



# the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

It took a while for the shock and outrage of Leo Ryan's murder to sink in. The first reports were vague enough to leave room for hope. Then the hope faded. The hard reality set in. Our elected representative had been martyred while on a mission for his constituents.

Leo Ryan, the man, is dead at 53. That is sad. He was murdered. That is terrible. But he was murdered while working for his constituents, being of service, and for that reason his murder is both despicable and outrageous.

A congressman acting officially carries a bit of each of us with him. When he is abused, we, each of us, is also abused. When he is attacked, we are attacked. So every Pacifican, every resident of the 11th Congressional district, and every American died a little bit when those bullets in Guyana snuffed out the life of this congressman of ours, a man full of life and plans at 53.

I HAD NOTED a while ago that the retirement of Alan Cranston in 1980 might give Leo Ryan a chance to go for the Senate. Politics being what it is, I might have voted against the congressman if he had made that run. But political opposition is much like a footrace. What joy is there in winning a race against no opposition? Politics is testing, always testing. Principles are discussed, tested, reviewed, over and over again.

What do the people want? What should the people receive? What are the needs of the nation, the state, the 11th congressional district?

A GOOD CONGRESSMAN is an ombudsman, a fearless and powerful helper to the poor or to those abused by injustice whether that injustice is from public or private sources.

That is what Leo Ryan was doing when the bullet struck, and it will make his memory unique in U.S. history. In "Profiles in Courage," John Kennedy wrote of Americans in public life who stood on principle even though it destroyed them, did them a great damage.

Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy himself were victims of political hatreds.

SOME CONGRESSMEN have died as a result of differences of opinion with colleagues. But Leo Ryan is, to the best of my knowledge, the first congressman in 200 years to die while rescuing Americans held against their will.

This congressman of ours was a hero. Let's not forget the former schoolteacher from South San Francisco who died in an alien jungle pursuing justice.

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