and listened reluctantly.

Dreams of an eternity in hell began to haunt him. Long talks with Ed Farrel only made it worse. He was convicted.

Several days later Hector hit a stone in the road while riding his bicycle. A jeep, following too closely, ran over him. Miraculously, there was not a broken bone or even a scratch on him.



of Pastor Chuck Smith's tapes that Naomi had given him. Hector was willing to do any type of work at the Bible Institute. At the end of 1984, Raul called 22-year-old Hector unexpectedly and said, "Hector, the Lord told me that He has prepared you to do the work in Colombia... it's really neat!"

Raul then began to send work teams to Colombia from his church. His wife, Sharon, accompanied the teams to rebuild the broken down mission at El Secreto. Their purpose was to re-establish a Bible school there, fulfilling God's long-awaited promise to the Farrels, who had returned to America due to health problems.

"You intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20 NIV

Pastor Hector and Hallie now face times of unbelievable turmoil. With their country in such political chaos, the chance of reprisal against pastors is certain apart from God's protection.

"No one is safe anywhere...anyone can become the target of the military, mercenaries, or the guerrillas, depending on who accuses you," said Sharon Ries. "Life has no value...death is a way of life. Hector is seeing many come to Christ and is expecting a great spiritual revival."

Pastor Hector accompanied the team to minister to the Calvary Chapels in Chile.

Landing in Santiago, the group headed for Viña Del Mar, on the Pacific coast. Some of the pastors' wives met them there, making contacts with the different ministries while their husbands were in Colombia. Christianity has witnessed steady growth. Chileans are open to hearing the Gospel more than any other time in recent history.

Fourteen national Calvary Chapel pastors carry on the work started there by Ed and Naomi Farrel. Pastor Raul commented on how the Lord had used an apparent defeat, the Farrel's expulsion from Colombia, to spread the Gospel in Chile.



Pastor Pancho Juarez interacts with a native Colombian baby.



Pastor Hector Martinez (left) translates as Pastor Lloyd Pulley prays with a woman in Villavicencio.



Pastor Pancho Juarez demonstrates his ability to mimic the sound of a trumpet to children at a Calvary Chapel in Chile.

The group soon met Chilean Pastor Jose Carrasco, who oversees the 14 Calvary Chapels in Chile. He has been involved with Raul Ries' work since its beginning in 1982. He was sent by Raul to El Secreto to be the director of the Bible College. He eventually returned to Chile.

After modeling expositional teaching through Ephesians, an outreach was planned. The pastors had brought many of their congregations with them, and many had family or friends in this popular resort area. Everyone was encouraged to bring an unsaved friend.

Jorge Chavez, pastor of Calvary Chapel Iquique, brought his unsaved brother, Gonzalo to the outreach. Gonzalo could never bring himself to seriously consider the notions about God that his brother said were true. At first content with his disbelief, Gonzalo had grown increasingly bitter and unhappy. He felt led to accept his brother's invitation.

"I came today because I have witnessed a transforming power in my brother's life," said Gonzalo. "I see in him a person with incredible peace and confidence, while I am lonely and sour."

Pastor Raul Ries invited the entire assembly to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Much to his brother's surprise, Gonzalo nearly knocked Jorge over making his way to the altar. Afterwards, a beaming Gonzalo shared his joy with everyone around.

"I feel this incredible presence of Jesus Christ in my heart," said Gonzalo. "I am 39 years old and my only regret is that I spent so many years in misery without Him. Now I am going to be part of God's plan." Overcome with joy, Jorge embraced his brother.

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Pastor John Milhouse ministers to young people in Chile at Viña Del Mar.



Pastor Lance Cook (left) gives a "thumbs-up" and shakes the hand of Gonzalo Chavez after Gonzalo gave his life to Christ during the outreach in Chile. Gonzalo's brother, Jorge (behind Gonzalo), has been a Calvary Chapel pastor for several years and was jubilant over his brother's salvation.



A two-year-old Chilean girl, Silvana, is captivated by her reflection in the mirror of the conference hotel in Viña Del Mar. Her father, Romeo Sarrochi, is a Calvary Chapel pastor.