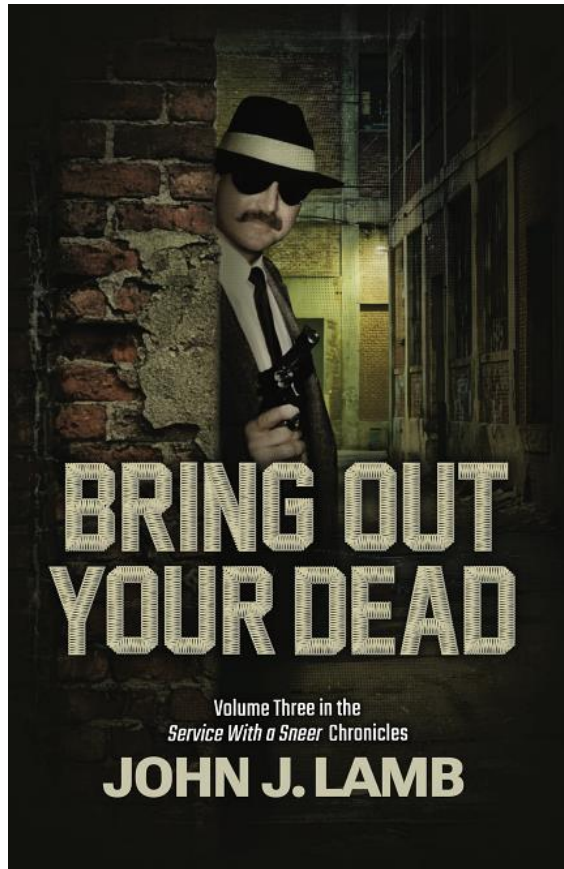




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Volume Three In The Service With A Sneer Chronicles
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BRING OUT YOUR DEAD

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Service With a Sneer Chronicles

JOHN J. LAMB

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STARTING OVER

I began my five-year tenure as a detective on Monday, June 26, 1984. That morning, I dressed carefully in a brand new ensemble of slacks, dress shirt with tie and sport jacket. With almost five years working in uniform, the professional clothing felt strange – as if I’d gotten dressed up for an elementary school class picture.

As the newest investigator in the detective bureau, I was a rookie again. Three days earlier, I’d been one of the senior guys on my patrol shift and had earned my place in the back row of the briefing room where all the wisecracking veteran cops sat. Now I was once more an F.N.G. – a Fucking New Guy.

On the drive to the police station, I stopped at Tan’s Donut Shop on Mission Avenue to pick up a two-dozen assortment of gut bombs. It was a long-held tradition at Oceanside P.D. – and I suspect most American law enforcement agencies – that you arrived at your new job with edible offerings of propitiation. I’d also been warned not to be a cheapskate. Under no circumstances was I to bring horrible, supermarket-brand, bone dry powdered sugar doughnuts.

Since I was morbidly fearful of being late, I got there too early. In fact, the detective bureau was still empty when I arrived. I set the boxes of doughnuts down on what appeared to be an unused desk. It then occurred to me there was a good chance that the desk was going to be my new workspace.

The detectives began to straggle in. I knew most of them by sight only and understood that I was little better than a stranger as far as they were concerned. The first to welcome me was detective Robert Pratt. As I’d soon learn, the bluff and silver-haired investigator was a retired

Marine gunnery sergeant who'd served in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam.

Detective Sergeant Terry Stevens next entered the room. He supervised the Property Crime Section and was my new boss. With his thin moustache and receding hairline, Stevens vaguely resembled the old film actor Clifton Webb. Stevens shook my hand and said he hoped I was ready to get to work. He added that the daily detective briefing was about to begin, and that I should have a seat at the vacant desk, which – as I'd correctly deduced – was now mine.

The detectives assembled in a rough arc, some of them dragging chairs over from their desks. Everyone present was male, with the exception of two women counselors assigned to the Juvenile Section. I was happy to note that the doughnuts were disappearing faster than good behavior at an office Christmas party.

A moment later, Lieutenant Clifford Rodney Stagg* strolled from his office and took a seat on an empty chair facing the detectives. Stagg was the commander of the General Investigations Bureau. Although I'd exclusively worked patrol since I'd arrived at OPD, I was aware of his reputation as an empty-headed and arrogant clotheshorse. Why he'd been assigned to be the boss of Investigations was a common topic of speculation because – as I was to discover – he was utterly unqualified for the position. Stagg had never served so much as a day as a detective and was reputed to have been a cowardly and useless patrol officer.

Briefing got underway. Stagg introduced me to the group with a tepid “welcome aboard” and then made a swift transition to reading aloud the watch commander logs from the weekend. He wrapped up the session by asking if anyone had anything they wanted to share with the group. Nobody did, so we were dismissed and told to get to work.

Stevens called me into his office, where he gave me a brief overview of how my first week would proceed. I was expected to hit the ground running. My caseload would begin that very day, and I'd cut my teeth on mostly lightweight – and likely unsolvable – misdemeanor crimes. Before long, I'd be assigned felony cases for investigation.

Stevens concluded my onboarding session by handing me a pager and a set of vehicle keys. He apologized in advance for the car I'd been allotted. He needn't have. I understood that, as the F.N.G., I'd be assigned the worst car in the fleet.

My “new” take-home car was a late 1970s four-door Plymouth Volare that would have been recognizable as a decommissioned patrol vehicle from low Earth orbit. When I drove it, I discovered the car had over 100,000 miles on the odometer, stank of cigarette smoke, and the suspension squeaked like a vintage brass bed in a hotel's honeymoon suite. I didn't complain, however. It was a take-home detective car.

I returned to the office. All the other detectives were already at work, either on the phone or discussing cases amongst themselves. This was in an era before the ubiquitous office partitions made workspaces look and feel like cattle stalls.

The old-fashioned, open-bay concept was a boon to the free flow of communication. You could shout across the room to ask a fellow detective a question and discover that other seemingly uninvolved investigators also had information germane to the case. Sometimes there were several of us looking for the same miscreant.

My desk and office equipment would impress the modern-day police detective as something from the Bronze Age. Desktop computers with word processing programs were still years in the

future. I produced my reports on an old Smith Corona electric typewriter that hummed like an angry hornet's nest.

Unlike the newer IBM Selectric machines assigned to senior detectives, my typewriter lacked the correction ribbon feature. That meant using copious amounts of liquid Wite-Out to paint over my frequent errors. Yet, just as with my detective car, I didn't complain. In fact, I was thrilled to even have a typewriter.

Sergeant Stevens emerged from his office and dropped six crime reports on my desk, all assigned to me. By the end of the week, I was responsible for right around thirty cases. They were an assortment of property crime offenses – burglaries, petty and grand thefts, vandalisms and car clouts – two-thirds of them misdemeanors.

As an aside, imagine a large police department assigning “minor” reports for investigation in this current day and age. They usually don't and – call me a dinosaur – I consider this a disservice to the citizens we're supposed to be serving. Even if the case is completely unworkable, a crime victim is entitled to at least a telephone call from a detective to determine if they have any new information. Police administrators lose sight of the fact that a crime isn't “minor” as far as the victim is concerned.

But I digress...

That afternoon, one of my new co-workers took me to the North County branch of the San Diego County District Attorney's office in the adjoining City of Vista. I was no stranger to the courthouse/D.A.'s office/county jail complex, but that was in connection with my work as a patrol cop. As a detective, I had new duties and responsibilities, among them learning the protocols for filing criminal cases with the issuing D.A.

The rest of that first week was busy but uneventful. I interviewed crime victims, mostly via telephone, and typed supplemental reports. In addition, I became further acquainted with my new co-workers. They turned out to be an interesting cast of characters.

The Property Crime unit consisted of Tom “Nice Guy Tommy” Lundgren, Jim “Frazier” Wood and Richard “Pharaoh” Derouen. They specialized in burglary, theft and arson cases. Edward “Squire” Selby and Rick “Lizard” Anthony primarily worked auto theft investigations. The aforementioned Robert “Bubba” Pratt investigated fraud and financial crime and was prone to sudden and brief explosions of noisy anger when forced to endure idiotic citizens and brain-dead police managers.

The Crimes of Violence (C.O.V.) squad was located in a separate cramped room that adjoined the Property Crime unit workspace. The boss was Sergeant Ron Call, and the unit was composed of seasoned homicide investigators Everett “Ed” Jacobs, Robert “R.L.” George and Robert “Bobby” Burke.

Finally, there was the Juvenile Bureau, which was situated in a separate office just down the corridor. They investigated child abuse offenses and crimes involving juvenile suspects. The supervisor was Chuck “The Samurai Sergeant” Potter, with his nickname alluding to the fact that he was a judo expert and, although a *gaijin*, spoke the Japanese language fluently. His team included detectives Ian “Igor” Johnston and Richard “Woody” Woodall, along with civilian counselors Glenda Kimbrel and Andrea Mommsen*.

And so, I began my tenure as an investigator. It wouldn’t be long before I’d be required to demonstrate to my bosses and co-workers whether I was a detective or a defective.

DEAD END

Tijuana residents Silviano Carranza Ramirez and Jose Espinal were coyotes, the self-proclaimed label for professional smugglers who transported illegal aliens into the United States from Mexico. On the night of June 30, 1984, they drove northward from the San Diego border community of San Ysidro with two *pollos* in the backseat of the car. *Pollos* (i.e., chickens) was what the smugglers called their customers. The pair of illegal aliens had paid \$50 each to be transported to the City of Oceanside.

Espinal drove, while Carranza, the alpha dog of the criminal enterprise, rode shotgun. Early on in the journey, Carranza brandished a .45 caliber semiautomatic pistol and gruffly announced to the *pollos* that he was upping the price of the taxi ride. They'd each need to cough up another fifty bucks in order to get out of the car. Frightened, the men in the back seat said that they didn't currently have the money but were certain they could get it from friends in Oceanside.

On a whim, the coyotes decided to maximize their profit margin for their night's labor and made a detour before getting to Oceanside. The smugglers drove into the agricultural fields that once existed in the City of Carlsbad, intent on robbing the illegal alien farm workers who lived there. This turned out to be a mistake. All the potential victims fled, and someone called the Carlsbad cops to report the attempted robberies. That person also provided the police with the Baja California license plate of the smugglers' car.

Angry that his robbery plans were foiled, Carranza warned the *pollos* that there would be *muy mal* trouble if they didn't come up with the extra \$100 dollars. Espinal drove north into Oceanside and got off

the freeway at the Mission Avenue off-ramp. Guided by the *pollos*, they headed into the Eastside Barrio and made a turn onto Puls Street.

The road was a dead end. Espinal pulled over to the curb but kept the engine running. There was a brief discussion about how the *pollos* were going to retrieve the extra money, and Carranza demonstrated he was the brains of the criminal operation in name only. He allowed the pair of illegal aliens to leave the car after they solemnly promised they would quickly return with the cash. The *pollos* headed for a house on the south side of the street and instantly vanished into the darkness.

Several minutes passed. When the men didn't return, Carranza became angry over being duped. Espinal suggested they leave, but his partner elected to double-down on stupid. Carranza got out of the car, pistol in hand, and announced he was going to find the *pollos* and get their money.

It was my weekend after having served five whole days as a detective.

A little before 1:00 a.m., on Sunday, July 1, 1984, I was awakened by both the telephone ringing and my beeping pager. I answered the telephone while fumbling to silence the pager. The caller was an OPD dispatcher. She told me that there had just been a 187 on the 1400 block of Puls Street, and that I was to immediately respond to that location. There, I would meet with another detective, and we would investigate the murder together.

I grabbed the notepad I kept in the nightstand and jotted down the time I'd received the call. Then, I quickly got dressed, grabbed my gun and was loading tobacco into my pipe as I left the house. Once behind

the wheel of my detective car, I radioed Station O that Ida-14 (my callsign) was en route to Puls Street.

Smoking my pipe as I drove, I speculated on what sort of murder scene I'd find. Puls Street was in the Eastside or Posole Barrio, which might mean the rival Center Street Locos street gang had done a drive-by shooting. Next, I recalled that the 1400 block of Puls was a dead end that abutted against the west edge of Balderrama Park. The park was a hotbed for dope sales, so another scenario was that rival drug dealers had permanently eliminated a competitor.

It took me 15 minutes to get to Puls Street, which was only about 6 blocks from the police station. The roadway was packed with black-and-whites, so I had to park around the corner on a cross street. I hoped the obvious unmarked police vehicle would still be there when it came time to leave, although an auto thief would have to be pretty desperate to steal my sad old beater car.

Once inside the crime scene perimeter, I was greeted by veteran Detective Jim Wood. He'd transferred from the vice and narcotics unit to the general investigations bureau a few weeks before I made detective. He delivered some shocking news.

With a mere week under my belt as a detective, I was being assigned as the primary investigator of the homicide. Wood and I would work on the case together, but I was responsible for the outcome of the investigation and completing all the associated reports. Talk about being thrown into the deep end of the pool. Yet, I was irrationally certain that I was up to the task.

Wood led me to a small house with a four-foot-tall chain-link fence separating the front yard from the sidewalk. The gate was open, and a cement walkway led to the front porch. A dead Hispanic man lay sprawled on the pavement. He looked to be in his mid-twenties and

had visible gunshot wounds to the left shoulder, right thigh, and both arms.

A large semiautomatic pistol was on the grass a few inches from the man's right hand. It looked like a Colt Model 1911 .45, and I noticed the hammer was at full cock. The slightest touch of the trigger might cause the weapon to fire.

I put on a pair of surgical gloves, and after ascertaining that photographs had been taken of the firearm in situ, I picked up the pistol. Gently lowering the gun's hammer, I engaged the pistol's thumb safety and then removed the magazine. Next, I pulled the slide back and caught a .45 caliber cartridge as it popped from the breach. Whatever had happened here, the condition of the pistol told me the dead guy had been ready to bust some caps.

Handing the pistol to the CSI so that it could be packaged, I next studied the corpse's face. I didn't recognize him and asked if any of the uniformed cops knew who the guy was. Nobody did. The dead man might have a wallet with an identification card someplace in his clothing, but we couldn't touch the corpse until a deputy coroner arrived to take control of the body.

Patrol officers told us what they knew. At about 12:30 a.m., Joseph Soto called the police department to report that he'd been forced to shoot a man who'd entered his yard and attacked him. The cops arrived and found Joe serenely seated in a lawn chair on his porch, finishing a can of beer while a man lay dead on the pavement a few yards away.

Soto told them that he'd been relaxing on his porch when two guys ran past his house. He didn't think anything of it. It was the Eastside and it wasn't uncommon to see people sprinting as if being pursued by the devil, usually from the cops or rival gangsters. A couple of minutes later, the soon-to-be dead man entered his yard and began shouting

angrily at him in Spanish while threatening him with the handgun. The guy was a complete stranger, so Soto told him to get the hell off the property.

Then the intruder pointed the gun at Soto, who, in fear for his life, leaned inside his house to grab his AR-15 rifle, which happened to be just inside the doorway. (This was not an uncommon way for Eastside residents to maintain their firearms in an era when drive-by shootings were common.) Believing he was about to be killed, Soto fired his rifle at the gunman and kept shooting because the guy wouldn't go down.

As the story unfolded, I continued to examine the scene and surrounding area. I noticed there was an old station wagon parked across the street and it looked as if the driver's-side rear passenger window had been shot out. That made me wonder just how many rounds Soto had fired.

Wood's voice pulled me from my wool gathering. "And here's something you're going to find interesting. Joe is the brother of Phil Soto."

"Well, shit, that may complicate things just a bit," I said.

A little over three months earlier, Phil Soto's dead body was discovered next to the trash dumpsters at an apartment complex on Greenbrier Street. He'd been the victim of an execution-style homicide, and it was rumored he'd been murdered for skimming drug dealing profits. I'd played a peripheral role in the investigation (as detailed in "Beach Blanket Bedlam") and was aware that a man had been arrested for the killing and was currently awaiting trial. Still, I was concerned that the two homicides might be connected.

Wood went on to tell me that Joe Soto and the rifle had already been transported to the police station. Since there was no ETA on the arrival of the deputy coroner, he suggested we leave the CSI to continue processing the scene while we went to interview Soto. That sounded sensible to me. I asked the CSI to radio us when the coroner arrived, and then I rode with Wood to the station.

Back in 1984, OPD didn't yet have video cameras installed in the interview rooms. That meant an audio cassette tape recorder was the only way to memorialize our conversation with Soto. I grabbed a recorder, a couple of unused cassette tapes and a blank Miranda Waiver form before entering the room. Even if the circumstances seemed to show that Soto had acted in self-defense, I was nonetheless going to Mirandize him before asking any questions.

Because it was my case, Jim Wood remained mostly quiet while I conducted the interrogation.

Soto said he understood his rights, signed the form and agreed to talk. His account was essentially the same as what he told the patrol cops. He'd been minding his business, and enjoying a beer, when the angry stranger had entered his yard. The man began waving the gun around and threatened to kill Soto unless he revealed the location of the *pollos*.

When I asked if he thought the incident was in any way related to the murder of his brother, Soto instantly rejected the idea. He explained that he'd had no connection with his brother's activities and didn't expect to be called as a witness in the upcoming murder trial, so he couldn't imagine why anyone would want to kill him. Instead, Soto was certain the gunman was chasing the two guys that had run past his house.

We next broached the subject of self-defense. Soto was adamant that he believed his life was in immediate danger. I then asked if it was possible for him to have retreated into the house and called the cops. Soto squelched that notion. The man was pointing a pistol at him and was standing so close to the porch steps that flight wasn't an option. However, Soto's rifle was at hand, right inside the door. He told us bluntly that he had no other choice but to shoot in order to save his own life.

By the end of the interview, Jim Wood and I had concluded that we weren't going to arrest Joe Soto that night. His story of self-defense matched the evidence at the scene, which sure made it look like a justifiable homicide. Not that the final decision would be mine. That judgement would come after the chief prosecutor at the North County Vista District Attorney's Office reviewed my report. I'll admit I was feeling pretty smug at how competently I was handling my very first homicide investigation.

That feeling vanished a nanosecond later when Soto said contemplatively, "The only thing I was really worried about was that guy and girl in the station wagon. They were in the back seat – you know – fucking. That's what they use the car for. I'm pretty certain I hit the car a couple of times. Are they okay?"

Wood and I exchanged stunned and increasingly apprehensive stares. Then the following brief telepathic conversation occurred:

Wood: *Holy shit! Did you check the inside of the station wagon?*

Me: *No! I thought you did!*

We jumped to our feet, and told Joe that we'd be back in a couple of minutes. Locking the interview room door behind us, we bolted for

the parking lot. A half-minute later, Wood was speeding back to Puls Street.

You might wonder why we just didn't radio ahead to ask the cops on the scene to check the station wagon. The answer was simple. Even if the car was empty, an announcement over the radio that we might have overlooked the presence of two gunshot wound victims would have made us look like careless idiots.

In fairness, I fit that description. It was my crime scene, and I had no business leaving to interview Soto before conducting a thorough search of the immediate area.

Back on Puls Street, Wood and I did our best to look casual as we walked over to the station wagon. The vehicle was empty, and there were no signs of blood having been spilled within. It was clear the young lovers had run away once the bullets stopped zipping through the car.

Heaving huge sighs of relief, Wood and I exchanged nervous chuckles. At the same time, I knew that we'd been luckier than we deserved. I silently promised myself I'd never again approach a homicide scene in so cavalier a manner.

Anticipating the arrival of the deputy coroner, I elected to remain on Puls Street while Wood returned to the police station to release Soto. The cops at the scene told me that they'd conducted a witness canvass and come up with a generic description of the vehicle seen fleeing the area after the shooting. One witness had even gotten part of the car's license plate, and it appeared very similar to the BOL that Carlsbad P.D. had issued for the suspect vehicle from the attempted farmworker robberies.

The coroner arrived and, after taking a couple of Polaroid photographs, we turned the corpse onto his side so that the coroner could retrieve the man's wallet. The billfold contained both US and Mexican currency and a Baja California driver's license tentatively identifying the corpse as Silviano Carranza Ramirez. As the meat wagon attendants shoved Carranza into a body bag, the coroner told me the autopsy probably wouldn't be until Monday. His office would call the P.D. when a specific time was scheduled.

We conducted a final careful walk-through of the crime scene and were satisfied we'd located and collected all the evidence. It was around 5:30 a.m., and the eastern sky was showing signs of dawn. Jim Wood arrived with Soto, who was allowed to return to his residence. Wood told me that he'd updated Ron Call on the investigation, and that the COV sergeant had approved the decision not to arrest Soto.

That meant I could go home and get a little sleep. My plan was to return to the office later that Sunday afternoon, so I could get a head start on the paperwork. It was a little after 6:30 a.m. when I crawled into bed.

Less than 90 minutes later, my home phone rang. It was a day watch patrol sergeant with news. The coroner's office had just called the P.D. to advise that Carranza's autopsy had just been rescheduled. Instead of Monday, Carranza's corpse had been bumped to near the top of the list and would go under the knife that day, at 11:00 a.m.

Since I was the case agent, it was my responsibility to attend the autopsy. I asked the patrol sergeant if I could borrow a CSI to accompany me to the coroner's office to take photographs. He told me none were available.

I could have telephoned Sergeant Call to snivel that I'd been up all night, and that someone else needed to go to the postmortem in my

place. But OPD cops didn't behave that way in the mid-1980s. So, I rolled out of bed, got dressed and drove into the police station to collect a camera kit. Then, I got on the freeway and headed south.

The medical examiner's facility was and still is located in the Kearny Mesa neighborhood of San Diego, north of downtown. Inside the building, I was struck by the chilly temperature, and how much the place smelled like the butcher department at the supermarket where I'd worked as a teenager. Carranza's naked body lay upon a stainless-steel table. The deputy coroner pointed to some paper bags on a nearby counter and told me they contained the dead man's clothing, shoes, and a few personal effects.

It was my first autopsy. I was worried that I might become queasy as the coroner took the corpse apart. Surprisingly, I found the procedure fascinating. I learned some important things that would serve me well over the next five years. One of the most important was that, unless you were willing to risk being sprayed with minced flesh and pulverized bone, it was always best to briefly leave the examination room when the rotary-blade power saw was used to cut a corpse's skull open. However, I immediately returned to watch the coroner remove Carranza's brain and weigh it.

The autopsy confirmed that Carranza had been shot four times, and I took photographs of all the gunshot wounds. Afterward, I collected the bullet fragments the coroner had removed from the man's body. We finished up a little after 1:00 p.m., and I drove back to OPD. There, I logged the clothing and other items into evidence and dropped off the exposed film in the department's photo lab to be processed.

I returned home, and after a quick meal, went to bed, praying that there wouldn't be another callout. There wasn't, and the following morning I arrived at the office prepared to spend the day typing

supplemental investigative reports. I soon discovered that Sergeant Call had other plans.

Call told me that while I was down at the autopsy, he'd assigned another detective to follow up on the suspect vehicle information obtained from Carlsbad P.D. That investigator was Special Enforcement Bureau Gang Detective Edward Morton. It was the first time I'd be working a case with a cop, who was known throughout the department as "Crazy Eddie." He'd earned the moniker due to his intense and almost manic approach to street enforcement, which caused outraged gangbangers to complain, "That dude, Morton? He's a crazy motherfucker."

With his whitish-blond hair, military-style moustache and circular wire-framed eyeglasses, Morton reminded me of a short, albino Teddy Roosevelt...if you could overlook the gang detective's day-to-day apparel. Morton was an aficionado of retina-searing Hawaiian Aloha shirts so bright they were best viewed through an arc welder's mask. Despite being whiter than granulated sugar, Morton spoke fluent Spanish, and I'd heard he had contacts with the Mexican cops in Tijuana.

Morton burst into the office a couple of minutes later and asked if I was ready to go. This was news, since nobody had mentioned anything about going anywhere. Morton said that we needed to get to San Ysidro as soon as possible and that he'd explain everything on the drive down.

We took Morton's car and, ten minutes later, we were careening down Interstate 5, well in excess of the posted double-nickel speed limit. San Ysidro – colloquially known to cops as San Ya-skid-row – was the location of the main border crossing into Mexico, and it ordinarily was an hour's drive away. Morton thought we could make

in about 40 minutes, barring being stopped by the C.H.P. He thankfully kept his eyes on the road while bringing me up to date.

The previous afternoon, Morton had telephoned an investigator at the Baja California State Judicial Police to report the death of Carranza and to request he run the Mexican license plate of the smuggler's car. The vehicle came back registered to a Jose Espinal of Tijuana. Morton then asked the Mexican detective to contact Espinal at his home and request he telephone the Oceanside cops as soon as possible.

Morton confessed to being shocked when Espinal actually called. Even more surprising, Morton convinced the smuggler to reenter the United States so that we could interview him about the Carranza's death. He accomplished this near miracle by falsely promising Espinal that we only wanted to talk and wouldn't arrest him.

"Are you that good a liar, or is he really that stupid?" I asked.

"A little of both," Morton said with a nasty chuckle.

(Yes, Virginia, the police lie to bad guys. It isn't illegal.)

"If he shows, how are we going to recognize him?"

"He'll know us. I told him to look for a gringo in a *muy feo* Hawaiian shirt."

"*Feo*? Bright?"

"Ugly."

Once we arrived in San Ysidro, Morton parked the car, and we jogged to the cross-border pedestrian walkway. We anxiously scanned the river of people entering the U.S., most of whom kept their eyes aimed at the pavement since we were obviously cops. At last, a man

emerged from the passageway who didn't ignore us. He walked up to us and identified himself as Espinal.

We returned to the car. I turned on the battery-operated audio cassette recorder, and Morton interviewed the guy. Espinal admitted he was an alien smuggler and confessed to being the wheelman in the attempted armed robberies of both the *pollos* and field workers in Carlsbad. He claimed that he hadn't seen the shooting but had heard Carranza loudly threaten to kill the *pocho Americano* (i.e., fat-assed American) just before the gunfire erupted.

At the conclusion of the interview, we pulled Espinal from the car and handcuffed him. Morton told him in Spanish that he was under arrest for robbery and, even though I spoke *muy poquito Espanol*, I could tell the guy was complaining that he'd been promised he wouldn't be arrested. I also guessed the gang detective's amused reply when he said in Spanish, "So, I lied."

We booked Espinal into the central jail in downtown San Diego. Knowing the detectives at Carlsbad PD also wanted to talk to him, I telephoned to let them know he was in custody. I added that, in the event Espinal invoked his rights, that there was no cause for concern. We'd burn a copy of the tape recording of his confession, which they could pick up at their convenience.

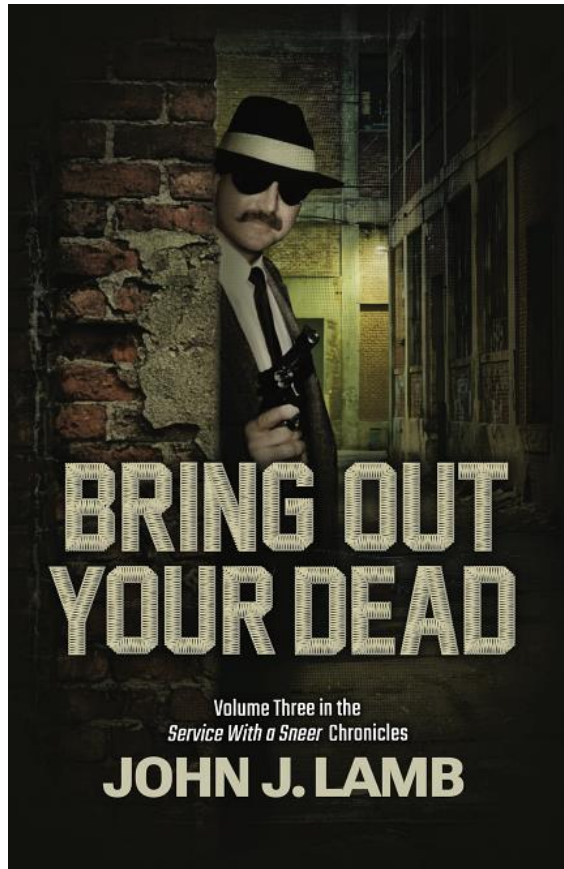
We got back to Oceanside a little after 2:00 p.m., and I stuck my head in Sergeant Call's office to update him on the case. Based on Espinal's statement, the shooting looked like a clear case of justifiable homicide. I told Call that my report would contain a recommendation to the district attorney that no criminal charges be filed against Joe Soto.

Call nodded. “Sounds good. Oh, and this morning we made a personnel reassignment. Move your stuff to the vacant desk in Crimes of Violence. You work for me now.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. Rookie detectives – especially someone like me with a mere week of very limited investigative experience – were *never* assigned to COV. Yet my work on the homicide had apparently impressed Call.

I began to express my gratitude, but Call cut me off, saying, “Don’t be in a hurry to thank me. You’re in the big leagues now. I expect you to be available 24 hours a day, and that includes weekends. Plus, when we work a murder it’s nonstop, sometimes for 36 hours in a row. We work as long and hard as necessary to get a killer in custody. If you aren’t up for that, tell me now.”

“I’m in,” I said without a moment’s hesitation.



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