



William Rosenau

POOR PERU

Peru's Upper Huallaga Valley is the coca-growing capital of the world. It is also home to a uniquely violent Maoist insurgency. And those are the least of the country's problems.

The world's biggest coca-growing region begins about 250 kilometers northeast of Lima. It is staggeringly large. The Upper Huallaga Valley is about three times the size of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Before the late 1970s, nobody paid much attention to this hot, remote piece of jungle, including the Peruvian government, which didn't even build a road there until the 1950s. But today, the Upper Huallaga is the object of intense official interest, in Washington as well as Lima.

Coca growing per se doesn't bother Peruvians much—they're far more worried about food shortages, inflation, and terrorist violence. But it does concern the U.S. Congress and the White House, which have been arguing for the last few years that cocaine is a threat to the security of the United States. As a result, the Upper Huallaga Valley, or "UHV," as the State Department likes to call it, has become a "front line" in the drug war, and visits by U.S. congressional delegations, presidential rhetoric, and Yankee dollars have had the effect of concentrating Peruvian minds wonderfully on the issue.

But a visit to the Upper Huallaga—or anywhere else in Peru, for that matter—should be enough to disabuse most gringos of any sanguine notions they might have about the likelihood of eliminating coca from the valley. Recent conversations with Peruvian and American officials and journalists in Lima, as well as a trip to the U.S.-financed anti-drug base at Santa Lucia, convinced me that Peru has much bigger problems to solve than coca growing.

"Lima in the wintertime is a hell-hole," an American academic

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warns me before I leave Boston, a town not known for its balmy climate. Built along the most inhospitable part of the coast, the capital sits in a bizarre Andean microclimate—cloudy, misty, and cold every day from May to December. A miasma generated from thousands of exhaust-belching buses and cars adds to the gloom. Frequent blackouts and brownouts—usually the result of terrorist bombings of electricity pylons—give the city a sinister air; indeed, as a cab driver described it on the way in from the airport—which was blacked out shortly after I arrived—Lima had become an "eerie" place.

Making matters even worse is the terrible physical overcrowding and poverty that overwhelm the capital. About eight million people are jammed into Lima, and most of them are poor. Many live in the deceptively pleasant-sounding shantytowns ("La Flor," "Heroes del Pacifico") that ring the

city. Known in Spanish as *pueblos jóvenes* ("young towns"), these conglomerations are actually improvements over the miserable mountain villages from which many of their residents fled.

Even the "nice" parts of Lima seem remarkably seedy, and sometimes dangerous—the relatively well-heeled neighborhood of Miraflores, for example, is infested with pickpockets and other thieves. On top of all this, the city government recently discovered that Lima's aquifer is being drained at an alarming rate, and that the capital will run out of water by the end of the decade. In short, Lima can at times seem "a never-ending nightmare," as the trendy-left (but generally accurate) authors of *The Real Guide: Peru* put it.

Many Peruvians believe the nightmare will get worse. The economy is a disaster and, for the moment, it overshadows all of the country's other considerable woes. President Alberto Fujimori, in an effort to control the hyper-

inflation created by his Social Democrat predecessor, Alan Garcia, has eliminated many of the subsidies that benefited workers, businessmen, and middle-class civil servants, and he has allowed the market to set prices for most goods. Gasoline, for example, was so heavily subsidized under Garcia that Peruvians actually smuggled it out of the country for resale abroad. That subsidy has been ended, and the government has added a massive tax, bringing the cost to about four dollars a gallon—making it some of the most expensive gasoline in the world.

Between last January and August, inflation was 2,886 percent, according to *Cuanto*, a magazine I found highly entertaining, despite the fact it does nothing more than calculate prices—a difficult task, given that they change several times daily.

In the past five years, economists say, prices have grown by 2.2 million percent. The introduction last August of a new denomination of the *inti*, the national currency, is a perfect example of this Weimar-type hyperinflation. Early in the month, the government began issuing one-million *inti* notes for the first time; but even these proved inadequate, and a few weeks later it was forced to begin printing a five-million *inti* note. Despite these huge denominations, changing U.S. dollars for Peruvian currency is still a wallet-bulging experience: fifty U.S. dollars typically get you a wad of Peruvian notes nearly an inch thick.

Most Peruvians recognize the need for the government to control spending and inflation, but they're angry over the pace of the reform measures, dubbed "Fujimori shock" by the press. Fujimori's defeat of the staunchly pro-market novelist Mario Vargas Llosa in last summer's elections was due in part to his pledge to move slowly; instead, Peruvians were horrified to discover



basic food prices increasing from between 400 to 1,000 percent overnight. The minimum wage, roughly \$42 a month, was barely adequate before. Now, according to one American economist in Lima, "all it gets you is a round trip to work on the bus and one piece of bread a day."

For the past decade, Peru has also been confronting an insurgency whose ruthlessness, fanaticism, puritanism, and love of violence is unprecedented in this hemisphere. *Sendero Luminoso*, or "Shining Path," is an ultra-orthodox Maoist cult movement founded and led by Abimael Guzman, a shadowy former philosophy professor.

Dubbing himself the "Fourth Sword of Marxism"—the first three being Marx, Lenin, and Mao—Guzman has become to his followers a kind of deified "philosopher-warrior," the only true Communist leader in the world. Outside support for his movement he deems impossible, since "revisionists" and other traitors have come to power in Peking, Moscow, Havana, and Tirana.¹ His weird hubris is further evident in the nonce title he has chosen for himself: Presidente Gonzalo.

Violence is central to his "people's war." Despite his mild-mannered appearance—Sendero's kitschy propaganda posters depict him as a bespectacled, rather bland-looking individual—Guzman advocates violence as both a means to destroy Peruvian society and as a psychically purifying act for his cadres. "Violence is history's midwife. . . . Violence is a universal law with no exception," Guzman said five years ago.

Initially dismissed as hopeless crazies when they launched their campaign of terror in 1980, Sendero has become a major threat to peace and stability in Peru. Political violence has caused \$18 billion in damage to the economy, according to a Peruvian congressional estimate, and thousands of civilians and soldiers have died as a result of Sendero bombings, assassinations (dubbed "selective annihilation" in Guzmanspeak), and other forms of mayhem.

A favorite tactic is to chop off the head of a suspected "collaborator," usually a helpless peasant, and then sew it on backwards. In the hands of Sendero, dynamite becomes a particularly horrific tool: they have been known to fasten lighted TNT to a duck, and let it wander into a telephone switching exchange. Then there is the so-called *niñobomba*: dynamite

strapped to a child and exploded near the Sendero target.

Large portions of the country are unsafe; the departments that make up the central third of the country have been declared "Emergency Zones," and are under the control of a military commander. During a typical month this year, Sendero Luminoso carried out attacks in the department of Ayacucho (a longtime Sendero strong-

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hold), the town of Tingo Maria, Lima, and in Huancayo province. The terrorism has reached such proportions that *Caretas*, Peru's leading newsmagazine, has taken to publishing a column each issue listing the week's subversive acts, as well as counterinsurgency operations by the state security forces. (Journalists who go to Sendero country go well armed, and in groups. One reporter I meet proudly displays his arsenal to me: a ferocious-looking Uzi, a much-prized stainless-steel Colt .45, a box of grenades, and a short-barreled "riot gun," a weapon his young son, a toddler, delights in loading and pumping.)

The question of Sendero's military strength and popular support is debated constantly by politicians, the army, the police, and a group of journalists and academics specializing in the insurgency. Raul Gonzalez, a leading "senderologist," believes that Sendero's strength has peaked—and his articles to this effect have led to countless death threats from Sendero, forcing him to live a near-underground existence. Others say that the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA); a much smaller, more conventional Guevaraist insurgency, is the greater long-term threat.

But Gustavo Gorriti, a journalist and scholar who is writing a three-volume history of the movement, argues that Sendero is actually growing in strength. "They're winning the war, in fact," Gorriti tells me in his comfortable (but highly secure) house in Lima. "The number of attacks this year make it the most violent of the decade. In the Upper Huallaga, the army is reporting huge casualties on the Shining Path side. But the army is suffering more casualties too."

Until a few years ago, the U.S. government had little interest in the Pol Pot-like activities of Presidente

Gonzalo and his comrades. But then it was discovered that Sendero was increasingly linked with a problem that did concern the United States—coca growing and trafficking.

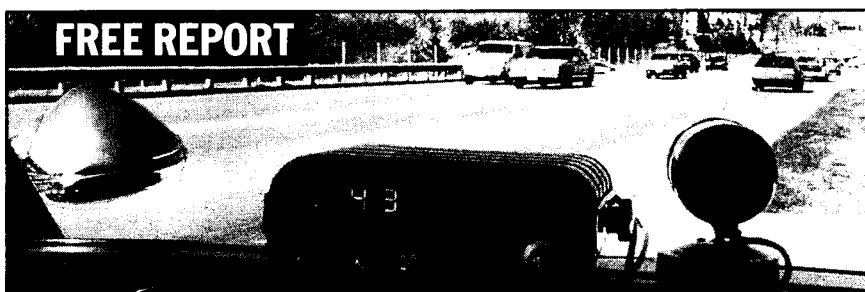
From the earliest days of its "people's war," Sendero had targeted the Upper Huallaga Valley. Isolated and relatively fertile, the valley became an ideal refuge during the mid-1980s, when the government's counterinsur-

gency campaign temporarily chased them out of Ayacucho and other departments.

At first, the dirt-poor peasants around the UHV town of Uchiza welcomed Shining Path. During the early years of the decade, Uchiza had become the coca capital of Peru, a lawless, wide-open town crowded with prostitutes, gangsters, barflies, and other riff-raff associated with the booming narcotics trade. But even though these peasants, and some 200,000 others in the valley, were growing coca for a living—having flocked there during the past ten years in search of a better life—they remained God-fearing *campesinos* at heart, and the lifestyles of the narcorable horrified them.

What is more, the traffickers who bought the coca leaves from the peasants frequently abused and cheated them. Sendero promised to end that, and the terrorists began operating as middlemen between the growers and the narcos, demanding ever-higher prices for the crop and shooting buyers who beat up on *campesinos*. For all its puritanism, Sendero has never opposed coca growing. In Sendero's view, cocaine is the product of decadent, imperialist nations such as the United States. As "Comandante Tomas" told the Sendero-controlled *El Diario* newspaper in 1988, "We aren't against coca, because that would mean being against the farmers. If we avoid consumption here in our country, the problem of coca is solved."

To the delight of the peasants, Sendero began cleaning up Uchiza and other drug towns, shooting homosexuals, banishing prostitutes, closing down nightclubs, and publicly flogging coca-paste smokers. Soon Sendero established total control of the coca business throughout the Upper Huallaga. As General Juan Zarate, the former head of the Drug Police Division explains to me, "Subversion and drug trafficking became inseparable." Sendero began to extract fees from traffickers who wanted to use the illegal jungle landing strips under Sendero control—as much as \$10,000 per flight, according to some estimates. (Although Sendero makes millions of dollars a year off the coca trade, few observers believe the organization has been corrupted by the "business"; any cadres suspected of be-



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¹However, Shining Path does have a small U.S. "support group," headquartered, of course, in Berkeley, California.

ing tainted are summarily executed.)

But by the end of the decade, the alliance between peasants and terrorists began to unravel. As long as they were left alone, the *campesinos* tolerated, and sometimes welcomed, Sendero's presence. Being ultra-orthodox Maoists, however, the cadres couldn't stomach an apolitical peasantry, and they began demanding the growers' attendance at indoctrination sessions. "It became like Tiananmen Square during the Cultural Revolution," says Gorriti. Sendero's zealotry was getting old, and when the army took over the valley following a massive Sendero attack on the Uchiza police garrison in April 1989, thousands of people came out to welcome the new military commander, General Alberto Arciniega.

Arciniega waged a devastating campaign against Sendero. Winning broad support in and around Uchiza by allowing the peasants to grow coca in peace was central to his victory. "We told the people, 'We are your army, you don't need Shining Path,'" Arciniega explains to me in his Lima office. "We told the peasants that we wouldn't fight against them. We understood that growing coca was the only thing they could do to make a living." The much-feared Peruvian drug police were prohibited from conducting crop-eradication operations in the valley. Arciniega began digging wells, bringing in electricity, and initiating other forms of goodwill-building "civic action"—a key component of any successful counterinsurgency plan.

His strategy worked, and the terrorists were driven from the Uchiza area. Thousands of residents once again jammed the town's plaza, this time to cheer the general for ridding them of Sendero. But the Peruvian police, and the U.S. State Department, which had spent millions of dollars since the early 1980s fighting coca in the Upper Huallaga, weren't so pleased with Arciniega.

Although some U.S. officials understood the dangers Sendero posed to Peru—and the role that the terrorists played in narcotics trafficking—others insisted that Arciniega's campaign was too easy on the growers and traffickers. "We strongly disagree with his approach," Assistant Secretary of State for Narcotics Affairs Melvin Levitsky said last fall. But according to Arciniega, "It's not true when the State Department says I don't want to fight against the narcotraffickers. I fought against them," he tells me.

Last December, after serving a little more than eight months, Arciniega stepped down as emergency-zone commander. U.S. officials deny that any pressure was placed on him—Arciniega

himself tells me that he left voluntarily—but many of his sympathizers believe that the United States had him sacked. His immediate successor didn't fare much better: he was dismissed after DEA agents photographed some of his men standing guard as narcos loaded coca paste aboard a plane.

To get to the Santa Lucia anti-drug base in the Upper Huallaga Valley, you first have to go to the police air force hanger on the fringes of the main

A favorite Sendero tactic is to chop off the head of a suspected "collaborator," usually a helpless peasant, and then sew it on backwards.

airport in Lima. There, a U.S.-supplied C-123 transport plane will ferry you to Tingo Maria, and then on to Santa Lucia—all in all, about an hour and a half of flying time. The plane was probably once a state-of-the-art craft; nowadays it seems quaint, with its oil-dripping turbo-prop engines and the oxygen masks you have to strap to your head in the unpressurized cabin.

After you've flown over the Andes, which lie between the valley and Lima, the jungle emerges below you—mile after mile of green, flat land, dotted here and there with small farmhouses. The sluggish, brownish-gray Huallaga River—utterly poisoned by kerosene, sulfuric acid, lime, and other chemicals used to refine coca—dominates the landscape. My traveling companion, whom I'll call Alberto, points out the coca patches: little plots of land with plants growing in perfectly straight lines. With my untrained eye, I count at least a dozen during the Tingo Maria-to-Santa Lucia leg of the trip. I see many more columns of smoke, the telltale sign of jungle being cleared to grow coca.

After clammy, cold Lima, Santa Lucia seems like a furnace. Carved out of the jungle in 1987, and refortified last year, the hundred-acre "forward base" is the headquarters for U.S.-backed anti-drug operations in Peru. Living here are about 400 "CORAH" coca eradication workers, a hundred Peruvian National Police, half a dozen or so long-haired U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) cops, and a handful of personnel from the State Department's Narcotics Assistance Unit (NAU), which pays for the place.

The base itself resembles a prison work camp: barracks surrounded by razor wire and guard towers. Alberto thoughtfully points out the minefields as we stroll around the camp, stopping here and there for snapshots (me with an Uzi, me standing in front of the

razor wire, gazing thoughtfully across the river separating the base from Sendero land beyond).

Vintage Huey helicopters, surrounded by protective concrete-filled bags, are scattered around Santa Lucia. The police use these to bring the relatively well-paid, but sometimes short-lived, CORAH workers out into the field to destroy any coca seedlings they happen to find. Well-armed paramilitary policemen accompany them; they're there to protect the machete-wielding eradicators from any irate growers or traffickers

they might meet in the countryside. They're also worried about Sendero, which has been known to shoot CORAH workers and nail them to stakes.

The futility of such "manual eradication," as the U.S. government calls it, has been apparent to Peruvian and American officials for years. The State Department has been trying to persuade Fujimori to allow the spraying of "Spike," a herbicide it believes will destroy much of the valley's coca without harming humans, livestock, or food crops. But although some testing was permitted under Alan Garcia, nobody believes that it will ever be sprayed on a large scale.

For one thing, Sendero as well as the large and highly vocal legal left will cry "Yankee Imperialism"; for another, Greenpeace has launched an anti-Spike campaign, and in this environmental-crazed age, it seems unlikely that the U.S. Congress will pay to defoliate the Peruvian jungle.² Most important, the government realizes that legal crops can never give peasants the income that coca does, and it doesn't want 200,000 angry ex-coca growers on its hands. "Do you think they'll return quietly to wherever it is they came from?" Alberto asks me. "Sendero Luminoso is nothing compared to what these people would be like up in arms."

After an hour or so, the base and the landscape around it start to seem a little forbidding. Despite all of the people at Santa Lucia, it's remarkably quiet. Last April, Sendero hit the base with small-arms fire. Nobody was hurt, but the police have built some

²Although they've mentioned it occasionally in their publications, Greenpeace is largely silent about the devastating effect of the coca trade on the Huallaga River—which is effectively dead, according to a study done by Buenaventura Marcelo of Peru's National Agrarian University.

fortified dugouts to protect the CORAH workers if another attack comes.³ I don't even want to think about what this place is like after dark, with squads of Senderistas prowling around beyond the wire, just waiting to chop off heads. "At night, you know they're watching you," Alberto intones. "They're the army of the night," he adds, only slightly melodramatically.

We decide to have a look from one of the watchtowers, and we snap some photos of a police unit trotting around the base, "calling out" numbers in true military hard-guy fashion. I have to get one last photo of them outside the barracks, I tell Alberto, and we stroll over to the building. A British-made armored personnel carrier, donated by Margaret Thatcher, is parked nearby, and I take a picture of it, and get Alberto to snap one of me in front of a little shrine to the Virgin Mary.

Then, as I'm reloading my camera, a Peruvian police colonel, who turns out to be the commander, strolls up to me and Alberto. His hair plastered to his head by sweat and his gold front teeth gleaming in the sun, the colonel spends the next ten minutes reaming out Alberto for taking pictures without his permission. He leaves me alone; I assume he thinks I'm just another idiotic gringo thrill-seeker taking pictures of their drug war, and I decide to keep my mouth shut.

Finally, we slink off. Alberto's Latin feathers have been ruffled by El Jefe's dressing down. "Let's get out of here, man," he says. I couldn't agree more. I want to have lunch first, though, and I persuade him to go to the mess hall. Peruvian policemen sit at one table, and the DEA agents and other gringos are scattered around the other two. As I'm eating my chicken, wondering whether I should've gotten that extra hepatitis shot before I left Boston, I notice El Jefe swaggering in. He gives us a look of utter contempt, and Alberto and I agree that it's probably best to skip dessert and head for the landing strip.

Three hours later, we're back in Lima drinking Cristal, an excellent Peruvian lager. Still, it's not a very festive occasion. Lima seems grimmer than ever, and Alberto is still fuming about El Jefe's attack on his manhood. Eventually, mellowed by the Cristal, he grows more philosophical. "You know, the police raise hell about taking pictures," Alberto says, "but they say nothing about me carrying my submachine gun up at Santa Lucia." □

³During the attack, the police didn't even bother to call the army—the two institutions hate each other intensely, and the army has made it clear that they won't risk their necks to save policemen.

Micah Morrison

A HOUSE OF GHOSTS

Even if Saddam Hussein fails to get his way, Kuwait as it existed before August 2 is lost forever. Widespread torture and executions have sent as much as two-thirds of its population fleeing abroad, and a disorganized resistance leaves Saddam some interesting options.

After a few days, she summoned up her courage and went to the Iraqi military post, Kuwait City's former Salymah Police Station, looking for her son. The rape stories frightened her. The rumors of people never returning from the building frightened her. But her son was missing, and the reports of children being taken to concentration camps in Iraq were torturing her, so she went to the station to inquire. The Iraqi soldiers there knew nothing of him. All inquiries should be forwarded to Baghdad, she was told. Almost as an afterthought, the soldier at the desk waved her on to a room at the end of the hall. She walked down the long hall and opened the door. None of the three boys were hers but they belonged to somebody, and now they were hanging from a beam, their testicles cut off.

Like many of the stories emerging from Kuwait these days, this one is difficult to corroborate, though it has a tragic ring of truth. Witnesses insist on anonymity to protect family and friends still in the country, but as the exiles spread out around the globe and fragmentary bulletins emerge from the resistance inside Kuwait, testimony of vast Iraqi human-rights abuses is emerging. In October, after interviewing scores of refugees in the region, Amnesty International charged that "a horrifying picture of widespread arrests, torture under interrogation, summary executions and mass extrajudicial killings" is now the reality in Province No. 19, formerly known as Kuwait. My interviews with Kuwaiti exiles, U.S. government officials, and Mideast analysts confirm Amnesty's charges.

The Iraqi dictator is a blood-soaked Big Brother. Both the Amnesty document and my interviews contain allegations that people have been arrested and even murdered for failing to re-

place photographs of the Emir of Kuwait with those of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqis are attempting to erase Kuwait's identity, carrying off public records and renaming streets, hospitals, police stations, schools, museums. Public buildings have been turned into detention centers. Possession of opposition literature or the Kuwaiti flag is treated as a capital offense. The Amnesty report notes, "Iraqi military and intelligence routinely torture detainees. Some have been given electric shocks or suffered prolonged beatings to sensitive parts of their bodies. Others have had limbs broken, their hair plucked out with pincers, their finger- and toenails pulled out, and were threatened with sexual assault or execution."

Executions seem widespread. Doctors who have fled Kuwait report Iraqi soldiers bringing in dozens of bodies of young men, many shot at close range in the head or heart. The doctors were forced to issue death certificates saying the boys had died after being admitted to the hospital. Mr. L., a Kuwaiti citizen with contacts in the resis-

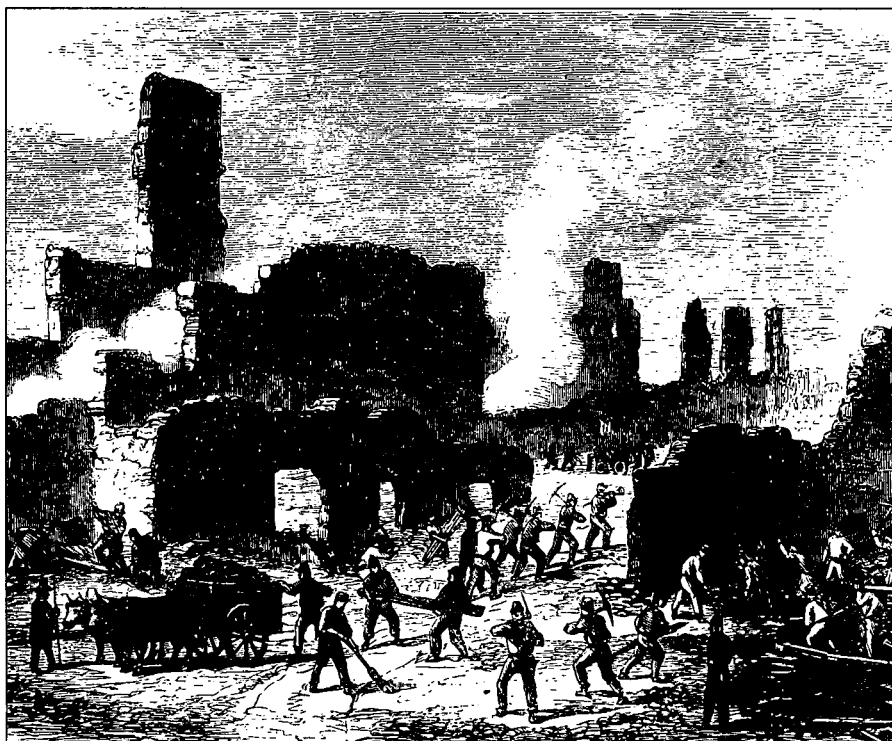
tance, told me of a teenage boy he knew well. The boy was seized by the Iraqi military and tortured, not breaking until both his ears were cut off. The boy then revealed the names of fifteen of his young allies, many of whom did no more than paint out street signs and tear down portraits of Saddam. Within a week, all fifteen had been captured and executed.

"They destroy everything, everything," said Mrs. Q., a Kuwaiti exile. "Saddam Hussein is stripping our country. He kills and kills. Children. Women. He has stolen medical equipment from our hospitals, even our street lights and school desks. Why are they doing this? Iraq is not a poor country. . . ." She pauses and her mind goes back to those she left behind in Kuwait. Her back straightens and her eyes glitter with pride and sorrow. "But still he destroys—the zoo, our Islamic Cultural Museum with its priceless artifacts, even our children's Entertainment Garden—like your Disneyland. It is all destroyed and taken away. They say that Ku-

wait now, it is a house of ghosts."

Some of the ghosts are fighting back. The Kuwaiti army buckled before the initial Iraqi surge across the border on August 2, but made a stand around Kuwait City. Fighting was fierce, though brief. According to Mr. L., as the city fell all military planes were ordered out of the country and the army was told to go underground. Some Mideast analysts and U.S. officials are skeptical about reports of widespread resistance, however. "The Kuwaitis were sort of a playboy army," a State Department analyst said. "They never had a reputation for toughness, like the Iraqis and the Syrians, or for professionalism, like the Israelis and Jordanians. Most of them probably headed for Saudi Arabia and are attempting to regroup there." Unconfirmed reports of U.S. Special Forces teams working with Kuwaitis in Saudi Arabia support this line of thinking, as does the lack of much direct evidence of resistance activities—photographs, videotapes, eyewitness reports—beyond the first few weeks of the occupation.

Still, a few facts may be pieced together. The size of the resistance is not known and probably exaggerated by the Cairo-based Kuwaiti media—the source of much Western information—in the interest of keeping up morale. Yet what resistance there is in Kuwait has exhibited a jaunty *savoir-faire* in the face of brutal suppression. They are said to communicate over cellular telephones. In one story making the rounds, the resistance bought a tank from an Iraqi deserter for about \$500. Unable to drive the thing off and hide it, they blew it up. Largely made up of scattered bands of teenagers, and led by a few individuals with military training, the resistance initially drove around running over lone Iraqi soldiers and removing street signs to confuse the occupying army. Firebomb and sniper attacks also have been reported. The at-



Micah Morrison, TAS's roving correspondent, will report next month from Saudi Arabia.