

*Los Voluntarios:*  
**A Failed Counterinsurgency Experiment of the U.S. Marines  
in the Mountains of Northern Nicaragua,  
January—June 1929**

**Michael J. Schroeder  
Associate Professor of History  
Department of History, Politics & Global Studies  
Lebanon Valley College  
Annville PA 17003  
[www.SandinoRebellion.org](http://www.SandinoRebellion.org)  
[schroede@lvc.edu](mailto:schroede@lvc.edu)**

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**T**his paper consists of a “detailed table of contents” for a solicited book prospectus

recently submitted to Lexington Books, an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield. The book’s core questions and themes are the same ones bedeviling U.S. military strategists in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Mali, and elsewhere around the world today: how does an imperial state shore up a feeble client state and build a viable national military force in a country or region wracked by civil conflict or a revolutionary armed insurgency? Especially in a place where most people are poor, the state’s fiscal resources are tight, and local actors are deeply divided along sectarian and partisan lines and give primacy to their own interests and agendas? How does an imperial power most effectively wage a counterinsurgency campaign against a homegrown insurrection propelled by a charismatic leader, a compelling ideology rooted in a specific national history, and a populace that fervently believes in that ideology? And how does that homegrown insurgency most effectively resist the efforts of a more powerful state to annihilate it?

This study explodes a moment in time in a mote of a place to offer a theoretically informed, empirically rich, fine-grained study of a six-month counterinsurgency experiment initiated and quickly abandoned by the U.S. Marines and the Nicaraguan government. The experiment lasted from January to June 1929, more or less, in two distinct sub-regions of the mountainous region of northern Nicaragua called Las Segovias. This counterinsurgency experiment not only failed but backfired, in multiple ways. Exactly how and why it backfired, the politico-military dynamics it revealed and set in motion, the structural contradictions from which it arose, and the contradictory legacies it bequeathed – these comprise the main themes of the book.

The book’s ten chapters are divided into three parts. Part I (chaps. 1-2) details the book’s theoretical and conceptual underpinnings, explores the principal questions and themes animating the study, and contextualizes the events to follow. Part II (chaps. 3-7) offers five detailed case studies that illuminate, in different ways and from different angles, the process of insurgency and counterinsurgency in two distinct sub-regions of Las Segovias. Part III broadens the canvas to explore larger themes and issues raised by the Voluntario experiment. More details on each chapter and the trajectory of the book’s arguments are provided in the detailed table of contents.

The printed book will be supplemented by an open-access online digital archive where readers can consult the collections of primary documents on which the study is based; an expanded scholarly apparatus (footnotes and bibliography); more extensive discussions of key episodes and events; and maps, photographs, and other material. Indeed, much of the material to be

used in this book is already housed online, at [www.SandinoRebellion.com](http://www.SandinoRebellion.com) (*Homepage > Guardia > Voluntarios*; and when the book is completed, *Homepage > Book / Libro > Los Voluntarios*). The result will be a genuinely hybrid print-Web text that will be of interest to scholars of small wars, insurgencies, and counterinsurgencies; historians of Latin and Central America; undergraduate and graduate students in Latin American studies, military history, and related fields; and the general public.

This study, which I expect will weigh in at around 80,000 words, builds on a large body of scholarship on counterinsurgency campaigns in small wars that emphasizes the often ironic, unintended, and destructive consequences that such campaigns unleash – works like John Nagl’s *Learning To Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago, 2005), David Kilcullen’s *The Accidental Guerrilla* (2009), and Christian Parenti’s *Tropic of Chaos* (2014), among many others. This study will contribute to this growing body of literature by offering a richly textured and engaging narrative and analysis of events in one of the twentieth century’s most influential “irregular” wars – one that resulted in the U.S. Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* (1940) that has played such a prominent role in recent scholarly debates on U.S. military interventions overseas.

Because a prospectus is by its nature provisional, I expect some changes in the chapter titles, section titles, and sequences of topics once I actually sit down to write. I thank the late Dr. David C. Brooks, formerly of the U.S. State Department, for pushing me to think harder and stretch further on the military dimensions of the conflict, and José Mejía Lacayo for his helpful comments on a previous draft.



## **PART I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS & HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### **Chapter 1: Insurgency & Counterinsurgency in the Modern World**

This introductory chapter poses the questions animating this study, describes its theoretical underpinnings and the sources it is based on, and outlines its main arguments, themes, and contributions to existing knowledge. Drawing from the work of diverse scholars, and using comparative examples from the Philippines, Haiti, Malaya, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, the chapter provides a conceptual framework for analyzing and

interpreting the principal dynamics of insurgency and counterinsurgency at play in Nicaragua in the 1920s and 1930s.

After the Civil War of 1926-1927, the overarching U.S. policy goal in Nicaragua was fostering its vision of “order and stability” across the country’s national territory through the upward displacement of the means of organized violence to the level of the national state. From the perspective of U.S. policymakers, a chronically weak and fractured central state governed mainly by patron-client relations and marked by decentralized control of violence-making required a wholly new and “non-partisan” national army – the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua – that would garner unto itself a monopoly on violence. Once a legitimately elected government was in place, and that new national military had become viable, U.S. military forces could withdraw. But effecting that transformation in practice proved slow and difficult, especially in the first three years of the fight against Sandino (1927-1930). Sandino’s rebellion, in effect, delayed the U.S. withdrawal by nearly four years (early 1929—late 1932).

Sandino’s revolutionary war erupted just a few years before Mao’s in China, and followed many of the same patterns. Following Mao’s dictum, in Nicaragua it was the campesinos (peasants) of the mountainous north – a region bordering Honduras called Las Segovias – that became the sea in which the Sandinista guerrilla warrior swam. The Sandino rebellion quickly became a people’s war, as in Spain from 1808 or the Philippines from 1898, with thousands of impoverished campesinos flocking to Sandino’s cause. Ironically, the main engine driving the rebellion soon became Marine Corps violence inflicted on rural folk suspected of being Sandinista “bandits.” The Marines’ campaign to “exterminate bandits” by attacking the rebels’ social support networks – their families and communities – served mainly to swell the rebels’ ranks and steel their resolve to expel the Marines. Violence against Segovian civilians from 1927, including Voluntario violence in the first half of 1929 – analogous to Japanese violence against Chinese civilians from 1937, or French violence against Algerian civilians from 1956 – soon became the most important motivation, symbol, and source of common identity among the families, communities, and individuals comprising Sandino’s Ejército Defensor de la Soberanía Nacional.

“Army in Defense of Sovereignty”. Contested sovereignties lie at the foundation of all of these struggles. In the context of the nation-state system that emerged in post-Westphalian Europe, and especially from the Age of Revolution (1770s-1820s), imperial powers and regional hegemons sought to carve out spheres of influence and impose their geopolitical wills – their sovereignty – on client states and peoples. Colonized peoples and subordinate groups, in turn, often acted collectively to challenge those impositions and assert their own sovereignties. At times those challenges erupted as armed insurgencies, in turn breeding counterinsurgencies, with each side enabled and constrained by a host of locally contingent and shifting factors: imperial will and military power; the nature, strength, and relative coherence of the client state in its various arms and branches; pre-existing class and race hierarchies and relations, and political-cultural traditions and practices; degrees of access to material and symbolic resources; degrees of popular support and political legitimacy; motivating ideologies; access to technologies of warfare and means of communications and transport; information flows; the

nature and proximity of borders, borderlands, and frontier regions; networks of allies and adversaries; and related determinants of the outcomes of revolutionary guerrilla wars.

The Sandinista challenge and the weakness of the fledgling Guardia Nacional compelled the Marines to experiment, innovate, and invent new ways of waging counterinsurgency war. So did political necessities, fiscal constraints, and a host of other factors. The Voluntario experiment, and the forms of organized violence that followed, also offer insights into the vastly more complex insurgency-counterinsurgency landscape of today's world. How and why that brief experiment was born, the events and consequences it unleashed, the reasons for its rapid demise, and the bigger story it tells about the dialectics of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the modern era – these comprise the main animating questions and themes of this book. The chapter closes with a synopsis of each part and chapter.

## **Chapter 2. Origins of Los Voluntarios: Nicaragua, Las Segovias, and the Fight against Sandino to January 1929**

This chapter outlines the main features of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations in the first three decades of the twentieth century and the sequence of events that led to the creation of the Voluntarios in January 1929.

*Ripple Effects of Empire-Making in Nicaragua, 1912-1928.* A crisp analysis of the period 1912-1926 is followed by a more focused discussion of the Civil War of 1926-1927 and its aftermath. The Espino Negro Accord of May 1927, formally ending the Civil War, resulted in Sandino's rebellion, the creation of the Guardia Nacional, and a U.S. commitment to supervise national elections in 1928. After the Liberal General and U.S. ally José María Moncada was elected to the presidency in November 1928, the Sandino rebellion posed a threat to the regime's political stability, and Moncada had political debts to pay. A good number of his former generals and lieutenants were looking for work and eager to join the fight against Sandino. Meantime the newly-created Guardia Nacional was not growing as quickly as its architects had hoped, and the U.S. Marines needed native Nicaraguan help in fighting the Sandinista rebels. Out of this complex confluence of events were born the Voluntarios – former Liberal generals and colonels, each commanding groups of 50 or more men, working in collaboration with Marine Corps field patrols, and paid out of a special fund – ironically making them not “volunteers” at all, but more paid private militias, or professional paramilitaries.

*Social and Political Geographies of Las Segovias.* This section introduces the political-cultural context of the region of Las Segovias, the mountainous northern part of the country where all the events in the rest of the book took place. Bordering Honduras to the north and unsettled wilderness to the northeast and east, and bewilderingly complex in its social and physical geography, this variegated region was characterized by widespread poverty; deep inequalities of social class and race; relatively weak patron-client relations; a small but emergent middle class of coffee growers and ranchers; and often bitter political battles between factions of the

elite. Tools of political struggle included not only elections and patronage-clientage but gang violence, the guarantee system, and forced contributions in times of war.

*The Dynamics of Guerrilla War in Las Segovias.* To pay the cost of waging war, Sandino's Defending Army of Nicaraguan National Sovereignty targeted property owners – coffee growers, ranchers, merchants and traders – both foreign and native, in a process I call “patriotic pillage”. This prompted property owners' growing clamor for Guardia protection from Sandino's “bandits”. But the Guardia's resources were tight and good recruits scarce, especially in the mountainous north. The Marines thus faced a crisis of political legitimacy – to have exclusively foreign troops patrolling through towns and villages reinforced the Sandinista nationalist narrative that this was a foreign invasion (which it was). The Voluntarios were created, in part, to put a Nicaraguan face on the intervention and blunt the perception among Nicaraguans and Segovianos that the Marines were foreign invaders and occupiers.

*Mobilizing Los Voluntarios in January 1929.* The final part of the chapter details the sequence of events and principal personages involved in the creation and initial mobilization of the Voluntarios in January 1929.

## **PART II: CASE STUDIES**

### **Chapter 3. Dialogue, Diplomacy, and Proto-Special Ops: Stockes & Hakala and Los Voluntarios in the Western Segovias**

This chapter, the first in a series of detailed case studies, focuses on the counterinsurgency strategy developed by Marine Corps Captains George F. Stockes and Herman H. Hakala in the Western Segovias along the Honduran border, and on the conflicts that ensued when they were ordered to work in tandem with Voluntario forces.

*Stockes in Somoto: Cultivating Allies in a Stew of Local Politics.* Among the canniest and most successful field officers in the entire Nicaraguan campaign, Stockes and Hakala commanded the Marine-Guardia garrison in Somoto. Stockes was in charge from March 1928 to April 1929, working with Hakala, before Hakala assumed command until early 1930. Separately and together, and with several columns of Voluntarios from February to June 1929, they confronted two of the rebellion's shrewdest chieftains: Generals Carlos Salgado and Miguel Angel Ortez. The latter was killed in a bold assault on the town of Palacagüina in May 1931. Salgado, more prudent and less audacious than Ortez, was active in the Somoto-Honduran border area from the beginning to the end of the rebellion and was one of the few major Sandinista chieftains never caught or killed. The town of Somoto and its hinterlands had a history of local political and social struggles as tangled and convoluted as any in Nicaragua. Built on the remnants of Tepesomoto, an indigenous community dating back more than 500 years, by the 1920s the town and surrounding villages were inhabited by cross-cutting factions of Conservative and

Liberal landowners, merchants, and politicians; Indians of diverse political affiliations and social grades; and a laboring class of dizzying complexity.

After assuming command of the Guardia detachment in Somoto in March 1928, Stockes took around six months to orient himself. By September his reports began arriving in Managua. Distinct from most, his were unusually informed, detailed, and useful. During his time of seeming quiescence, in the run-up to the elections in November, Stockes was evidently busy learning about the region's byzantine politics; cultivating personal relationships with the town's most influential citizens; becoming personally acquainted with key local Honduran border officials; and recruiting a small coterie of agents and spies. In forging these alliances he worked to identify and exploit the pre-existing social and political divisions among the district's inhabitants.

After nine months in Somoto, in late January 1929 Stockes received the order from Second Brigade Commander General Logan Feland to work with this new group of Voluntario generals and colonels, appointed by the newly elected President Moncada. Stockes probably detested the idea, knowing full well it would lead to toxic politicization of state-sanctioned violence, but dutifully followed orders. Feland's role here was pivotal. This was his second stint as Commander in Nicaragua (his first was February to August 1927, during and after the Civil War). It lasted less than ten weeks (16 January—26 March 1929). The Voluntario program was Feland's baby. In April, Brig. Gen. Dion Williams replaced Feland, and the Voluntario experiment in the Western Segovias ended.

*Marine Corps-Voluntario Operations in the Honduran Borderlands.* In the first half of 1929, Stockes, Hakala, and a series of Voluntario columns aggressively pursued Salgado, Ortez, and lesser rebel chieftains all along the Honduran border in the Western Segovias. The Voluntario columns – led by former Liberal generals Augusto J. Caldera, Felipe F. Flores and two Expeditionary Chiefs under the authority of the Honduran government – were officially under the command of the Marines. In reality they acted largely independently and operated by a wholly different political logic – one driven mainly by the desire for political retribution against Conservative and other enemies from the Civil War. Stockes combined his military campaign with efforts to build political relationships with prominent locals, using local scouts, spies, and guides and working diplomatically through pre-existing networks of patronage and clientage. His patrols were relentless in their pursuit, but targeted only known rebels and minimized violence against civilians. By mid-1929, Stockes and Hakala had substantially reduced rebel strength in the zone. It is shown that little of that success can be credited to the Voluntarios they sometimes marched with. How the dynamic tension between these two clashing visions of counterinsurgency played out in practice is the section's main focus and theme.

*Failures of the Voluntario Program in the Western Segovias.* The case of Stockes and Hakala in the Western Segovias is interpreted as a distinctively successful counterinsurgency campaign that by seeking to integrate local allies, minimize civilian casualties, and respect the rural populace was unusually effective in blunting the rebel movement – at least in the short-term. At another level, the campaign's Voluntario component proved a dismal failure, intensifying the

political divisions among factions of the elite that the U.S. intervention was intended to dampen. Stockes became one of the program's most pointed critics. He knew that the fragmented, decentralized, partisan, personalized nature of the violence of the Voluntarios was fundamentally incompatible with the central state's efforts to monopolize, across the whole of the national territory, the legitimate authority to make and use violence.

#### **Chapter 4. Who Murdered Anastasio Zamora and Raped His Wife and Daughters? Counterinsurgency and the Tangled Webs of Political Violence in the Western Segovias**

*A Puzzling Atrocity.* This chapter is based on a horrific and puzzling atrocity that reportedly occurred at the tail end of the Stockes-Hakala-Flores campaign against Salgado and Ortez. The episode is described and analyzed in some detail on my Sandino Rebellion website (Homepage > Top 100 > Doc 34): “Statement of Locadia López Zamora on the murder of her husband Anastasio Zamora & gang rape of her girls near Dipilto” (R-2 intelligence report, 21 April 1929). In brief, a surviving rape victim blamed Sandinista General Juan Pablo Umanzor for murdering her husband and raping her and her two daughters. The allegation immediately raises a red flag, because the evidence is overwhelming that Sandino strictly enforced a moral code against the rape of women and girls. And Umanzor, long reputed a man of honor, had never been accused of a crime so atrocious. So who really committed this atrocity against Locadia López Zamora and her family?

*Tracking Down the Perpetrators.* Trying to answer this question makes for a fascinating detective story. Careful investigation reveals a tangled web of allies and adversaries that stretches across the borderlands region and back in time to the Civil War and to the notorious mass murderer and political gang leader Anastasio Hernández – a character spotlighted in my award-winning article, “Horse Thieves to Rebels to Dogs: Political Gang Violence and the State in the Western Segovias in the Time of Sandino” (*Journal of Latin American Studies*, 1996) and featured on the website (Homepage > Gangs).

*Unintentionally Unleashing Terror.* Unravelling this mystery and tracing the movements in time and space and the motivations of the various actors involved, the chapter highlights the intricacy of the local political landscape and the challenges confronting the architects of Guardia counterinsurgency campaign in Las Segovias. As it turns out, the evidence is strong that Voluntario forces commanded by Liberal General Felipe Flores killed Conservative Anastasio Zamora and raped his wife and daughters – an episode that reveals much about the unintended consequences unleashed by the Marines' Voluntario experiment.

## Chapter 5. Kangaroo Trials, Bush Executions, and Campaigns of Terror: Hanneken & Escamilla in the Jinotega Coffee Districts

This chapter examines a case that both contrasts sharply and shows many similarities with the Stokes-Hakala campaign in the Western Segovias: that of Marine Corps Lieutenant Herbert H. Hanneken and Voluntario General Juan Escamilla in the Jinotega coffee districts in March and April 1929.

*Capture, Trial, and Execution of Sandinista General Manuel María Girón Ruano.* The chapter opens with the well-known capture, bush trial, and execution of Sandinista General Manuel María Giron Ruano by Hanneken and Escamilla in February and March 1929, an episode described on the website ([www.sandinorebellion.com/Top100pgs/Top100-p27.html](http://www.sandinorebellion.com/Top100pgs/Top100-p27.html)). United States Marine Corps Lieutenant Herman H. Hanneken had earned his fame in Haiti, where in 1919 he led an audacious assault on the camp of Charlemagne Péralte and killed the renowned *Caco* chieftain. In January 1929 he was assigned to field duty in Las Segovias, joining forces with the Mexican and former Liberal General Juan Escamilla and his column of Voluntarios. The bush trial and execution of General Girón – and soon after, of captured rebels Isabel Rocha and Filiberto Hernández – is used to segue into the principal features of the counterinsurgency campaign waged by Hanneken and Escamilla in the months to follow.

*Targeting Women, Children, and Families.* In March and April, Hanneken and Escamilla cut a swath of destruction and outrage across the length and breadth of southwestern Jinotega. Knowing that the rebel movement found its base of social support among the district's campesino families and communities, they developed a highly distinctive *modus operandi*: targeting the *families* of suspected rebels, especially their women and children. In the most typical pattern, Hanneken would extract information about “bandits” from prisoners arrested in the field. With that information, a combined Marine-Voluntario column would descend on the dwelling of a suspected rebel, roust the inhabitants, search the house, burn it down, confiscate the livestock, and force-march their prisoners to the town of Yalí. By June more than 200 detained women and children were living in hastily erected shacks on the edge of town. In early July the battalion medical officer found nearly all the children suffering from gastrointestinal illnesses, including dysentery and diarrhea, and many other cases of fever, skin infections, and ulcers. People were dying at the rate of more than one per day, which the medical officer attributed to “unhygienic living conditions and insufficient food and shelter” in the camp.

*Legacies.* In late July surviving detainees were allowed to return to their destroyed homes. The overall effect of the Hanneken-Escamilla counterinsurgency program was to pour gasoline on the fire of anti-Marine sentiment across the district. Until the end of the war the area north and northeast of Yalí remained one of the most active rebel zones in the country. There is no evidence that Hanneken sought to forge alliances with local notables in town or country. Nor did he recruit more than a handful of spies, scouts, or agents from the local populace. In his relations with local inhabitants, winning hearts and minds was not Hanneken's or Escamilla's

goal. Instead Hanneken, his Marines, and Escamilla's Voluntarios, often in collaboration with other Marine-Guardia and Voluntario patrols, sought to sow terror and fear among the local inhabitants – men, women, and children. They succeeded mainly in thickening the rebel ranks and making possible a collective memory of violence and hatred that endured for decades.

## **Chapter 6. Spearing Babies on Bayonets? Gunnery Sgt. William A. “Iron Man” Lee and His Voluntarios in Jinotega**

This chapter focuses on Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant and Guardia Nacional Lieutenant William A. “Iron Man” Lee and his groups of Voluntarios in Jinotega in the first six months of 1929. More than a year after his stint with the Voluntarios, starting in mid-1930, Lee teamed up with famed Marine Corps Lieutenant (later Lieutenant General) Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller to form “Company M” (for “mobile”) – probably the single best known unit of the entire Nicaragua campaign among Marine Corps historians. This chapter spotlights Lee’s activities during the first six months of 1929, more than a year before the creation of Company M, when Lee patrolled the hills and valleys of Jinotega with a handful of fellow Marines and a series of Voluntario forces.

*“El Carnicero” (The Butcher) Lee.* In the words of historian Neill Macaulay, Lee was “probably the subject of more atrocity stories than another other American officer in Nicaragua” (Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, Duke Univ. Press, 1985, p. 229). Macaulay first made this observation in the 1960s, long before the revolutionary Sandinista government in the early 1980s launched a memory project intended to rescue popular memories of Sandino and his fight against the U.S. Marines. One of the most striking features of the oral testimonies produced in this memory project is a shared set of representations about “the butcher” Lee (these are the IES testimonies, on the website called IES-Docs, short for Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo). More than a dozen elderly residents of the Jinotega district narrated stories about Lee that painted him as a bloodthirsty killer. Fifty years after the fact, a striking number told stories about Lieutenant Lee seizing babies from their mothers’ arms, tossing them in the air, and spearing them with his bayonet.

*Evaluating the Evidence on Lee.* Notably, few of these testimonies identified Chesty Puller as complicit in these atrocities – suggesting they refer mostly to the period before the formation of Company M. Also notable, and rather odd, is that only a handful of Lee’s field reports for the crucial six-month period from February to June 1929 can be found in the archives. But other key Marine Corps documents from this period strongly indicate that Lee and his Voluntarios waged a very aggressive counterinsurgency campaign in these months, especially targeting civilians. By my reading of extant evidence, it is not only plausible but likely that the oral testimonies on Lee’s atrocities did indeed have some basis in reality – and that they referred mainly to Lee’s actions from February to June 1929. This was the same period that Hanneken & Escamilla were waging their campaign of terror in the same districts. Lee’s column of Voluntarios had the same mindset and used the same counterinsurgency strategy as Hanneken

& Escamilla: a campaign of terror targeting the families of “bandits,” especially their women and children. Whatever the facts about Lee’s actions, it is also a fact that an enduring field of social memories formed in the hills and valley of Jinotega that insisted that he behaved toward civilians in the most inhumane ways imaginable. In the bigger scheme, whether these atrocity stories were “true” matters less than the widespread popular belief that they were. For the Sandinistas, Lee became an important symbol and anti-hero in a larger narrative of Nicaraguan nationalism.

## **Chapter 7. The Black Legend of Marine Corps Atrocities in the Love Letters of Marine Corps Private Emil Thomas of Cleveland, Ohio**

*The Black Legend.* A rich body of corroborating evidence for a shared Marine Corps culture that morally legitimated violence against Nicaraguan civilians – and for the Sandinista “Black Legend” of Marine Corps atrocities that crystalized during and after the war – can be found in the love letters of Marine Corps Private First Class Emil Thomas of Cleveland, Ohio, to his fiancée Beatrice. This extraordinary collection of personal letters from a Marine Corps grunt to his sweetheart back home consists of some 331 letters and more than 186,000 words spanning more than six years (April 1923—July 1929). The entire collection is housed in four web pages starting at [www.sandinorebellion.com/USMC-Docs/USMC-docs-Thomas1.html](http://www.sandinorebellion.com/USMC-Docs/USMC-docs-Thomas1.html). Most revealing here is the trajectory of Emil Thomas’s representations of race and his explicitly racist understanding of the world; his anger and resentment at being stationed in Nicaragua and forced to fight against Sandino’s “bandits”; the violence against the “gooks” that he morally legitimated; the violence he committed while patrolling with a Voluntario column in January and February 1929; and his post-combat expressions of remorse and a desire to forget the things he did and experienced in the hills and valley of Las Segovias and adjacent areas of Honduras during his month-long stint in the field with the Voluntarios.

*Before Nicaragua.* This section analyzes Emil Thomas’s representations of race, nation, himself, and the U.S. Marines before his stint in Nicaragua.

*In Nicaragua.* This section offers a critical reading of the letters he wrote while in Nicaragua, focusing on his representations of the people and culture; of his preconceptions, observations, and understandings of the natives and their relations to the Marines; and of his actions while on patrol with the Voluntarios.

*After Nicaragua.* This section critically interrogates Emil Thomas’s letters to Beatrice in this last phase of their courtship correspondence. Most notable here are his expressions of post-traumatic regret for his actions in Nicaragua. After leaving Nicaragua his memories haunted him, and we hear mainly of his desire to forget the horrors he had experienced and inflicted. The letters make very clear that Emil Thomas witnessed, sought to inflict, and committed atrocities against Nicaraguans; that he felt morally and ethically justified in doing so at the time;

and that he soon came to regret his actions and wanted only to forget and move on with his life.

*Summary of Chapters 3-7.* The chapter closes by summarizing the principal conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing case studies: that the Voluntario program proved a dismal failure mainly because it politicized and personalized state-sanctioned violence, thus working directly against the grain of the larger Marine Corps effort to centralize, depoliticize, institutionalize, and monopolize the means of organized coercion in the Guardia Nacional. Related to that fundamental failure were others, most notably the intensification of Conservative elites' furor over the Liberal Moncada regime and the U.S. intervention, and the Voluntarios' excessive violence against civilians in their areas of operation, which served mainly to inflame the rebellion it was intended to eradicate.

### **PART III: LARGER THEMES**

#### **Chapter 8. Borders, Borderlands, and Frontier Regions in the Nicaraguan Insurgency and Counterinsurgency**

The case studies in the previous five chapters demonstrate the crucial role played by borders, borderlands, and frontier regions in the shifting dialectic of insurgency and counterinsurgency that was the war between Sandino's rebels and the Marines-Guardia and their Voluntario allies. To the north and west, the Honduran border shaped the conflict in myriad ways, in part by making possible the borderlands region of the Western Segovias and southern Honduras – a highly distinctive cultural space molded especially by the very existence of an imaginary line on the earth separating two sovereign nation-states. To the east, the vast unsettled frontier stretching for more than a hundred miles all the way to the Caribbean Coast created its own sets constraints and opportunities, for both sides. This chapter highlights the centrality of this international border, these transnational borderlands, and the eastern frontier region in this six-and-a-half year conflict. The chapter uses Voluntario episodes already introduced to segue into analyses of how these distinctive political-cultural spaces influenced the nature and trajectory of the war in the three-and-a-half years from the end of the Voluntarios experiment (June 1929) to the end of the war against the Marines (December 1932).

*The Honduran Border and the Western Segovian Borderlands.* Without the Nicaragua-Honduras border and the borderlands region that this imaginary line created, it is unlikely that a sustained nationalist insurgency in Las Segovias would have been possible. The border and borderlands created for each side in this conflict a highly asymmetrical set of constraints and opportunities, on the whole favoring the rebels far more than the counterinsurgency. The border's semi-porosity was key here: the rebels could and did cross the border at will, while the dictates of international law prevented the Marines and Guardia from doing the same – a source of endless frustration for the latter. For the rebels the Honduran side of the border offered refuge and sanctuary, a market for goods plundered from Segovian property-owners,

and a ready supply of firearms, ammunition, medicines, and other supplies. Many merchants and traders on the Honduran side fattened their wallets purchasing goods plundered by the rebels, and many ordinary people materially benefitted from these illicit markets. By all accounts, by late in the war most everyone on the Honduran side was sympathetic to the rebel cause, and for good reason: they could decry the U.S. intervention without being directly threatened by it, and their material lives were enhanced because of the material dynamics it had set in motion.

*The Northern and Eastern Frontiers.* A similar but distinctive set of constraints and opportunities was at play in the northern and eastern frontier regions of Las Segovias that for a different set of reasons also asymmetrically favored the rebels over the counterinsurgency forces. The vast, unsettled tropical forests of the interior offered refuge and sanctuary for the rebels, effectively shielding them from counterinsurgency raids – an advantage the rebels enjoyed from the beginning to the end of the rebellion. From the rugged wilderness of Peña Blanca and Guapinol mountains in the south to the sparsely inhabited Río Bocay and Río Coco valleys in the north, the rebels took strategic advantage of this vast unsettled zone to establish an archipelago of semi-permanent camps far outside the reach of the counterinsurgency forces. The Río Coco provided a transport artery from Las Segovias to the Caribbean and the Caribbean Coast region, and a route for smuggling arms, ammunition, and other supplies back to Las Segovias.

*The Cultural Frontier of the Caribbean Coast Region.* The cultural frontier represented by the Caribbean Coast region, on the other hand, effectively stymied the rebels' efforts to spread their rebellion into this strategically important part of the national territory. As explored in my award-winning article, "Cultural Geographies of Grievance and War" (*Dialectical Anthropology*, Dec. 2012), despite major efforts, the Sandinistas were never able to win the popular support of a critical mass of Costeños – of the Miskitu Indians, Creoles, West Indian laborers, and other non-Spanish-speaking ethnic groups populating the Caribbean littoral from Cabo Gracias a Dios in the north to Bluefields in the south. Thus the Caribbean Coast region played a critically important role in the counterinsurgency campaign as a predominantly "pacified zone" from which the Marines-Guardia could project their reach and power into the rebel-held zones of the interior.

## **Chapter 9. Lessons Learned: Centralizing Authority and Decentralizing Responsibility for Coercive Power in Municipalities, Farms, and Mines, 1930-1933**

The failure of the Voluntario experiment by mid-1929 did not put an end to the underlying dynamics that led to its creation. The fiscal constraints of the national state meant that the Guardia Nacional was never able to expand its size much beyond a plateau of about 2,500 troops – not enough to protect all the cities, towns, ranches, coffee farms, mines, and haciendas clamoring for protection against rebel attacks and raids. This chapter explores the

bumpy, twisting path the Marines-Guardia followed in developing a set of pragmatic, field-tested policies meant to augment the strength of the counterinsurgency forces without compromising or undermining the Guardia's authority. From mid-1929 until the end of the U.S. occupation in early 1933, the Guardia developed a series of rules and practices for various types of groups authorized to exercise coercive power – including municipal auxiliary forces, municipal police, *cívicos* (civilian volunteer forces), and *cívicos en finca* (hired armed guards on ranches and coffee farms), *cívicos expedicionarios* (expeditionary armed civilians), and others. Insisting on maintaining its ultimate authority over all forms of state-sanctioned violence, the Guardia also authorized various types of armed groups not under its direct control to protect cities, towns, and privately-owned enterprises like mines and coffee farms – so long as the entity seeking protection paid for it. This strategy of rigorously maintaining the Guardia's ultimate authority over all forms of state-sanctioned violence, while permitting specific entities (cities, towns, farms, mines) to hire or mobilize police forces and groups of armed men to provide the security that the Guardia could not – avoided the excesses of the Voluntario experiment and buttressed the state's larger project to monopolize all means of organized coercion within the national territory.

*Protecting Cities & Towns: Municipal Police Forces, Municipal Auxiliaries, and Civilian Militias.* Starting around mid-1930, the Guardia began authorizing municipalities to mobilize and fund municipal police forces, and for volunteer municipal auxiliary forces and civilian militias, consisting of individual, named civilians authorized to carry firearms, for the specific purpose of defending municipalities from rebel attacks. The policy depended on local initiative, saved the state money, and effectively served its intended ends: protecting cities and towns without bankrupting the state or undermining the Guardia's efforts to monopolize all substantial means of organized coercion.

*Protecting Farms, Plantations & Mines: Cívicos en Finca, Cívicos Expedicionarios, and Special Classes of Guardia Auxiliaries.* The Guardia developed a similar policy in response to the clamor for Guardia protection by owners of coffee farms, mines, and plantations. The Guardia's Jefe Director considered, negotiated, and approved such arrangements on a case-by-case basis – such as General Matthews' agreement with Standard Fruit Company on the Caribbean Coast in the first half of 1931. After lengthy exchanges and negotiations, Matthews authorized a special class of Guardia auxiliary forces to be stationed on Standard Fruit's properties, as long as the company paid the bill and acknowledged that they served under the authority of the Guardia (see the correspondence housed in the website's East Coast pages, at [www.sandinorebellion.com/EastCoast/EC1931A-p6.html](http://www.sandinorebellion.com/EastCoast/EC1931A-p6.html)) Similar arrangements were made with coffee growers in Jinotega and Matagalpa – armed guards paid for by property owners but firmly under the Guardia's authority. By the end of 1932, the institutionalization of partially privatized public security formed a critical part of the rapid and ongoing transformation of the power and reach of the national state and a critical element of its counterinsurgency strategy. By this time, the lessons from the failure of the Voluntario experiment had been learned.

## Chapter 10. Conclusion: Top Twelve Ironies of U.S. Intervention, Insurgency, and Counterinsurgency in Nicaragua, 1910-1979

This final chapter broadens the canvas to situate the ironies of the Voluntario experiment within the larger context of twelve of the most important ironic processes and unintended consequences resulting from the U.S. intervention across the circum-Caribbean and in Nicaragua in the first third of the twentieth century, and the ripple effects of that policy throughout the rest of the century.

1. *The Unintended Effects of the U.S. Policy of Political Exclusion from 1910: Intensifying Political Divisions among Factions of the Elite.* Drawing mainly from the seminal work of Michel Gobat, this section synthesizes the unintended effects of the U.S. policy of supporting a series of unpopular Conservative leaders from the Dawson Pact of 1910 – mainly, to sharpen and intensify the country’s political divide between Liberals and Conservatives.
2. *The Unintended Effects of Dollar Diplomacy: Intensifying Economic Nationalism.* Again drawing mainly from Gobat, a related unintended consequence of the imposition of the Dawson Pact of 1910 and the policy of “dollar diplomacy” that followed was economic dislocation, scarcity of credit, sharpened political divisions, and the explosion of economic nationalism opposed to intervention by “Wall Street bankers.” Dollar diplomacy helped to lay the groundwork for Sandino’s nationalist, anti-imperialist discourse.
3. *Unintended Consequences of the Golden Age of U.S. Empire-Making in the Circum-Caribbean (1898-1934) and in Nicaragua (1910-1934): Sandino’s Nationalist Challenge.* Considering the broad sweep of U.S. empire-making across the circum-Caribbean and in the Pacific and East Asia in the first third of the twentieth century (1898-1934), and the more specific interventions in Nicaragua (1910-1927), it is argued that the eruption of Sandino’s nationalist challenge from May 1927 was a direct consequence of nearly two decades of intensive U.S. interventions in Nicaraguan affairs. The entire rebellion emerged as an unintended consequence of empire-making, specifically in Nicaragua and more generally across the Caribbean and in Asia.
4. *Unintended Consequence of Chasing Sandino: Making Possible an Organic Social Base for the Ideology & Practice of Sandinismo.* What would have happened if the Marines had ignored Sandino after he sacked the San Albino Mine in late May 1927? Probably not much of anything. While it is impossible to demonstrate a counterfactual claim, it seems very likely that there would have been no invasion, no rebellion, and no war. This single event – the sacking of the San Albino Mine – prompted the Marines to send troops to Las Segovias, establish garrisons in some of the major towns, and begin the war – based on the principle that the United States government was obliged to protect the “lives and property” of U.S. citizens. Ironically, four years later, in April 1931, that obligation was abrogated anyway (in consequence of the Sandinista raids on the Caribbean Coast). If the U.S. Marines had ignored Sandino’s sacking of San Albino Mine, and ignored a few more unlawful raids on

properties owned by U.S. citizens, it seems very probable that the whole Sandino movement would have withered and died, and there would have been no war – and no organic social basis for the ideology and practice of Sandinismo. All subsequent Nicaraguan history would be different. Sandino drew the United States into a fight U.S. policymakers didn't really want, and the resulting invasion and occupation made Sandino's legacy possible.

5. *Unintended Consequence of Sandino's Rebellion: Prolonging the U.S. Intervention.* A second irony flowed from the foregoing. In May 1927, U.S. policymakers were looking to withdraw from Nicaragua as soon as practicable. What they required was "order and stability" in the form of a legitimately elected national government and a reasonably viable national army. The target date was late 1928 or early 1929. Sandino's rebellion actually prolonged the U.S. military intervention by nearly four years (early 1929—December 1932). Whether that prolongation was unintentional is another question – a question that the Sandinista narrative of the rebellion has never asked.
6. *Unintended Consequences of Marine-Guardia and Voluntario Violence against Civilians: Widespread Campesino Support for Sandino.* This is the core irony examined in this book. When the record of the Voluntarios is analyzed in the context of all the other evidence from this period – especially more than 1,200 extant patrol and combat reports (PC-Docs), the oral testimonies produced by the Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo in the early 1980s (IES-Docs), and the published literature – it is clear that the single most important factor in mobilizing an organic and enduring base of social support for Sandino across large parts of Las Segovias was Marine-Guardia violence against civilians. The Voluntario program built on and contributed to that ironic outcome.
7. *Unintended Consequences of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: Social Trauma and Political Polarization in Las Segovias and Nicaragua.* States claim sovereign authority over a territory, tax the inhabitants of that territory, and wage war against invaders. Sandino considered his Defending Army a sovereign nation-state, or rebel republic, and authorized that state's authorities to tax Segovianos and wage war against the Marines and their collaborators. Sandino's nationalist vision and practice, the material necessities of waging war and rebellion, deep social inequalities, and longstanding traditions of warfare in Central America and Las Segovias led to a process of "patriotic pillage" and violence against "traitors". The insurgency and counterinsurgency ripped Segovian society apart, leaving in its wake a war-weary, traumatized, and more politically polarized society. After Sandino's assassination in 1934, indelible memories and deeply held social identities were outlawed and silenced. From early in the war, a discourse emerged among Nicaraguans that condemned Sandino's rebels as "bandits" for their crimes against property and person. After the war, Somoza built on that discourse to propagate a state-sanctioned master narrative that portrayed Sandino and his EDSN as bloodthirsty bandits and killers. Somoza sought to bury Sandino's legacy. But people remembered, told clandestine stories, and a subversive field of social memories endured. The national experience, like national identity – the lived experience of what it meant to *be Nicaraguan* – became increasingly polarized,

influenced, and altered in consequence of the epic drama of Sandino, Somoza, and the U.S. intervention.

8. *Unintended Consequences of Sandino's Rebellion: Accelerating the Centralization of the National State.* As Charles Tilly argues, states make war, and in the process, wars make states. Here I claim another counterfactual irony: that a key consequence of the process of war in Las Segovias was the accelerated centralization of organized coercive powers at the national state, in the institution of the Guardia Nacional. Since independence in 1821, the means of organized violence remained mainly in the hands of local-regional caudillos. The Civil War of 1926-27 further dispersed and decentralized control of organized coercion. But by 1934 – in less than eight years – the Guardia Nacional exercised an effective monopoly on violence across the whole of the national territory. The process of war accelerated and intensified the upward displacement of organized violence, and along with it the entire process of state-making, thereby facilitating Anastasio Somoza Garcia's consolidation of power in 1936 (see no. 11, below).
9. *Unintended Consequences of U.S. Intervention: Granada's Conservative Oligarchs Embrace Sandino and Authoritarian Corporatism, Ideological Basis of Somocismo.* Synopsizing an important argument in Michel Gobat's work, another irony of the war between Sandino and the Marines-Guardia was Conservative Granada oligarchs' and intellectuals' embrace of Sandino's brand of revolutionary nationalism, mainly by virtue of its consonance with their vision of an authoritarian-corporatist style of rule, in keeping with the rise of fascism in Europe in the interwar years. Somoza then appropriated that endorsement as a basis for his own political legitimacy. These Granada oligarchs' and intellectuals' embrace of Sandino's brand of nationalism helped to lay the ideological foundation for the Somoza dictatorship.
10. *Unintended Consequence of Sandino's Assassination: Creating a National Hero & Martyr.* This is perhaps the most obvious irony. Through the process of war, Sandino created a win-win situation for his vision of Nicaraguan revolutionary nationalism. He would advance his revolutionary project dead or alive. Alive he would become an important power-broker. Dead he would become a national hero and martyr. His assassination in 1934 turned him into just that.
11. *Unintended Consequences of Creating a "Non-Partisan Constabulary" (the Guardia Nacional): The Somoza Dictatorship and Dynasty.* United States policymakers intended the Guardia Nacional as a "non-partisan constabulary" that would transcend the partisan, personalistic qualities of past national armies. Enormous efforts were expended toward that aim. Yet by 1936, Anastasio Somoza had turned the Guardia into his own personal army and the material basis of his dictatorial power. What was conceived as a professional, non-partisan national army became the cornerstone of more than four decades of dynastic dictatorship.

12. *Unintended Consequences of the Somoza Dynasty: The Sandinista Revolution of 1979.* It was never inevitable that the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional would overthrow the Somoza dynasty in July 1979 and launch the Sandinista Revolution. A modicum of moderation and compromise by the last of the three Somozas might well have led to a different outcome. But in the end, a revolutionary organization that took Sandino as its inspiration ended 43 years of dictatorial rule by the Somoza family and launched a leftist social revolution that has had ripple effects up to the present day. Just as Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement framed the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution as the final victory of the “delayed revolution” launched by José Martí in 1895, so too the Sandinistas in 1979 claimed the mantle of Sandino. The reelection of longtime Sandinista Daniel Ortega to the presidency in 2011 was only the most recent expression of the enduring legacy of the insurgency and counterinsurgency examined here.

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