Kidnapped Sandinista describes life with contras

Reporters Notebook

By Daniel J. Glenn

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architecture at M.I.T. where he worked as a volunteer architect for
five months. Today's article is the sixth in a series for
The Tech.

On my first trip to Nicaragua in 1983, I had an oppor-
tunity to interview a Sandinista soldier who fought as a
contra for nearly eight months. He was kidnapped by the
contra forces in December 1984 and forced to fight against
his own military,

Throughout seven years of war the US-backed contra
forces have had difficulty maintaining a force of more
than a few thousand men in their struggle to overthrow
the Sandinista government. As this interview illustrates
the contra have resorted to kidnapping to bolster their
forces.

Although this interview was conducted two years ago
the issues raised are highly relevant in light of the recent
signing of the Arias Peace Plan, the continued funding of
the contras by the US Congress, and the Iran-contra scan-
dal.

One aspect of the Arias Peace Plan requires that each
Central American government give amnesty in rebel in-
surgents. The Sandinistas have given amnesty to contra
fighters who turned themselves in since December 1, 1983. The sub-
ject of the interview, along with his three friends, were
among the many hundred of contra fighters who have received amnesty since that time.

Interview with a contra

The following is transcribed from a taped session on
Sept. 1, 1983:

Q: First of all, could you please introduce yourself and
describe your position in the Sandinista military?
A: My name is Jose Antonio Ramirez. I am 32 years old.
I worked for State Security in Recanencion . . . with a
small group of soldiers. We act as advance guard for mili-
tary troops, checking the positions and strength of contra
territorial forces.

Q: What were the circumstances that led to your capture
and consequent role as a contra?
A: I was walking along a mountain road near Jinotega on
The contra surrounded me and threatened to kill me . . .
(They accused me of being a spy for the Sandinistas.
Luckily we don't carry any identification so they believed
I was only a compass [German].)

I was then taken to Honduras with the contra . . . for
training, physical exercises and infantry training . . . I was
excellent above the rest of the soldiers (because of my militar
class) so I was quickly given positions of re-

Q: Please continue with your story after your training in
Nicaragua.
A: On the first mission we had two confrontations with the
Sandinista military.

The first confrontation was with the Simone Boliv
in San Francisco de Tal. This battle is a spe-
cial force that searches out the contra in the mountains.

I was forced to fight so I simply did what I had to do; it
was not voluntary.

We were ambushed by them on a road. We were able to
hold them off for one and a half hours of shooting.

The next day were ambushed again but this by BLI
(regular Sandinista soldiers). This time we killed a couple
of Sandinistas and captured two AK-47s.

After this fight we went back to Honduras for four
months, resting and waiting for supplies.

Q: How did you feel about fighting against your own mili-
ary?
A: I was forced to fight so I simply did what I had to do; it
was not voluntary.

They mix the more fanatic Sandinistas with the cap-
tured contra so that we were always being watched. I was
very afraid that they might kill me at any moment.

Q: How did you finally escape?
A: On our next mission into Nicaragua I planned an ex-
cape with three other campesinos. We waited until we
were back in the Jinotega region so we'd be on familiar
ground, and then fled during the night. We were followed
for four days and four nights by the contra. We finally
got away from them when by chance we passed close by a San-
dinista ambush. The contra that followed us were scared off by the Sandinistas.

We escaped with three backpacks filled with ammuni-
tion, three G-3's and one FAL [machine-guns].

Q: What sort of reception did the Sandinista give you
when you returned?
A: Very good . . . We first went to my house in Jinotega,
and then we wrote a letter to the local head of state secu-
rety, requesting that they come so we could turn ourselves
in. Four security officers came to my house . . . we were
taken to their headquarters and we were interrogated for
three hours about contra positions, supplies and so forth.

My three campesino friends had been frightened about
their fate, but within days they were offered jobs at a co-
e-operative farm. They were free to work there or go back
to their homes. I was given back my old job.

Q: What impression do you have of the contra after your
eight-month ordeal, and, did you at any time feel sup-
portive of their position?
A: I don't feel anything against the contra, because they
are mostly people who are mistaken or confused.

I would like to have the power to tell the Contra that they
should finish their war and come home.

While I was with the contra, my force did not do any-
things against civilians . . . but there are other groups of
contra that seek out civilians who work with the Sandinisa
t government and assassinate them . . . They kill little kids, women and men if they have any
connection with the government. A little boy in my village
was killed because his father was president of a farmer's
co-op . . .

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