



Prologue

Nicaragua is an astonishing country of volcanoes, expansive lakes, wide rivers, numerous Pacific and Caribbean beaches, mountains dotted with rows of coffee, and plains with cattle and cowboys. It is also a country that has suffered serious political turmoil and armed conflict. Its people are warm, hospitable, courteous and independent. But they will rise up in anger when their way of life, their culture, their well-being, their individual freedom is threatened.

Beginning in 1936 the Somoza family took control of Nicaragua. In that year, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, then Commander of the National Guard, seized power. He was followed first by his son Luis, then by son Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The 1972 earthquake that devastated Managua was followed immediately by an outpouring of international relief aid. Much of the aid went into the Somoza family coffers. This particular event galvanized stronger opposition to the dictatorship.

The FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) was born in 1961 with a Marxist foundation and political philosophy. Support for the FSLN became more wide-based, not for its political aim, but in spite of that objective. In 1978 Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the editor of *La*

Prensa, was assassinated. The newspaper had been highly critical of the Somoza rule, and the murder was widely attributed to Somoza. The assassination created a martyr for the opposition to the dictatorship. Businessmen, trade unions, non-aligned conservatives and liberals joined with the FSLN in an armed insurrection. The Somoza dynasty was over by July 1979.

The FSLN and supporters formed a five person ruling junta, composed of three Sandinistas and two outside the party. The Sandinistas consolidated their power in the true communist tradition, organizing along the Cuban model with Cuban hands-on direction. Trade unions and rural worker organizations were mandated for Sandinista control. Strikes were barred. Sandinista Defense Committees were established in every neighborhood, the eyes and ears of the government. The Sandinistas assumed total control of the army, electoral council, and judiciary. The two non-Sandinista members of the ruling junta resigned after only one year.

As the repression and control of citizens' lives grew – price controls, enforced cooperatives, favorable treatment of Sandinista party members, etc. – the emergence of the counter-revolutionary Contra movement began. At first many of the ex-National Guard were in the forefront of the Contra movement which began along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border. As the Contra forces grew and leadership was centralized, the ex-National Guard element was largely replaced.

With the growth of a Cuban-inspired revolution in Central America, Soviet military supplies arriving weekly in Nicaragua, and the transshipment of military supplies to the revolutionaries in El Salvador through Nicaragua, the U.S. became alarmed. Support for the

Contras in terms of dollars and military equipment was authorized by the U.S. Congress. Air bases in El Salvador, Honduras, and later Costa Rica became the aerial re-supply bases for the Contra forces operating within Nicaragua.

By 1988 the economy of Nicaragua was collapsing and aid to the Sandinistas from Russia and other Soviet-bloc countries was becoming unreliable. The U.S. Congress had refused to pass a bill that would continue military aid to the Contras, and these factors plus international pressure for the two factions to reach an accord resulted in the Sapoa agreement. The agreement provided for a cease fire, the acceptance of a disarmament plan by the Contras, with Sandinista guarantees of return of exiles without penalty, freedom of expression, peaceful dissent, and non-interference in the political process of returning to a democratic form of government, including free elections.

The accord was enacted slowly, as the cease fire was broken on occasion, and the Sandinistas cracked down on the opposition at times, but the economy continued to deteriorate and military aid to both sides was disappearing. In 1989, Daniel Ortega, confident that he would win the presidential election, set the election date for February 25, 1989. A number of anti-Sandinista candidates emerged, and it became clear that Ortega would win the election unless one candidate was chosen to represent the opposition. That candidate was Violeta Chamorro, widow of the martyred *La Prensa* publisher, and herself a Sandinista junta member in the first year of Sandinista rule until she left the party.

The Sandinista political machine was well funded and Ortega appeared in huge and well-planned and well orchestrated rallies. Hundreds of Sandinista political volunteers ranged

throughout the country to promote their candidate. Thousands of spectators were brought into the rallies in long convoys of buses and trucks. In contrast, Chamorro's appearances were much less publicized and not particularly well attended, and her campaign funds were only a fraction of that available to Daniel Ortega. Her defeat and Ortega's win seemed inevitable. But when the votes were counted, Ortega was soundly defeated, garnering only 42% of the vote to Chamorro's 55%, to nearly everyone's surprise.

The success of the Contra counter-revolution is evident. It forced concessions from the FSLN, and perhaps most importantly, resulted in the first free elections.

This story is based on the times and many events in Nicaragua during the 1980's. Much of what is described is based on historical fact, e.g., there was a Point West air strip in the Guanacaste Province of Costa Rica on the Santa Elena Peninsula; a C-123 was shot down in Nicaragua by a missile on the same date and same location used in this story. On the other hand, the story itself and the characters portrayed are fictional.