

## Part Three: COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Truly, Ardschunas, your pity is exceedingly ridiculous. Why do you speak of friendship and relationship? Why of men? Relations, friends, men, beasts or stones, all are one. The principle of everything is eternal; what value has all else? You as a Schatrias, a man of the cast of warriors, are doomed to the combat. Therefore do battle. A fearful carnage will be the result. So be it. To-morrow the sun will shine as today, and the eternal principle will continue to subsist. Beyond that all is illusion.

(An old Sanskrit poem).

## 20. Wall Street Connection

Simultaneous with the savage civil war in Nicaragua, a bloodless power struggle among the Transit Company magnates raged in New York. Early in 1854, Vanderbilt began running his Independent Opposition Line of steamers to California via Panama, bent on ruining the Nicaragua Transit in the hands of Morgan and Garrison. But the shorter distance and faster voyage by way of Nicaragua, gave the latter an advantage which Vanderbilt could not overcome. The cheapness of their equipment also helped to lower expenses, and enabled them to withstand the stiff Panama competition. Vanderbilt was forced to change tactics by midsummer.

In August, he bought the *Uncle Sam* and *Yankee Blade* from his partner, Mr. Mills, which made him sole owner of the Opposition Line. He then turned around and sold them at a much higher price to his competitors, who eagerly allowed him to make a good profit in order to ease his withdrawal from the field. The *Uncle Sam* and *North Star* went to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (Panama line), and the *Yankee Blade* to the Nicaragua Transit. On part payment for the latter, Vanderbilt received 5,000 shares of Transit stock, which he quietly added to 15,000 shares he bought at bargain prices before the deal was announced and Nicaragua stock rose in the market.

Upon the withdrawal of Vanderbilt's competition, the Nicaragua and Panama companies reached an agreement by which the price of passage and rates of freight were largely increased. A new schedule was put in operation in late October, by which the Nicaragua and Panama steamers left on alternate weeks.

The picture was rosy for the Nicaragua Transit Company

at the end of 1854. During the year, after paying expenses, it had made a clear profit of about a million dollars, and much higher profits were expected in the future. On its last trip of the year, the *Uncle Sam* arrived in San Francisco with five hundred passengers on December 20, 1854.

Nonetheless, under the management of Charles Morgan, no dividend was distributed to the stockholders and Nicaragua Transit stock plunged in Wall Street to a new low of \$13 per share on December 31st. According to the *New York Herald*, the depression was produced by the underhanded machinations of the likes of Vanderbilt and Morgan:

MONEY MARKET --The depreciation in Nicaragua is not understood in the street. There is some mystery about it. . . . These great and sudden fluctuations can easily be produced in Wall street, between certain brokers. . . . The game today was carried on between a heavy bear operator and some of his secret wire-pullers.

The transactions were made at prices previously agreed upon, the stock transferred to the buyers, and immediately transferred back again to the sellers. In the same way they could just as easily have fixed upon 10%, as 13 or 14.<sup>1</sup>

Although roughly 40,000 shares of Nicaragua Transit changed hands in Wall Street each month during that fall and winter, Vanderbilt didn't succeed in his attempt to displace Morgan as majority stockholder. Consequently, the Commodore tried a new trick. On March 10, 1855, he transferred one hundred shares to his son-in-law Daniel B. Allen, who upon becoming a stockholder, immediately proceeded to file in court a bill of complaint against the President, Directors and Agents of the Accessory Transit Company of Nicaragua.

It was a document of frightful length, and had obviously been written over many weeks. Allen alleged in this paper

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<sup>1</sup>"Money Market," *New York Herald*, December 31, 1854, p.7, c.2.

that the agents, officers, and directors had been fraudulently misappropriating the money of the company; that they illegally issued 40,000 shares of capital stock to purchase the Vanderbilt line of steamers in 1852; that Morgan and Garrison were incompetent to act as agents because of adverse interests and want of integrity; that they received exorbitant salaries of \$100,000 and \$60,000 per annum, respectively, and unwarrantable commissions; that Joseph L. White was paid some \$10,000 per annum for services purely imaginary, etc. The *Herald* commented:

. . . That the whole affair will end in smoke no one can doubt; and in the meantime we expect to see the market value of the stock enhanced. These matters are too transparent to attract much attention, and the courts and lawyers are the only parties who are likely to derive any benefit from this.<sup>2</sup>

The price of the stock declined temporarily; upwards to 3,500 shares were sold in one day; a lot of 1,600 shares was sold for cash on April 5, but Vanderbilt's ruse again failed to make him majority stockholder. And while beating back Vanderbilt's latest attempt to regain control of the Transit Company, Morgan broke off the agreement with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company which had turned out to be disadvantageous to the Nicaragua line. High fares had resulted in falling off of business, and the completion of the Panama railroad in February, 1855 tended to leave Nicaragua with a shrinking portion of the profits.

Morgan slashed fares to one half in March, and in June he stiffened competition by scheduling steamer departures on the same days of his rival. The *Herald* pointed out that the reduction in prices would be of great impetus to travel, and to the advantage of the Nicaragua line, because "it can run so much cheaper than the other line that it can make money

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1855, p. 590, c.1.

while the other is not paying expenses."<sup>3</sup> The Pacific Mail Steamship Company advanced proposals for a new agreement, but Morgan was in no hurry to come to terms with Panama. The Nicaragua steamers were again full of travellers, more than ever before: the *Sierra Nevada* arrived in San Francisco with 847 passengers on May 26.

In July, while doing a large and profitable business, Morgan issued no report and distributed no dividend to the stockholders. Despite such irregularities, a sudden increased demand for Nicaragua Transit stock sustained higher prices in Wall Street throughout the summer, as investors in the Panama Railroad and the Pacific Steamship Company also bought Nicaragua Transit stock in a vain attempt to gain control of all three companies. During July and August, the Money Market column in the *Herald* registered diverse manipulations and maneuvers with the Nicaragua Transit stock on Wall Street.

Nicaragua Transit sales at the Stock Exchange rose from 8,375 shares in May to 31,550 in July; 31,605 in August, and 35,465 in September; prices jumped from a low of 15-1/2 to a high of 20-3/4 per share, to the profit of Morgan, White, and fellow directors who controlled the transactions from behind the scenes. When a new arrangement between the rival companies was announced in September, the *Herald* reminded investors that "The Nicaragua Company is a very profitable concern to its officers, agents, and employees generally, but stockholders have rather a poor look for profits."<sup>4</sup>

Thereafter, Nicaragua Transit was not plentiful in the market. The new agreement between the rival companies was signed in New York on October 10, 1855. It fixed fares and services, and it pooled the receipts of both lines for any excess of passengers, to be equally divided after deducting excess expenses. Once the agreement was signed, Morgan

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1855, p. 547, c.2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1855, p.7, c.2.

called a meeting of the stockholders, but prior to the meeting, held on October 15th, he stepped down from the presidency, thus averting embarrassing questions about his management of the company.

On the eve of the gathering, the *Northern Light* brought to New York the news from Nicaragua up to October 5th, showing that Walker was in complete control of the transit road in the isthmus of Rivas. The new president, Thomas Lord, made a few remarks to the stockholders on the bright future of the company. A Company agent, just returned from Nicaragua, spoke on how the Company had deemed it its duty to oppose Kinney, whose followers had been reduced to five men, and how it wished to convince the Nicaraguan government that it neither aided nor abetted any filibuster schemes:

Letters from Col. Walker and J. N. Scott, Esq., were read, confirming the statements made above. Col. Walker, in speaking of Kinney, says "his race is run." The agent of the company also stated that Col. Walker had on every occasion expressed his desire and manifested his disposition to serve the company in any manner within his power, having oftentimes provided an escort for the company's special train, etc. Altogether, the condition of things in Nicaragua is favorable to the company's interests, and must continue so from necessity, whatever political party may hold the governmental rein in that region.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Lea, the Secretary, then read a concise statement of the Company's debts--\$259,854, and assets--\$2,749,684, counting over \$300,000 in cash. Yet, the suspicious absence of the long overdue account of the expenditures and receipts was instantly felt in Wall Street, where Nicaragua Transit stock promptly declined after the meeting. At this point, the

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<sup>5</sup>"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, October 16, 1855, p.8, c.3.

arrival of news about a rise in interest rates in London and Paris, and a great deal of commercial uneasiness in Europe related to the Crimean War, produced a panic in Wall Street. During the ensuing weeks, Nicaragua Transit was severely affected by the general drop in prices, again plunging below 14 early in November.

In the midst of that financial crisis, the Transit Company faced the task of raising \$115,000 by December 1st in order to cancel the debt incurred with Vanderbilt a year earlier, when he had withdrawn from the field. Actually, the Company met its obligation to Vanderbilt in time, while Morgan and a few associates made more money for themselves: they personally lent the money to the Company by buying bonds at less than par, payable in six months, and safely secured by the ships *Northern Light* and *Star of the West*, worth several times the value of the loan. According to the *Herald*:

The Company's worst enemies are in the Board of Management . . . There have been fine pickings in the way of salaries and commissions, and so far the entire concern has been managed solely for the benefit of a few individuals, who are rapidly extracting its very life blood. . . . This is another iniquitous transaction on the part of the managers of the company. . . . There must be somewhere or some how a remedy for this wholesale financiering. . . . We can point out men in this community who have made from one quarter to half a million of dollars within the past few years out of this company . . . [somebody must] put a stop to the wholesale plundering going on in all departments of the company's business.<sup>6</sup>

The anxiously awaited report of income and expenses for the period from July 1, 1854 to October 6, 1855, was finally given to the Transit Company stockholders around November

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<sup>6</sup>"Money Market," *NY Herald*, 11/20/1855, p.2 c.6; 12/4/1855, p.3 c.2.

20th. It was so condensed and deficient, that it conveniently hid much more than it disclosed. The entire operations of the passenger, freight, and treasure traffic were given in a lump sum, as follows:

--Cash received from Messrs. Morgan, Garrison & Templeton, agents of steamships [in New York, San Francisco and New Orleans, respectively]: \$1,149,235.15.

The *Herald* denounced it severely and repeatedly, revealing a number of dishonorable practices of the Transit Company management, whose "private interests lie like an incubus on the top of it," having "shuffled the interests of the stockholders to the bottom, or out of sight."<sup>7</sup> As might be expected, in that setting, the interests of Nicaragua were invariably lower and more invisible than those of the stockholders.

Throughout the Nicaraguan revolution of 1854, the Transit Company simply abstained from paying either faction any dues, thus continuing its unscrupulous course of previous years. At long last, when the fortunes of war briefly improved for Granada, the Legitimist authorities renewed frantic efforts to collect the 10% of profits stipulated in the charter. Early in May, 1855, Mr. Cortlandt Cushing, Company agent at Virgin Bay, finally advanced a small "loan" of between eight and nine thousand dollars to the Government. And on the 9th of June, President José María Estrada appointed two commissioners, Messrs. Rafael García Tejada and Gabriel Lacayo, duly empowered to settle all differences between the Government and the Company.

The commissioners, accompanied by Cushing, proceeded to New York and entered into yet another round of fruitless talks with Mr. Joseph L. White. Their final proposal, on the 2nd of August--\$40,000 for past dues and a capitation tax of two dollars for adult and one dollar for child passenger

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, November 22, 1855, p.6, c.1; 26, p.6, c.4.



thereafter--received no satisfactory reply from White.

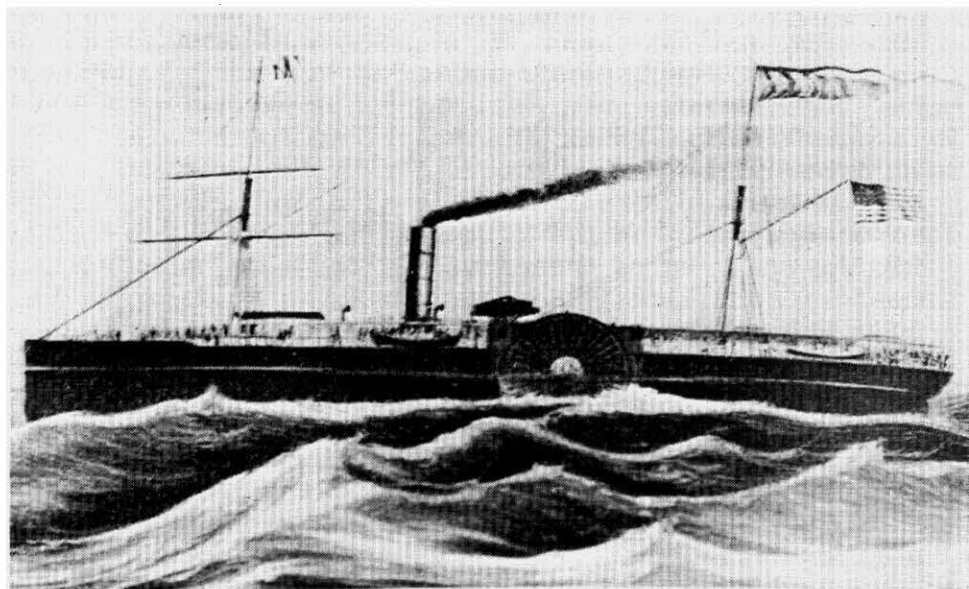
Cushing returned to his post at Virgin Bay in time to witness the rout of Guardiola by Walker on September 3rd and the subsequent complete control of the transit road by the filibusters. Walker then approached the agent with his powers from President Castellón, which authorized him to settle all differences and outstanding accounts between the Government and the Accessory Transit Company. Cushing promptly wrote to White in New York for instructions, and the latter lost no time in sending his reply, with pertinent advice on how the Company would aid Walker in order to cash in on his success.

White's letter makes it appear that up to that moment White had no connection with the Walker venture.<sup>8</sup> It was only after Walker's victory at Virgin Bay that White jumped at the opportunity of using the filibuster to advance his own plans for the conquest of Nicaragua. Furthermore, his letter to Cushing, dated Oct. 2, must have left New York on the *Star of the West* of the 5th, and arrived at Virgin Bay by the *San Carlos* on the 19th, much too late to influence the occurrences that had led to the capture of Granada by Walker on the 13th.

It seems that during his visit to New York in August, Cushing became fully cognizant of White's plans for the conquest of Nicaragua and of his favorable view of Walker. Hence, abetted by Garrison's agent, C. J. Macdonald, Cushing allowed Walker to seize the steamer *Virgin* on October 11, 1855, thus carrying out some of the letter's instructions even before he received them. As suggested by White in the letter, Walker also seized the four six-pounders and other arms carried in the hold of the steamer: military supplies which had previously belonged to the foreign contingent stationed by the Transit Company at Castillo to block Kinney's way in July. White's designs, however, were frustrated because Cushing neglected to exact from Walker the vital, solemn pledge for the unqualified preservation of the Charter.

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<sup>8</sup>See letter in Appendix B.



**Star of the West**  
*"was delayed a week at San Juan . . ." (p. 245)*

The *Star of the West* was delayed a week at San Juan del Norte, waiting for the passengers from California detained at Granada until the afternoon of the 23rd. Because of this, all tidings from the fall of Granada to the Walker-Corral treaty reached New York together on November 3rd. The rejoicing that the unexpected Walker victory produced among the directors of the Transit Company was promptly transmitted to the stockholders in a public announcement:

The President and directors of the Accessory Transit Company are enabled, at last, to congratulate you on the restoration of peace in Nicaragua. . . . The revolution is now over. Order prevails again. The new government, friendly to the company and respecting its vested rights, will at all times be ready to protect it should protection be required, and we shall no longer have to invoke the aid of our own government. . . .<sup>9</sup>

The secret understanding between filibusters and financiers for the subjugation of Nicaragua was too plain to overlook, and a number of newspapers called attention to it. Even the *Washington Evening Star*, presumed to speak the sentiments of the administration, pointed out that the Transit Company's complicity was the crucial factor for Walker's success. Moreover, the altered Nicaraguan scenario had far reaching repercussions in Wall Street, where the aroused sanguine expectations of the Transit Company management brought about a reversal of policy that accelerated stockjobbing.

With seemingly bright prospects in sight, the recent arrangements with the Panama line suddenly appeared foolish to White, Morgan, Lord, and associates, and so they set about to annul them. A transparent excuse for breaking the agreement was readily found when the Pacific Steamship

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<sup>9</sup>"To the Stockholders of the Accessory Transit Company," *New York Herald*, November 5, 1855, p.1, c.6.

Company refused to lend Nicaragua Transit \$100,000 to pay Vanderbilt. A renewed struggle for control of the Accessory Transit Company rapidly raised its stock from the depression into which it had fallen in October: 33,070 shares were sold in Wall Street in November, at increasing prices that reached \$17 by the end of the month.

The business of the company was buoyant, too, with more than two thousand passengers using its steamers during November, at rates ranging up to \$125 for steerage and \$275 for the main saloon. Transit facilities were being improved, and a new record was set when eastbound travellers crossed the isthmus inside of 27 hours on November 18. On arrival in New York, on the *Star of the West* ten days later, they brought the welcome news that there had been no sickness during the entire voyage. That steamer also brought the news of the shooting of Corral and a letter from Parker H. French, Minister of Finance in the Walker-Rivas government, which startled Joseph L. White and associates:

Department of Hacienda. Granada, November 12, 1855.  
To the President and Directors of the Accessory Transit Company--

This government requires that you shall, immediately on the receipt of this, appoint two commissioners, under article 28 of your charter, to meet two others appointed by this government, here in Granada, so that an immediate settlement may be made of the differences now existing between your company and the government of Nicaragua.

Yours, &c., (Signed) PARKER H. FRENCH.  
Minister of Hacienda, Commissary of War.<sup>10</sup>

Directed by White, President Thomas Lord informed the Walker-Rivas government on December 8 that the Transit Company could not comply with their demand to appoint

<sup>10</sup>"Nicaragua Transit Company," *Ibid.*, March 21, 1856, p.4, c.6.

Commissioners because they had already been appointed by the previous Nicaraguan government and the Company. Simultaneously, White wrote to Cushing, "threatening the authorities unless they settled with the company on its own terms."<sup>11</sup> And Messrs. Lord and White soon had a personal exchange of views with Parker H. French when the former Minister of Hacienda arrived in New York aboard the *Northern Light*, on December 11, to present his credentials as representative of Nicaragua in Washington.

Know-Nothing French and Transit Company White were both trying to use Walker to advance their own interests, but it was Walker who used the Transit Company and the Know-Nothings to advance his own plans. Soon after capturing Granada in October, Walker wrote to his intimate friend, A. Parker Crittenden, of San Francisco, saying that any arrangements he might make with Garrison to get five hundred men into Nicaragua would be fully approved.<sup>12</sup> Walker's other intimate friend, Edmund Randolph, accompanied by Charles J. Macdonald and by W. R. Garrison, son of Transit Company agent C. K. Garrison, arrived at San Juan del Sur on the *Sierra Nevada* from San Francisco on December 17.

Randolph and Crittenden were advancing Walker's plans apart from White and French, and without regard to their separate particular designs.

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<sup>11</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 149.

## 21. The Know-Nothing Connection

Towards the end of 1855, Walker's main concern was to secure enough American "colonists" to strengthen his hold on Nicaragua. His original force of 58 *Vesta* filibusters had grown in six months with the additions of 35 brought by Gilman, 62 by French and Fry, 46 by Kewen, 26 by Fabens, and 30 more recruited in Nicaragua, providing a total of nearly 260 fighting men who had enrolled in Walker's ranks by the middle of November. Subtracting the casualties in the battle of Rivas, deaths from illness, executions, banishments, discharges from the army, and absentees on leave, the roster of troops stationed in Granada, listed by *El Nicaraguense*, November 17, 1855, contained 213 names. Arriving on that date at San Juan del Sur from San Francisco, the *Cortes* was said to have added "not more than 4 or 5 men, who intended to join the party of Walker."<sup>1</sup>

Walker's filibuster army was then roughly 220 men strong on the 23rd of November, when the Walker-Rivas government issued a "Colonization" decree, offering inducements of "free donations" of 250 acres of public lands to each new "colonist" entering the country.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, Walker sent agents to the United States to recruit "colonists," that is to say, soldiers for his army. Col. E. J. C. Kewen went to San Francisco; Col. Parker H. French to New York; Col. Thomas F. Fisher to New Orleans. Thereupon, that trio of Know-Nothing slavery agents set to work on their tasks, carrying out the plan outlined by their confederate Col. Birkett D. Fry in his

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<sup>1</sup>"Departure of the Steamers," *Alta*, November 6, 1855, p.2, c.1.

<sup>2</sup>"Colonization," *El Nicaraguense*, November 24, 1855, p.2, c.3.

letter of November 13th.

When Col. Kewen left Granada, *El Nicaraguense* told of his mission: "We understand that the Col. is empowered by this Government to raise large sums of money and men; and will return immediately, with at least five hundred volunteers."<sup>3</sup> Upon arrival in San Francisco, the *Alta* informed:

Col. Kewen, with several of his associates that went down from here with him, have returned for the purpose of raising a force of one thousand or twelve hundred men, to repair immediately to Nicaragua. They intend to purchase or charter a ship or steamer for the purpose of transporting them to the newly established republic.<sup>4</sup>

The steamer would also be used "to transport troops, provisions and munitions of war for the approaching contest with Guatemala."<sup>5</sup> It was said that, to raise the large sums of money and men, Walker had provided Kewen with a million dollars in the bonds of the new Republic. The bonds, soon printed in San Francisco on expensive bank note paper, depicted "a fine engraving of Virgin Bay; a head of Washington; an American Eagle; and other pictures emblematic of commerce."<sup>6</sup>

The judicial authorities promptly notified Kewen that they would not permit him to fit out and sail from San Francisco an armed vessel for Nicaraguan service. Even so, additional items appeared in the press, concerning the purchase of the Transit Company steamer *Brother Jonathan* by Kewen, and it was disclosed, early in February, 1856, that negotiations had broken off on the receipt of the news that President Pierce

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<sup>3</sup>"Departures for California," *Ibid.*, November 17, 1855, p.1, c.2.

<sup>4</sup>"Recruits for Walker," *Alta*, December 5, 1855, p.2, c.1.

<sup>5</sup>"A Nicaraguan War Steamer," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.2.

<sup>6</sup>"Nicaragua Bond," *San Francisco Herald*, January 8, 1856, p.2, c.1.

did not recognize the Walker-Rivas regime.

Thwarted in his efforts to acquire a steamer, Kewen used the bimonthly vessels of the Transit Company line instead. He collaborated with Crittenden, who on instructions from Walker had reached an agreement with Garrison for carrying five hundred filibusters to Nicaragua. The first contingent, forty-two adventurers under Mr. Calvin O'Neal [or O'Neil], of Stockton, had sailed aboard the *Uncle Sam* on November 20th, "well supplied with arms and ammunition, which were conveyed aboard the steamer in the form of baggage, so as not to attract any notice."<sup>7</sup>

On December 6, the *Sierra Nevada* transported from San Francisco 125 additional filibusters, accompanied by Edmund Randolph, Charles J. Macdonald, and W. R. Garrison. In addition, the ship carried 450 pounds of gunpowder, 93 muskets, 60 colt revolvers, and several rifles. The spirit of emigration to Central America was at its peak: there were some four hundred persons in town, mostly from the interior, "longing for a habitation under the protection of Col. Walker. . . . Those left behind will await another opportunity to embark for the attractive scenes of Nicaragua. The contemplated arrangements of Col. Kewen may have determined many of those who otherwise would have gone yesterday."<sup>8</sup>

Thereafter, Kewen's name was repeatedly mentioned in the press, as he was actively engaged in providing reinforcements and supplies for Walker. On December 20, the *Cortes* transported 124 recruits under Captain Mark B. Skerrett, appointed by Col. Kewen in command of the company. On January 5th, Kewen sent to Nicaragua about 120 filibusters on the *Uncle Sam*. Among them went Col. William Alphonso Sutter, son of the famous California pioneer John Augustus Sutter, leading a company of 62 men from the interior. Finally, on the *Sierra Nevada* of January 21st, Kewen

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<sup>7</sup>"More Recruits for Walker," *Alta*, November 21, 1855, p.2, c.5.

<sup>8</sup>"Departures for Nicaragua," *Ibid.*, December 6, 1855, p.2, c.2.



personally led another contingent of 125 recruits for Walker.

Counting the previous Gilman (35), French/Fry (62) and Kewen (46) contingents, when the *Sierra Nevada* arrived at San Juan del Sur, February 3, 1856, the Transit Company steamers had taken nearly 700 filibusters from San Francisco to Nicaragua, without the authorities making any attempt to stop them. But even if they had tried, nothing could have been done, for 500 recruits had through tickets to New York, furnished gratis by Garrison as per agreement with Crittenden, and the others had tickets financed by the Know-Nothing slavery group.

Upon becoming Minister of Hacienda, French immediately began to cash in on his associates' "investment." The government had a monopoly on the sale of tobacco, hides, and spirits; and French found sizable amounts of these commodities in the public stores. Moreover, he laid heavy contributions of from \$200 to \$12,000 each on the merchants of Granada, and issued a decree that "parties on whom contributions have been laid not being able to pay the same in money, goods are to be taken from them, at half the original cost."<sup>9</sup> Official British intelligence from Greytown, transmitting the merchants' angry protests, recorded that within a few days French had taken and shipped large quantities of such goods to the United States.

Kewen's bond scheme produced additional cash for Walker's Know-Nothing associates. According to rumor, \$250,000 were derived from the negotiation of these bonds in San Francisco. Yet, Kewen didn't disburse any hard currency to pay his \$600 to Mr. Butler, the lithographer who printed the certificates. In lieu of money, Walker's agents issued abundant but worthless "Nicaragua scrip." Towards the end of January, 1856, some ten million dollars of scrip were in market: "Parker H. French is entrusted with the greatest portion of it, and the balance is in San Francisco, or floating

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<sup>9</sup>Mosquito Correspondence, FO 53-35, p. 141; also pp. 138-166 and FO 53-39, pp. 21-28, Public Record Office, London.

about Central America."<sup>10</sup>

Walker made no mention, in *The War*, of French's and Kewen's considerable financial deals. He merely recalled that French's rapacity made him dreaded by the people of the country, for which reason it was necessary to get rid of him. So, after serving barely a month as Minister of Hacienda and Commissioner of War in Granada, "the honorable" Parker H. French was sent as Minister to Washington, sailing on the *Northern Light* from San Juan del Norte on December 3rd.

The public climate awaiting Walker's envoy was not good. On November 28, the *Star of the West* had brought to New York the startling news of the shooting of Corral and of Wheeler's hasty recognition of the Walker-Rivas government, contrary to the express instructions from Marcy, who on Nov. 8 had written to Wheeler: "The President instructs you to abstain from any official intercourse with the persons now exercising a temporary control over some parts of Nicaragua. In such a dubious state of affairs you cannot be expected to act in your official character until you receive instructions from your government."<sup>11</sup>

Marcy's natural anti-filibuster posture was strengthened by Walker's open letter of protest published by the press in September. Marcy's friend, Joseph L. White, was also irritated with Walker after receiving French's peremptory request for the naming of commissioners. Hence, early in December, White supported Marcy's anti-Walker stand and the latter prevailed in the Cabinet over the filibustering propensities of the Secretaries of War and the Navy, Davis and Dobbin.

On December 8, Transit Company President Thomas Lord replied to the Walker-Rivas government, rejecting its request to name commissioners, and on the same date, United States

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<sup>10</sup>"Nicaragua Scrip," *San Francisco Bulletin*, 1/30/1856, p.3, c.2.

<sup>11</sup>Marcy to Wheeler, Washington, November 8, 1855, M-219-10, The National Archives, Washington, D.C. That letter should have gone on the *Star of the West* that left New York on November 9 and arrived at San Juan del Norte on the 19th, but it suffered a suspicious delay along the way before it arrived at Granada in mid December.

President Franklin Pierce issued a proclamation against Walker's Nicaragua filibusters. It was a repeat performance of the January 18, 1854 proclamation against Walker in Lower California. As Bennett pointed out in the *Herald*: "the proclamation of the President of the United States against the Nicaragua filibusters . . . is behind time. It comes out after the filibusters have gone in."<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of President Pierce's proclamation, French landed in New York on December 11. When ready to proceed to Washington, on the 13th, a telegraphic dispatch stopped him in his tracks:

At a Cabinet council held to-day, the Administration positively determined not to recognize the government established in Nicaragua, under Walker's auspices, nor to receive French as Minister from that country. It is expected here that French will be arrested and held to answer charges of having committed crimes in the United States, previously to his departure from there.<sup>13</sup>

The "crimes" French had committed in Texas during his trip to California in 1850, now came to haunt him, in addition to his dismissal as Walker's envoy: in particular, he had purchased supplies from the San Antonio Army Post for his "Overland Express Train," and paid for them with drafts that were returned unpaid. Ever resourceful, he thereafter used to good account his forced stay in New York to carry out his important mission of sending reinforcements to Walker.

A couple of meetings with Joseph L. White sufficed for French to revoke the powers of the commissioners and to settle the pressing problem with the Transit Company. White rapaciously obtained from Walker's Minister an extension of

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<sup>12</sup>"President Pierce's Proclamation Against the Nicaragua Filibusters," *New York Herald*, December 16, 1855, p.4, c.4.

<sup>13</sup>"Walker's Government Ignored--French Expected to be Arrested," *New Orleans Picayune*, December 14, 1855, p.4, c.3.

the Company's charter for almost a hundred years. In return, the Company would transport five-hundred men to Nicaragua at \$20 a head, to be charged to the government's account, and would also carry supplies "proven to be for Walker's government."<sup>14</sup> Under the agreement, part of the men would sail on the *Northern Light*, December 24th, and the remainder on the *Star of the West*, January 9th.

Recruiting began in earnest on December 17th with the publication of newspaper ads offering grants of land and cheap passage at \$20 a head to anyone desiring to emigrate to Nicaragua. In his suite at the St. Nicholas Hotel, French was visited by hundreds of persons, anxious to learn about his new country. Among the callers was Gen. William Cazneau, special agent (1853-55) of the United States to Santo Domingo, whom the press considered to be plotting for the annexation of the island republic to the Union. French also met with representatives of the Cuban Junta led by Don Domingo de Goicouría, sole successors to the López filibusters after the dissolution of the Cuban Liberating League and the resignation of General Quitman.

While in New York, French was accompanied by his father-in-law, Gen. Duff Green, prominent journalist-politician who had served as private agent of President Tyler (1841-45) and of the State Department at various times in Great Britain, France, Texas, and Mexico. On the 17th, French went to Washington. As became his station, the "Ambassador of the Buccaneers" travelled in grand style, well provided with "material aid. . . . Beside some \$5,000 in gold, it is said, he brought drafts for \$20,000 on the Transit Company, and he has opened a large account with the bankers in Washington."<sup>15</sup>

But Walker's ambassador did not come within hailing distance of the State Department. Rather, on the 19th he sent

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<sup>14</sup>"Money Market," *New York Herald*, January 8, 1856, p.5, c.1.

<sup>15</sup>"The 'Ambassador of the Buccaneers'," *Alta*, January 21, 1856, p.2, c.3; "From Washington," *New York Tribune*, December 25, 1855, p.6, c.1.

his private secretary with a message to Marcy, respectfully requesting an interview. Marcy's reply, two days later, was short and to the point, refusing to receive him.<sup>16</sup> French read Marcy's reply in New York, where he had hurried back on December 20th to superintend the sailing of emigrants to Nicaragua on the *Northern Light*. His agents soon gathered 350 recruits. No family man was taken; unmarried young men were preferred. They formed a regiment officered by Mexican War veterans and by Major Louis Schlessinger, a famous Hungarian exile who had served under Kossuth and López, and escaped from the Spanish penal fortress of Ceuta in 1852.

But all preparations ended in smoke when District Attorney John McKeon libelled the vessel for violation of the neutrality law. During a tumultuous scene at the wharf on the afternoon of the 24th, Joseph L. White directed Captain Tinklepaugh to take the *Northern Light* out to sea, in defiance of McKeon's orders. The revenue cutter *Washington* stopped it while passing Governor's Island, by firing a blank cartridge followed by a round shot just three feet from its bow. Fifty marines forthwith boarded the steamer, arrested several filibuster officers, and put on shore 189 expeditionists found without tickets. A *Herald* reporter called the rank and file "about the roughest specimens of humanity

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<sup>16</sup>"Department of State, Washington, December 21, 1855.--To Parker H. French, Esq., Washington: Sir-- Your letter to me of the 19th inst., with the enclosed copy of 'an autographed letter from the President of Nicaragua to the President of the United States of America,' has been received and laid before the President. I am directed by him to reply to your communication that he has not yet seen reasons for establishing diplomatic intercourse with the persons who now claim to exercise the political power in the State of Nicaragua.

Those who were chiefly instrumental in suspending or overthrowing the former government of that State were not citizens belonging to it, nor have those citizens or any considerable part of them, as far as is now known here, freely expressed their approval of, or acquiescence in the present condition of political affairs in Nicaragua. Until such shall be the case, the President does not deem it proper to receive you, or any one, as Minister to this government duly appointed by the supreme government of Nicaragua. I am, sir, your obedient servant, W. L. MARCY. "Official Correspondence," *New York Herald*, December 26, 1855, p.1, c.4.

that could be found in any quarter of the globe."<sup>17</sup> A New York police officer, speaking of them, said that they consisted for the most part of pocket-book droppers, sneak thieves, runners, hackmen, and vagabonds of the worst class in the city, and it was a great pity that they were not to be so easily got rid of.

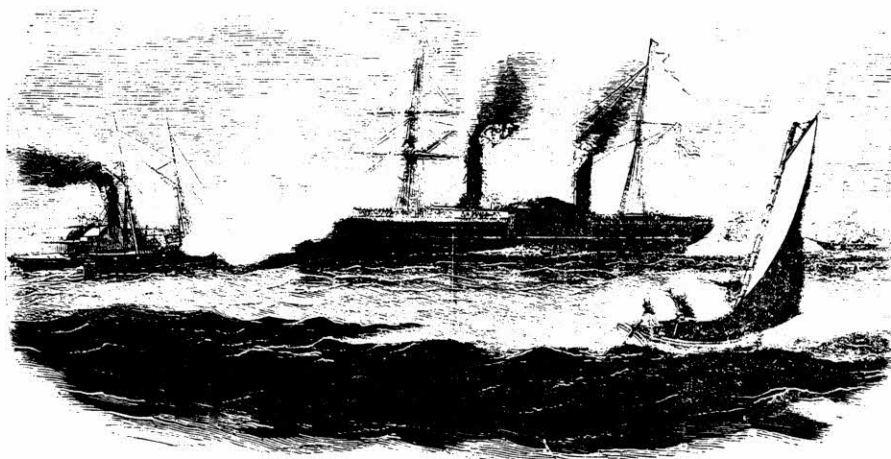
"The Nicaragua Excitement" filled the entire front page of the *Herald* on Christmas day and continued on the headlines until the *Northern Light* was allowed to depart on the 27th at dawn, after securing permission from President Pierce. Its remaining passengers were bound for California, but at least two of them planned to stop in Nicaragua: Francisco Alejandro Lainé, Cuban Junta agent, who went to Granada to arrange an alliance with Walker, and Major Louis Schlessinger, who escaped detention disguised as a crew member. Both were destined to play relevant roles in the future.

One of the filibuster officers detained in New York, William H. Allen, turned informer. His startling disclosures to the authorities were blazoned by the *Tribune* on December 26th under a fitting caption: "Grand Scheme to Annex Cuba and San Domingo." It was said that irrefutable affidavits and documents showed that the Cuban Junta (and Gen. Cazneau) had commenced a widespread movement along the Atlantic seaboard of the United States:

. . . to send men and arms to Nicaragua, for the purpose of organizing an army in that State, to descend upon Cuba and San Domingo, and wrest them from their present possessors. After the consummation of this design, the parties interested in the movement propose to unite into one confederacy the State of Nicaragua and such other portions of Central America as may be acquired by conquest or otherwise, Cuba and San Domingo, and either to set up a separate republic, or to apply for admission into the American Union as Slave

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<sup>17</sup>"The Nicaragua Excitement," *Ibid.*, December 25, 1855, p.1, c.1.



### Northern Light

*"The revenue cutter Washington stopped her . . . by firing a blank cartridge followed by a round shot just three feet from her bow" (p. 255)*

States. . . . It is further alleged that Walker cares not a little for Nicaragua, any further than as she may prove serviceable as a gathering point for the invading army.<sup>18</sup>

Legal proceedings were then instituted in New York against several persons, charged with violation of the neutrality law; but Parker H. French escaped prosecution on direct orders from President Pierce. District Attorney McKeon informed him that the President did this in order that he should depart from the United States within a reasonable time. Evincing no intention of complying, French wrote back to McKeon on December 31st, solemnly denying having violated any such law.

At the start of the new year, Walker's one-armed Talleyrand was back in Washington, lobbying in the Capitol under the expert guidance of his father-in-law, veteran politician Gen. Duff Green. The press reported that French, "the representative of Nicaragua and a Southern republic," was warmly received by "a strong majority" in both houses of Congress. "His firm bearing and brilliant style of conversation captivates even the old fogies."<sup>19</sup>

A few days later, French was back in New York, attending to the shipment of emigrants by the *Star of the West* on the 9th. At the time of departure, the authorities arrested a fillbuster "professor of military tactics" and four "laborers," but allowed 125 others to go on their passage because the Transit Company called them "mechanics and laborers" employed for the completion of the wharf at Virgin Bay. Upon arrival at Virgin Bay ten days later, most of them formed the first contingent of the New York Regiment in Walker's Army.

In New York, on January 15th the Grand Jury rendered wholesale bills of indictment against the Nicaragua filibusters,

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<sup>18</sup>"Grand Scheme to Annex Cuba and San Domingo," *New York Tribune*, December 26, 1855, p.5, c.3.

<sup>19</sup>"News from Washington," *New York Herald*, January 3, 1856, p.4, c.3.



and the U.S. Marshal arrested French at the rooms of the Legation in the St. Nicholas Hotel. But within a half an hour, French was released on orders from Washington.

The *Northern Light* sailed with the second contingent of Walker's New York Regiment on January 24th. The authorities again searched the ship and detained several young men found without tickets. but two hundred emigrants bound for Nicaragua were allowed to go on. The dress and appearance of the passengers was superior to those who went by the previous steamer. Among them were merchants, professional men, mechanics and farmers, including some eighty recruits under the command of Captain J. Egbert Farnham. At San Juan del Norte they united with emigrants from New Orleans by the *Prometheus*; at Virgin Bay they met the California contingent brought by Kewen on the *Sierra Nevada*, and all together arrived in Granada, aboard the *San Carlos*, on the 6th of February, 1856.

The third member of the trio of Know-Nothing slavery agents, Col. Thomas F. Fisher, was one of the five men who arrived in Nicaragua on the *Cortes*, November 17, 1855. When Fisher, founder of the Know-Nothing Order in California, left for Nicaragua, the *Sacramento State Journal* remarked: "It is understood that he has gone to Nicaragua to purge the natives of their Catholicism, and to establish the principle that foreigners shall rule Nicaragua."<sup>20</sup>

Col. Fisher and Col. French left Granada together at the end of November; French proceeded on the *Northern Light* for New York, while Fisher went on the *Prometheus* to New Orleans, accompanied by *Vesta* veteran Ordnance Officer Ed. W. Rawle. Upon arrival on December 8, they opened an office on Royal street, next to the United States Court room, to recruit "emigrants" for Walker. Their first advertisement of the Nicaraguan Colonization Decree appeared in the *Picayune* on December 11.

Fisher and Rawle were in a friendly town. As reported by

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<sup>20</sup>"Expeditionists," *Democratic State Journal*, 11/8/1855, p.2, c.3.

the *New York Tribune's* correspondent, every man, woman, and child in that part of the country was favorable to Col. Walker's new Government. Moreover, upon receipt of instructions from New York, Transit Company agent W. C. Templeton reduced fares to less than half the former rates, and agreed to carry all emigrants sent by Fisher, charging their tickets to the Nicaraguan Government's account. Finally, New Orleans authorities made no attempt to stop them.

Under such favorable circumstances, the *Prometheus* sailed on December 26 with 86 men for Walker and 42 for Kinney. Upon arrival at San Juan del Norte, some of Kinney's men went on to Granada and joined Walker. But the *Daniel Webster*, on January 11, took only 43 emigrants which included 21 recruits under the command of Captain James Linton, several of whom were accompanied by their wives. And the number of emigrants carried by the *Prometheus* on January 26 was so insignificant that nobody cared to count them, and not even *El Nicaraguense* noticed their arrival in Granada.

In summary, the Fisher New Orleans effort fell short of 200 immigrants for Nicaragua--perhaps less than fifty recruits for Walker's army, in three steamers. Together with 300 from New York and 536 from California, they amounted to 1,000 "colonists" for Walker's Republic in two months: from December 1, 1855 to February 6, 1856. Added to the 265 men enrolled before December, the Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny had lured roughly 1,300 persons to his banner in nine months since sailing on the *Vesta* from San Francisco.

Meanwhile, both the scarcity of funds and a fatal epidemic simultaneously began to weaken Walker's efforts to build up his army. The obituaries of Henry Barrington, Caesar J. Ferrero, Lieut. Henry Grim, Capt. George R. Davidson, Capt. Robert W. Armstrong, Col. Charles H. Gilman, and others, in the pages of *El Nicaraguense* during December, were a prologue to the accelerating deaths that depleted Walker's forces in January. The unfolding story was captured by the *New York Tribune* in its February 3, 1856 Granada correspondence:

The Government is understood to be in a tight place for funds, and certain persons representing Walker in the States are empowered to negotiate a loan. Money is now a necessity. Not one of the soldiers has received a dime since the opening of the campaign, and there is much discontent and even insubordination among the troops on this subject. Two companies stationed at León had revolted, and refuse to do garrison duty until all arrearages of back pay have been settled. . . . Recruits continue to pour in from San Francisco and the States; between 400 and 500 arrived during last month.

A fearful epidemic, resembling yellow fever, has been killing off the army, and the recruits arriving have been necessary to fill up the gaps created by this terrible scourge. The mortality averaged six or seven per day, and was confined almost exclusively to the army. . . .

Gen. Walker had positive intelligence from Guatemala that Gen. Carrera had commenced a march upon Nicaragua with 2,000 men. It was presumed that Costa Rica would concert measures to act in concert with him, and every preparation is being made in Granada for active duty . . . In Granada business is completely stagnant. A cloud of desolation seems to hover over the place. The only active duty required of the troops is to bury their dead comrades.<sup>21</sup>

In *The War*, Walker mentions that in December "the cholera had appeared at Granada. The disease seemed to select those officers who were most capable and useful, and there were suspicions that the people of the town, mostly Legitimists, were not entirely ignorant of the cause which produced the deaths of leading Americans. Among the first victims of the disease were Capt. Davidson and Col. Gilman."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>"Nicaragua," *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1856, p.6, c.6.

<sup>22</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 158.

Both Gilman and Davidson were members of the tribunal that had condemned Corral, and Gilman had commanded the firing squad that executed the Nicaraguan general on the 8th of November. On reporting their deaths, the *Tribune* stated that "two of the officers who condemned Corral had been murdered."<sup>23</sup> The *Alta* put it this way:

We have heard it stated by a gentleman who came up in the *Sierra Nevada*, that it was the opinion at Granada, although nothing was said about it in *El Nicaraguense*, that the deaths of Col. Gilman, Capt. Davidson, and Lieut. Grim, were caused by poison, and that the Americans there are in constant fear of having their food and water poisoned by the natives.<sup>24</sup>

In such dire straits, Walker had to augment his forces: cash and men were urgently needed, but the Know-Nothing connection could contribute no more. After doing his share, French was being recalled from Washington, where his tainted reputation was detrimental to the Walker cause. Kewen and Fisher were back in Granada, after tapping California and New Orleans to the best of their ability. Once the five hundred men of the Crittenden agreement had been shipped, Garrison refused to carry any more filibusters from San Francisco unless their passage was paid for. The *Tribune* got it right: as always, "money is now a necessity."

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<sup>23</sup>"Miscellaneous," *New York Tribune*, January 30, 1856, p.7, c.1.

<sup>24</sup>"The Deaths in Nicaragua," *Alta*, January 6, 1856, p.2, c.2.

## 22. Money Is a Necessity

Walker did not acknowledge the Know-Nothing connection in *The War*; hence, he kept silent about the recruiting efforts of Kewen, French, and Fisher. His narrative concentrated instead on the activities of Crittenden and Randolph. On instructions from Walker, Crittenden had promised Garrison a new transit charter and the latter had furnished five hundred tickets as advance payment. Randolph's trip to Nicaragua in December, with Garrison's son, was for the purpose of drawing up the new charter. It was done in secret to allay suspicion, but it was announced in Granada that Randolph and Walker were drafting "a new constitution and general plan of government for the new Republic."<sup>1</sup>

Garrison told Morgan of his secret agreement with Walker. His letter travelled by the *Uncle Sam*, which left San Francisco on November 20. Morgan received the news in New York by the *Northern Light* on December 11, and immediately proceeded to dump his Transit Company shares on the market. Gobbling them up, Vanderbilt at last succeeded in regaining control of the Nicaragua line. On Dec. 21, Morgan sent in his resignation as director and agent of the company in New York; Vanderbilt was appointed director next morning, "to fill the vacancy," and soon assumed the agency and became president too.<sup>2</sup>

No sooner in control, Vanderbilt reached an agreement

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<sup>1</sup>"Edmund Randolph, Esq., in Nicaragua," *Aita*, 1/5/1856, p.2, c.2.

<sup>2</sup>"Commercial Matters," *NY Tribune*, 12/17/1855, p.8, c.2; 22, p.7, c.6; 1/5/1856, p.8, c.3; 24, p.7, c.6; "Money Market," *NY Herald*, 12/22/1855, p.3, c.5; 24, p.3, c.4; 1/7/1856, p.3, c.4; 2/8, p.3, c.3.

with the Panama line to work in harmony so as to reduce expenses and increase profits. The programme called for the running of both Atlantic lines by the Nicaragua Company, and both Pacific routes by the Mail Steamship Company. The Pacific Company would then run boats weekly to San Juan del Sur and Panama alternately, and the Nicaragua Company, in like manner, to San Juan del Norte and Aspinwall. The business of the Nicaragua route at San Francisco was to be transacted by the Pacific Company without charge. The gross receipts of both routes for passage and specie were to be divided--two thirds to the Pacific Company and one third to the Nicaragua Company. The rates of passage would be \$100 in the steerage and \$250 first cabin.

In order to carry out this arrangement, on the Atlantic side the U.S. Government mail contract had to be transferred from Law & Roberts to Vanderbilt. On March 7, 1856, the agreement was ready for signature but delayed by the non-completion of the mail arrangements at the capital. "Commodore Vanderbilt has recently returned from Washington," informed the *Tribune*, "where he found no obstacle to the arrangement excepting in Secretary Dobbin, but his scruples, it is believed, will be removed."<sup>3</sup>

While Vanderbilt was engrossed in his new scheme, W. R. Garrison arrived in New York on January 12 and informed Charles Morgan of the terms of the new transit grant privately arranged between Walker and Randolph in Granada. Morgan owned steamers on the Gulf trade, and quietly proceeded to make arrangements for his vessels to coal at Key West in preparation for his future Nicaragua route. Simultaneously, he made additional "short" sales of Nicaragua Transit through third parties.

At that time, Nicaragua remained in the low 20's, and the Commodore confidently predicted that it would "go up to 32, and it's worth much more." Hence, Vanderbilt greedily grabbed all the shares he could, "at sellers options, 4 months." About 30,000 shares, to the order of \$600,000 were

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<sup>3</sup>"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, March 7, 1856, p.8, c.3.

swiftly sold by Morgan's agents, mostly to the Commodore. The transactions prompted the *Tribune* to remark: "The result promises to be a contest in the stock between the selling party and Commodore Vanderbilt, and as the length of the Commodore's purse is proverbial, the result in such a contest can scarcely be doubted."<sup>4</sup>

What the *Tribune* ignored is that the contest had been decided in Granada in Morgan's favor, before it even started. Walker, however, was not yet ready to make it public, for he wished to take advantage of the White-French agreement to get as many colonists as possible transported quickly to his realm. Alejandro Francisco Lainé's trip to Nicaragua, on the *Northern Light*, opened the way for securing additional recruits. Lainé arrived in Granada on Sunday evening, January 6th; on Friday, the 11th, he had signed a contract with Walker, whereby

... the material and pecuniary resources of Nicaragua, as well as those which are in the possession of the revolutionary party of Cuba, shall be amalgamated together, making common cause together for the purpose of overthrowing the Spanish tyranny in the island and of insuring the prosperity of Central America, identifying thereby the interests of both countries.<sup>5</sup>

Contract in hand, Lainé boarded the *Star of the West* at San Juan del Norte on January 19 and landed in New York on the 29th. With him traveled Gen. C. C. Hornsby, just then promoted to that rank, and other "distinguished officers" of Gen. Walker's army, to assist in recruiting. Captains Charles J. Turnbull and D. W. Thorpe went on a similar mission, by the *Daniel Webster*, to New Orleans. The fruits of their efforts were soon apparent, on subsequent steamers.

The *Star of the West* left New York on February 9 with three hundred passengers for Nicaragua, and the *Daniel*

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1856, p.8, c.1.

<sup>5</sup>"More Nicaragua Revelations," *NY Herald*, 11/24/1856, p.1, c.1.

Webster left New Orleans on the 12th with two companies: 81 emigrants bound for the promised land of Walker & Co. Both groups, which furnished 170 recruits for Walker's army, entered Granada together by the lake steamer *La Virgen* on the 22nd. The next contingents sailed from New York on the *Northern Light* on the 25th and from New Orleans by the *Prometheus* on the 27th. Again, both groups entered Granada together, and *El Nicaraguense* announced "the arrival of the *La Virgen*, on Sunday morning last [March 9], with something like 310 troops for the government, and 50 or 60 emigrants." The writer went on to describe the scene:

. . . Great were the rejoicing accordingly, and with reason. Among them was a fine company from New York, a German and French company; the latter was composed of as fine men as we ever had the pleasure to behold--many of them old Chasseurs de Vincennes, bronzed with the sun of Africa, and familiar with the use of that most deadly of weapons, the Minnie Rifle; these bringing with them their musicians formed in their respective positions, and headed by their officers elect, and defiling in one continuous and lengthened column . . . with drums beating appearing in parade order before the man whom all look to and revere--who holds in his hands the destinies of Central America. This was indeed a sight worth the living for.<sup>6</sup>

It was indeed a sight, we might add, to behold such flagrant violations of the Neutrality Law with the complacency and complicity of the Federal authorities. No attempt was made to stop the men leaving New York and New Orleans on either occasion. "Positive information has been received that over four hundred men, organized as a regiment, and well-armed, left New Orleans on the morning of February 27, in the steamer *Prometheus*, to join Col. Walker," wrote the *Tribune's* Washington correspondent on the 5th of March. "Most of the

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<sup>6</sup>"Rough Sketches," *El Nicaraguense*, March 15, 1856, p.2, c.4.



men are from the West and know how to use arms. A free passage was given them. Arrangements have been made for eight hundred more in the next steamer."<sup>7</sup> And yet, not a word from President Pierce or anybody in the government to prevent their departure. Moreover, at the United States Circuit Court in New York, the trial of the *Northern Light* filibusters indicted in January had been postponed until April, and bail was substantially reduced by the Judge.

A noticeable change had certainly come over the spirit of the Administration, after reports had established the stability of the Walker-Rivas government. Commodore Paulding's letter of January 22nd to Secretary Dobbin (mentioned above, in chapter 20) was favorable to Walker and carried much weight before the Cabinet. And the powerful influence of Joseph L. White & Co., added to the Southern interests, tilted the balance for the filibusters. The *Tribune's* Washington correspondent wrote on February 9th:

Mr. White, counsel of the Transit Company, and other persons in that interest, have been here urging an understanding between themselves and the government to prevent any further interruption in the sailing of their ships. Another object of their presence may have been to aid the recognition of the Walker government, since it is well known that the President has been daily importuned in this behalf by Members of Congress and others, who were accessible to such influences.<sup>8</sup>

The *Herald* gave word of White's success on the 12th: "We hear that McKeon's ardor has been checked, and that government will not again obstruct the Transit Company in its business. Ho! for Nicaragua."<sup>9</sup> Identical inside information reached the *Tribune*:

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<sup>7</sup>"For Nicaragua," *New York Tribune*, March 6, 1856, p.4, c.6.

<sup>8</sup>"From Our Own Correspondent," *Ibid.*, 2/11/1856, p.4, c.6.

<sup>9</sup>"Soldiers and Buttons for Nicaragua," *NY Herald*, 2/12/56, p.4, c.3.

FREE EMIGRATION TO NICARAGUA. -- It is reported that hereafter the Nicaragua Transit Company will be exempted from the surveillance of the United States District Attorney McKeon, and peaceful agriculturists may emigrate to that promised land with their bowies, revolvers, and like implements for cultivating the soil, without fears of molestation. The last steamer, it is said, took out no less than three hundred of Walker's friends, together with a large quantity of military buttons for his army. The latter are struck with a view of the sun rising above three volcanoes and the lake, and the word "Nicaragua" as a legend.<sup>10</sup>

Walker's soldiers resembled Falstaff's words: "There is but a shirt and a half in all my company," but the buttons were fine. Sensing the favorable climate, and believing that the time was ripe, Parker H. French traveled to Washington on Feb. 1st, and had "a long interview with President Pierce, and was treated in a manner becoming his official station."<sup>11</sup> Although Marcy still refused to receive him as Minister, "the kindest personal relations now exist between all parties, and in due season the political relations will be the same." But before getting better, the political relations got worse. Within another week, the *Northern Light* brought Nicaraguan dispatches announcing the suspension by the Walker-Rivas government of official relations with Minister Wheeler, and the revocation of the diplomatic powers of Col. French.

Closing shop in New York, French moved on to New Orleans, where he was said to be superintending the embarkation of his own "French's Battalion" aboard the *Daniel Webster* on March 11. The vessel carried 204 "emigrants" to Nicaragua. At San Juan del Norte, "French's Battalion" was joined by a "small company" brought by the *Star of the West* from New York. The troops arrived together in Granada on

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<sup>10</sup>"Free Emigration to Nicaragua," *NY Tribune*, 2/13/1856, p.7, c.2.

<sup>11</sup>"Our Washington Correspondence," *NY Herald*, 2/9/1856, p.8, c.1.

the *La Virgen* on March 22nd, when hostilities with Costa Rica had already started. Estimating the New York contingent at 50 men, the emigrants from the East on that trip were 250.

Adding up, the departures from New York and New Orleans on the last three steamer voyages provided one thousand colonists for Walker; raising the number of people flocking to his banner to a total of 2,260 in ten months. The California contributions after Kewen's departure from San Francisco had been meager, barely bringing the total to a round figure of 2,300.

The problem in California was the lack of funds to pay for the tickets. Steerage rates were \$90, and Garrison refused to furnish any free tickets over the five hundred arranged with Crittenden, unless and until the Nicaragua Transit grant was officially given to him as per agreement. The *Cortes* sailed from San Francisco on February 5, but the press did not mention any passengers for Nicaragua. Likewise with the *Uncle Sam*, on the 20th. A passenger wrote:

At sea, off San Juan, March 2 . . . There are ten adventurers for Nicaragua, only half of them Walker recruits, the rest migrating on their own hook. Of the former portion is Lieut. Jones, on his return from a recruiting service in California, which proved unsuccessful, not from the lack of volunteers, for he had one hundred enlisted and ready to start from Sacramento, but because the agent had peremptory orders to carry no more recruits on the steamers of this line.<sup>12</sup>

*El Nicaraguense* confirmed the nature and extent of the problem early in March.<sup>13</sup> The difficulty was not yet obviated

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<sup>12</sup>"Editorial Correspondence," *Alta*, March 23, 1856, p.2, c.3.

<sup>13</sup>"FROM CALIFORNIA.--Dates up to the 20th ult., have been received from California. A large number of emigrants were ready to sail for Nicaragua, but owing to some misunderstanding with the government, they did not get a passage down. The seizure of the Company's steamers will probably obviate this difficulty in future. Lieut. Jones, who went to California as a recruiting officer, returned on the steamer. He organized

when the *Brother Jonathan* sailed from San Francisco on the 5th of March, and the *Alta* reported: "But very little is said about passengers for Nicaragua, and we judge there are very few if any going."<sup>14</sup>

The decree revoking the Transit Company charter was dated at Granada, February 18, but it was not made public until next day, after the eastbound passengers had crossed the lake for San Juan del Norte. The news reached San Francisco by the *Cortes* on March 7, but it was delayed for New Orleans until the next steamer, the *Prometheus*, which arrived on March 11, and on the same date it reached New York, by telegraph from New Orleans.

Walker explained the sequence of these events in *The War*. In particular, he recounted that by delaying the news one day, the revocation was not known in New Orleans when the *Daniel Webster* left for Nicaragua with more than 250 recruits (French's Battalion)--their tickets paid with drafts of D. Domingo de Goicouría on Cornelius Vanderbilt. If the decree had been published a day earlier, "they would certainly not have been carried to Nicaragua at the expense of Mr. Vanderbilt."<sup>15</sup>

Walker's review, in *The War*, of the arrivals between November and March, is incomplete and inaccurate. He focuses the spotlight on the Crittenden-Garrison agreement that provided 500 men for his army, but keeps the reader in the dark about the French-White and Walker-Lainé contracts that furnished thrice that number of recruits. In this manner, he conveniently disposed of the Wall Street, Know-Nothing and Cuban Junta connections. All three managed to slip in, however, hidden and huddled in the drafts of D. Domingo de Goicouría on Cornelius Vanderbilt paying for the passage of French's Battalion from New Orleans to San Juan. The Goicouría drafts also highlight that "money is now a

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a fine company but owing to the difficulty referred to above, could not bring his men down." *El Nicaraguense*, March 8, 1856, p.2, c.4.

<sup>14</sup>"Shipment of Treasure," *Alta*, March 6, 1856, p.1, c.1.

<sup>15</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 156.

necessity," which is the obvious compelling reason for the revocation of the Transit Company charter and for the new grant to Edmund Randolph and associates. As explained in *The War*:

The old Transit Company aimed at being master of the government; the new charter made the owners of the grant the servants of the State and the agents of its policy. The control of the Transit is, to Americans, the control of Nicaragua: for the lake, not the river as many think, furnishes the key to the occupation of the whole State. Therefore, whoever desires to hold Nicaragua securely, must be careful that the navigation of the lake is controlled by those who are his staunchest and most reliable friends.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the "fearful ravages of disease," the number of Americans under Walker continued to increase, and on the first of March, 1856, "there were upward of twelve hundred Americans, soldiers and citizens, in the Republic, capable of bearing arms."<sup>17</sup> Since Walker lacked the money to pay for the tickets, the owners of the Transit grant had to become "the servants of the State and the agents of its policy." Commodore Vanderbilt, Joseph L. White, and associates, would never do in the long run, since they always "aimed at being masters of the government."

The French-White agreement simply served as stopgap to usher in the flow of emigrants from the East in December, but it failed to resolve the main problem. In its editorial review of the Accessory Transit Company, *El Nicaraguense*, February 23, 1856, complained that "quite recently, when Minister French demanded a settlement in New York, Mr. White refused to come to terms, and subsequently wrote a letter to this place, threatening, in the event the government did not come

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

to a proper settlement, that he would break up the line."<sup>18</sup>

With Vanderbilt at the head of the Company, the filibusters' prospects darkened. The Commodore's well-known financial practices, his large investments in Panama railroad stock, and his harmonious arrangements in-the-making with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company; presaged doom for Walker, as *El Nicaraguense* voiced in the same editorial:

. . . Both of the last mentioned gentlemen [Messrs. Aspinwall and Vanderbilt]--grand speculators in steamship and railroad stocks--are now interested in the Panama Railroad stock. There is a capital of eleven millions of dollars in that enterprise, which, at present, pays a merely nominal per centage. In order to get out of that speculation, they know it is necessary to break down the Nicaragua Line and thus drive passengers via Panama. This would inflate the value of their stock, and enable them to sell out at a large advance.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Vanderbilt contemplated the temporary closure of the Nicaragua Transit route for the benefit of Panama. The *Tribune* explained that "one line to California is sufficient for the business at present offering, and the expense of running another line is saved."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, an agreement was signed by Aspinwall which would enable the Commodore to stop running the Nicaragua Transit and make money in so doing. With the Nicaragua steamers doing nothing, Vanderbilt would receive from Aspinwall \$40,000 a month --\$480,000 a year; and, of course, he would also collect his share of increased profits as owner of Panama Railroad stock and by running the Atlantic vessels of the Panama traffic.

Whether and when such a scheme would be put in operation made little difference to Walker. Its mere potential

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<sup>18</sup>"Accessory Transit Company," *El Nicaraguense*, 2/23/1856, p.2, c.1.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, March 24, 1856, p.8, c.1.

existence was intolerable, since it would make Vanderbilt the absolute "master of the government." Hence, the revocation of the charter became imperative. The decree was promulgated in *El Nicaraguense*, February 23, 1856. The new cession to Randolph and associates appeared on March 1st. The telegraphic dispatches from New Orleans, transmitting the news of these decrees, dramatically affected Wall Street. There was an immediate dumping of stock in the market, with the price falling precipitately. Almost 12,000 shares were sold in one day--on March 13.

The Nicaragua stampede sent Commodore Vanderbilt instantly to Washington, and the *Tribune* on the 15th announced "a rumor that he has already brought this outrage of the Nicaraguan Government to the notice of the Secretary of State, who has assured him that the rights of American citizens shall be fully maintained. A little display of our naval force in the neighborhood of San Juan would have a wholesome effect; and if Gen. Walker is intractable, a blockade only would be necessary to keep out recruits; the climate would do the rest, and Walker's force would waste away under the miasma of the country like dew before the sun."<sup>21</sup>

Back in New York, the Commodore issued a notice on the 17th, stopping all steamers on the Nicaragua route, which the *Herald* set in place with a short but sharp comment:

We have already published the decree of the Autocrat of all Nicaragua, "wiping out" the Transit Company; we now give the retaliatory non-intercourse decree of the Autocrat of all Wall Street, stopping for the present all steam communication with the rebels in Central America.<sup>22</sup>

With the steamers withdrawn, Vanderbilt hurried back to Washington, accompanied by Joseph L. White with appropriate

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<sup>21</sup>"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, March 15, 1856, p. 7, c.5.

<sup>22</sup>"The Ferment in Wall Street--Nicaragua and the Nicaragua Transit Company," *New York Herald*, March 17, 1856, p.4, c.2.

documents, and doubled his efforts to establish the justice of the Company's claims and convince the U. S. Government to intervene. He wrote a letter to Secretary Marcy, and then called upon Marcy and President Pierce on the evening of the 18th. He again visited the State Department next morning and called on Senator Clayton in the afternoon. He made desperate appeals to Cushing and other members of the Cabinet, and on the 21st he had another lengthy interview with the President, but all in vain. As told by the press: "The administration are of opinion that White and Vanderbilt aided and connived at filibustering expeditions to Nicaragua; therefore they have no sympathy with them, and are determined not to interfere."<sup>23</sup>

Vanderbilt and White then brought their case before the Congress, through the agency of Senator Seward, but gained nothing by the change. Pierce and Marcy refused to interfere, and the *Tribune's* Washington correspondent summed it up well on April 8th:

. . . The Transit Company made its own contract without any previous engagement here; and if the bargain has turned out unfortunately, our Government can hardly be expected to repair the damage—especially after having been defied and outraged by this very corporation when it was engaged in sustaining Walker. If the engineer happens to have been hoisted with his own petard, he owes the blame to himself. Sympathy is too valuable to be expended upon such bad subjects; and it is hardly needed, as the speculators will foot the bill at somebody's expense on 'Change.<sup>24</sup>

For the time being, Vanderbilt footed the bill at the Pacific Steamship Company stockholders' expense, as he began to collect \$40,000 each month from Mr. Aspinwall immediately after stopping his Nicaragua ocean steamers. From the

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<sup>23</sup>"From Washington," *New York Herald*, March 23, 1856, p.4, c.5.

<sup>24</sup>"From Washington," *New York Tribune*, April 10, 1856, p.4, c.5.



beginning, Mr. Morgan was said to have made "advances toward a reconciliation and consolidation of interests; but Commodore Vanderbilt is too indignant to meet those advances."<sup>25</sup> Vanderbilt's mind was rather set on revenge than on reconciliation. And Vanderbilt's revenge meant the downfall of Walker. It was soon

. . . loudly whispered that the league of the four remaining Central American States--of which a good deal has lately been heard and threatened--will be speedily consummated, and the expulsion of the adventurer who has so suddenly assumed supreme power in those latitudes, will be at once undertaken. . . . The indignant and outraged Transit Company must be well disposed to unbutton their purses for the double object of regaining their lost property and feeding their revenge at the black ingratitude of their protégé, who has so faithlessly kicked away the ladder by which he climbed to power.<sup>26</sup>

Under the circumstances, the defeat of Walker and his expulsion from Nicaragua were considered necessary to secure the re-establishment of Vanderbilt's Transit Company. Hence, by March, 1856, a state of war existed, pitting the Autocrat of Wall Street against the Autocrat of Nicaragua. And as the length of the Commodore's purse was proverbial, as well as the emptiness of the Gray-Eyed Man's coffers, the result of such a contest could not be doubted.

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<sup>25</sup>"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, March 21, 1856, p.8, c.3.

<sup>26</sup>"An opening seems to be making," *Ibid.*, 3/20/1856, p.4, c.5.

## 23. Mighty Hermaniticos

Having reached the 1st of March, 1856, with upwards of twelve hundred Americans, soldiers and citizens, in the Republic, capable of bearing arms, Walker geared up for the defense of his domain from attack by its neighbors. But the danger was from Costa Rica, for at the moment neither Guatemala nor El Salvador or Honduras showed any disposition to attack his northern flank. The southern neighbor was an entirely different matter.

With its population concentrated on an elevated tableland of from 3,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level, in many aspects Costa Rica presented the sharpest contrasts to Nicaragua. Costa Rica was so poor during colonial times, that a writer wondered if the name "Rich Coast" had been given to it in jest. At the time of Independence from Spain, in 1821, its 60,000 inhabitants raised only what was strictly necessary for internal consumption; its sole exports were some mahogany and cedar, shipped to Peru. Government revenues met only one fourth of expenses; the \$20,000 collected in 1826 were insignificant when compared with the \$145,000 collected annually by Nicaragua before Independence. Even after the transfer of Guanacaste, its territorial domain measured only one third the size of its northern neighbor.

Subsequent development, however, skyrocketed Costa Rica in a diametrically opposite direction from Nicaragua. The blessings of peace and the introduction of the coffee culture in the 1830's made the difference. By 1845 its 80,000 inhabitants were exporting five million pounds of coffee, mainly to England, and an English traveller recorded:

The inhabitants of this state are nearly all white, not having mixed with the Indians as in other parts of

Spanish America, and the few who are coloured have no doubt come from the neighboring states. Their character is very different from all other parts of Central America; they are industrious, though not fond of hard work; every family has a small coffee or sugar-cane plantation; the lower orders appear very simple in their habits; all marry very young, and the promiscuous intercourse between the sexes which exists in the other states is unknown. Life and property are also very secure, and it is four years since a murder took place; a state of things very different from the other governments.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of Costa Rica signally ahead of its sister republics was soon apparent to all observers, and publicized through the tireless efforts of its envoy in London, Don Felipe Molina. His promotional pamphlet *A Brief Sketch of the Republic of Costa Rica*, printed in London in 1849, was widely quoted by the press thereafter. As told in excerpts published by the *New York Herald* in January, 1850:

. . . The population amounts to 100,000 inhabitants, of whom only 10,000 are Indians. The trade is now almost exclusively carried on with England, in British bottoms; but the shipments taking place on the Pacific side, the tedious route by Cape Horn is a serious drawback. Last year the exports consisted of 150,000 cwt. [15 million pounds] of coffee, estimated at \$6 on board; about 10,000 ox and cow hides; a considerable quantity of mother of pearl, Nicaragua wood and sarsaparilla . . . the total value being estimated at \$1,000,000 . . . The great want of the republic is a communication with the Atlantic, so as to save the long navigation by Cape Horn. . . . The President is elected for six years, and the Congress, consisting of ten deputies, for three years. The State

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Glasgow Dunlop, *Travels in Central America* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847), p. 45.

has no debt, either foreign or domestic.<sup>2</sup>

The great want of a communication with the Atlantic provided the initial compelling force behind Costa Rican covetousness of the Nicaragua route. The impotence of its distracted neighbor and the support of its commercial partner, Great Britain, then combined to open the way for its encroachments on the San Juan river and the Nicaragua Lake.<sup>3</sup>

Simultaneous with Molina's diplomatic maneuvers leading to the Crampton-Webster Convention in 1852, a cart road was in progress from the coffee plantations to the river Sarapiquí, "by a company composed of the principal landowners of the country, through which an important communication will be opened with San Juan del Norte, to facilitate the commerce between the country, Europe, and the United States, via the Atlantic."<sup>4</sup> The 45 mile long cart road from San José to the Sarapiquí would connect with boats down that river 24 miles, and then with Nicaragua Transit Company steamers down the San Juan river, 35 miles to San Juan del Norte.

While news from Nicaragua constantly highlighted the horrors of revolution, those from Costa Rica spoke only of progress and prosperity. The following is typical of many:

INTELLIGENCE FROM COSTA RICA. -- By a communication from this interesting country, dated San José, Costa Rica, Nov. 4, we are advised of its continued prosperity. The coffee crop promises a good average. The revenue this year will exceed half a million of dollars, and government was actively pushing the completion of the Punta Arenas and San José hospitals,

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<sup>2</sup>"The Republic of Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, 1/28/1850, p.3, c.1.

<sup>3</sup>Partly covered above, in chapters 2, 3 and 6.

<sup>4</sup>"Interesting from Costa Rica," *NY Herald*, 11/30/1852, p.6, c.6.

and the new National Palace. The University is finished, and the energies of this industrious people are now devoted to the perfection of public roads . . . A large number of German emigrants, partly laborers, were expected to arrive in November, on the Atlantic side. Every encouragement and assistance is offered by the government to settlers, who fully understand the necessity of marching with the spirit of the age, and who evidently have taken the lead in Central American civilization, and intend to keep it.<sup>5</sup>

The Bremen ship, *Antoinette*, arrived at San Juan del Norte on December 14, 1853, with the first contingent of 200 German settlers for Costa Rica. Most of them stayed around San José, but thirty-five moved on to Puntarenas; they all contributed the valuable mechanics and artisans that were altogether wanting among the natives, and also brought modern European skills to the Artillery Corps and the Militia.

For in the midst of peace and prosperity, Costa Rica was gearing up for war. By law, every male citizen, from the age of 15 to 60, was enrolled in the Militia and was obliged to perform duty when required, unless he could show a legal ground of exemption. In 1849, the active Militia numbered 5,000 men, including cavalry and artillery corps.

Its armament was by far the best and most modern in Central America. As early as April 16, 1852, Costa Rican consul Eduardo Wallerstein acquired a dozen of the latest Minie rifles in London, long before that deadly weapon became popular in the world. In 1854 he sent three shiploads of war supplies to Puntarenas aboard the *Times*, *America*, and *Esperanza*. Lengthy waybills list 500 Minie rifles, 100,000 cartridges, 11,200 lbs. of Minie bullets, 10,000 lbs. gunpowder, 8 brand new pieces of artillery (3, 9 and 18 pounders) complete with carriages and all kinds of accessories, and abundant canister, grape and solid shot ammunition. The heavy ordnance came

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<sup>5</sup>"Intelligence from Costa Rica, *Alta*, December 9, 1853, p.2, c.2.

from the royal arsenal at Woolwich, and the shipments cost the Costa Rican treasury five thousand pounds sterling.

Such extraordinary military preparedness provided sufficient power to back the diplomatic efforts of Don Felipe Molina, who relentlessly carried on his design of engulfing the Nicaragua Canal route inside the Costa Rican borders. As commissioner from his country, in September, 1848, Molina proposed to Nicaragua a "pecuniary compensation" in exchange for acceptance of a boundary at the southern margin of the lake and river. Nicaraguan authorities adamantly refused to comply.

Molina went to London, and then to Washington. In Europe he hired a Spanish researcher, Don José María Gutiérrez, to investigate in the Archivo de Indias at Sevilla for documents in support of Costa Rican pretensions to the canal route. Gutiérrez labored for three years with remarkable success, which earned him an extra bonus of five hundred dollars from his employer. The fruit of the research appeared in a *Memoir on the Boundary Question pending between the Republic of Costa Rica and the State of Nicaragua*, published by Don Felipe in Washington in 1851. The priceless document in that pamphlet, cornerstone of Don Felipe's Costa Rican claims upon the waters of the Nicaragua Lake and San Juan River, is a sixteenth century charter from the king of Spain, transcribed here in Appendix C.

It may be seen in Appendix C, that the charter had no value, for it had perished stillborn in 1540, and nineteenth century Nicaraguans knew very well that Costa Rica had never exercised any kind of authority anywhere near the San Juan river and the Nicaragua Lake. As expressed by commissioners Juan José Zavala and José Laureano Pineda to their Costa Rican counterparts in 1846, "Neither historical records nor the memories of tradition point to any fact from which you may deduce that the authority of the Government of Cartago ever extended for even one league to the north of

Matina."<sup>6</sup> The map on page 282 drives the point home at a glance.

But the ancient royal charter produced by Molina, and its endorsement by Crampton and Webster, bestowed a false veneer of legality to the Costa Rican claim upon the Nicaraguan canal and transit routes; it strengthened the Costa Rican position and forced Nicaragua to yield on Guanacaste in a desperate attempt to hold on to river and lake.

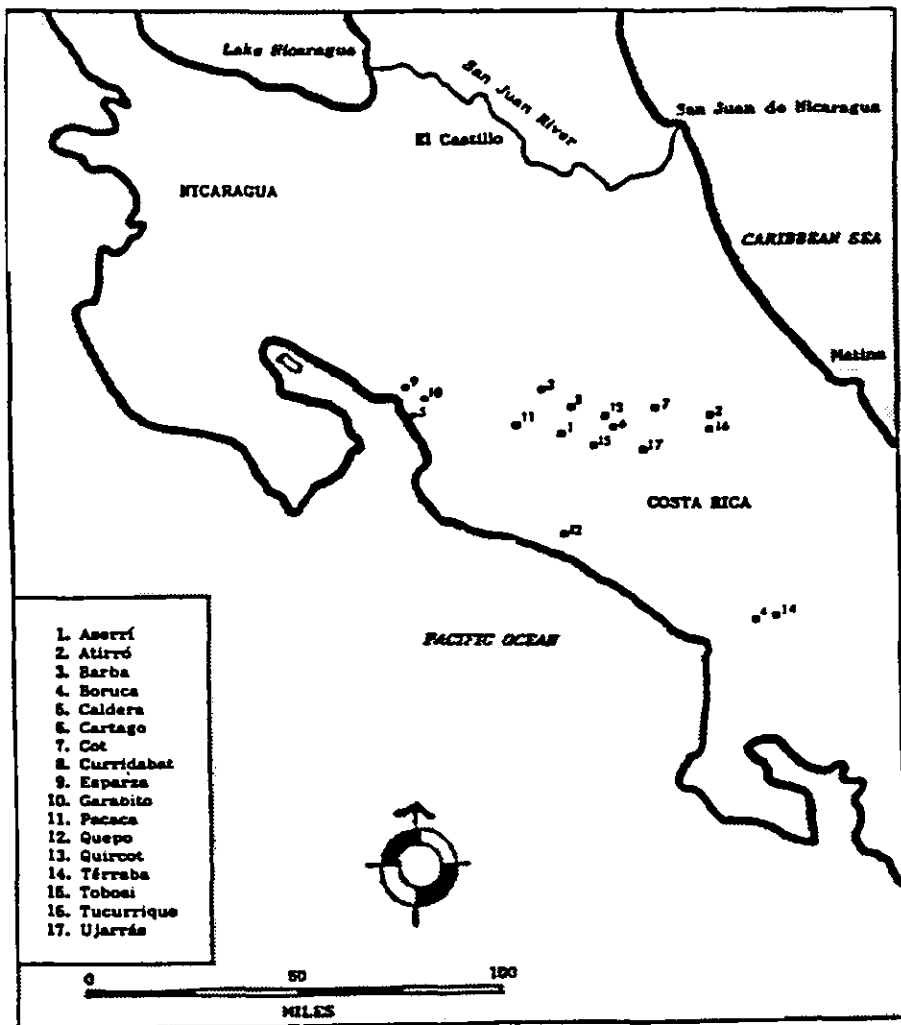
In January, 1854, Don Fruto Chamorro sent his brother Dionisio with full powers to San José, to propose that Nicaragua would cede Guanacaste to Costa Rica for a pecuniary compensation, and would grant free transit to its commerce at San Juan del Norte and over the rivers San Juan and Sarapiquí; that the border to be traced would run parallel to but several leagues south of the lower lake shore and San Juan river bank. Costa Rican commissioners Joaquín Bernardo Calvo and Manuel José Carazo responded that Costa Rica was already in firm possession of Guanacaste, and that its northern border began at "the mouth of the San Juan river on the Atlantic; and thence the waters of said river up to the Great Lake of Nicaragua, and following the lake shore to a point in straight line upon the river Flor to its mouth on the Pacific."<sup>7</sup>

For the first time, Costa Rica had pushed its frontier to swallow the San Juan river waters into its domain. After several fruitless conferences, Don Dionisio lost "his patience" and directed a strong protest to the Costa Rican government on February 22nd, before returning home. Three days later, Costa Rican Foreign Minister Joaquín Bernardo Calvo, fully

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<sup>6</sup>Juan José Zavala y José Laureano Pineda, *Respuesta a la Proposición que la Legación de Costa Rica hizo a la Comisión de Nicaragua en la Reunión del 9 de Octubre de 1846* (San Fernando de Masaya: Imprenta de Minerva, 1847), p. 4.

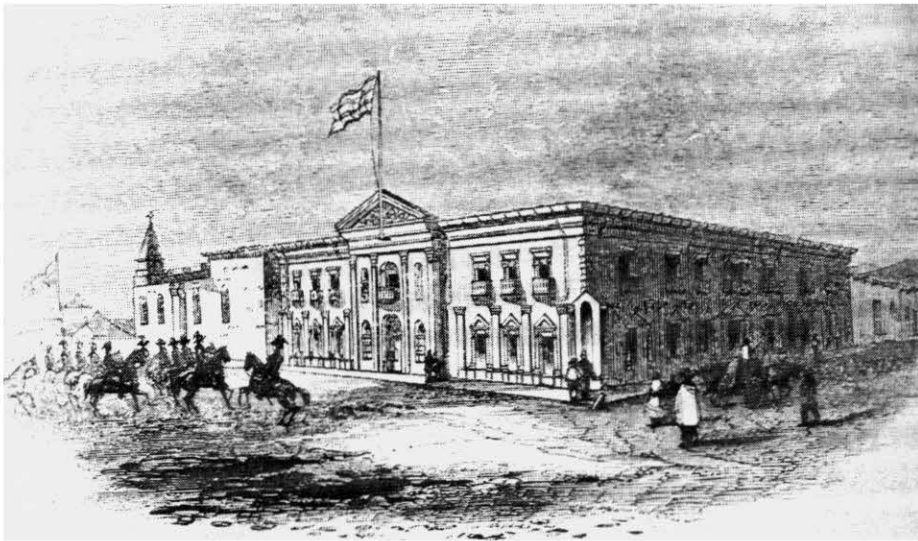
<sup>7</sup>Reuniones de Plenipotenciarios de Costa Rica y Nicaragua en San José iniciadas el 10 de enero de 1854, Caja de Relaciones 1854, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.



**Costa Rica**  
*Towns and Villages in the Year 1700*

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**The Artillery Barracks**  
*San José, Costa Rica*

"Costa Rica was gearing up for war . . ." (p. 279)

authorized by his government, signed a contract (which was in the making simultaneously with the talks with Chamorro), granting exclusive privileges of navigation over the San Juan river and Lake Nicaragua to a "Costa Rica Transit Company" owned by William P. Kirkland, William B. Geering, and associates.

In one gulp, Costa Rica had also swallowed all the Nicaragua Lake waters into its domain; and from the Washington dispatches of Don Felipe Molina we learn that Mr. Geering's "associates" was none other than Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was bent on dispossessing the Nicaragua Transit then in the hands of Morgan and Garrison.

During March, President Juan Rafael Mora visited the district of Guanacaste, "to affirm the people's adhesion to Costa Rica, and to make its frontier secure."<sup>8</sup> He there met with Don Buenaventura Selva, enemy of Don Fruto Chamorro, and assured him that "Costa Rica would not lift a finger in favor of the Nicaraguan government" if there were a revolution. When Selva communicated to Honduras the green light from Costa Rica, it removed the principal deterrent, and President Cabañas armed the exiled Leonese who embarked for El Realejo.

At the onset of the revolution in Nicaragua, in May, 1854, the Costa Rican Congress decreed the formal annexation of Guanacaste, changing its name to Moracia in honor of the president. The Congress likewise rubber-stamped with alacrity the Transit contract with Vanderbilt's company. The *New York Herald* exposed the encroachment and commented:

This is not the first time Costa Rica has made grants for transits and what not, through other countries than her own. A year or two since she undertook to grant the right of way for a road from Chiriquí Lagoon to Golfo Dulce, through the territory of New Granada. This act has been made the subject of a special message of the

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<sup>8</sup>Jerónimo Pérez, *Obras Históricas Completas*, p. 15.

President of New Granada to the Congress of that republic, looking to the adoption of means to confine Costa Rica to her legitimate limits. With a controversy with Nicaragua on one side, and New Granada on the other, that greedy little State (numbering less than 100,000 inhabitants, all told,) will be likely to have a surfeit of trouble.<sup>9</sup>

Costa Rica was quite prepared to overcome what little "surfeit of trouble" might arise from a distracted Nicaragua immersed in a savage civil war. Moreover, huge tons of modern military equipment were soon rushed to San José from England, while Don Felipe Molina and Vanderbilt's agents made arrangements with the State Department in Washington to facilitate the taking over of the Nicaragua Transit. Molina promised that a squad of some twenty-five Costa Rican soldiers with the Costa Rican flag would accompany the first boatload of passengers to confront the Nicaraguan forces at Castillo. "This number appeared to them to be more than sufficient to open the way, considering that the passengers themselves, of whom almost all carry arms, will constitute a respectable force."<sup>10</sup>

In subsequent dispatches through July, Molina told Calvo about his own talks with Marcy: of how "a surprise attack" would be the only way to establish "our company," and of how Costa Rica must arrange a plan of military operations with Geering and associates, and be ready to repel an attack from Nicaragua. "The interests at stake are too large for those who hold possession of the monopoly to meekly allow it to be wrested from their hands." Naturally, Costa Rica "will do no more than answer any unjust provocations, leaving to

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<sup>9</sup>"Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, June 27, 1854, p.8, c.4.

<sup>10</sup>Felipe Molina to Joaquín Bernardo Calvo, Washington, May 16, 1854, Caja de Relaciones 1854, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

Nicaragua the responsibility for breaking hostilities."<sup>11</sup>

All carefully laid plans came to naught when Mr. Vanderbilt, changing tactics in August, sold his steamers and received a large number of Nicaragua Transit shares in payment. With the Commodore again interested in the Nicaragua line, Mr. Geering was unable to raise the five thousand dollars required for initial payment to Costa Rica, and the defunct "Costa Rica Transit Company" instantly vanished in thin air.

Don Felipe then entered into correspondence with the directors of the Nicaragua Transit Company, constantly pushing Costa Rica's claim, but at the same time stressing that "she was not reluctant to make the necessary concessions to the company in order to facilitate their enterprise." In his last letter to Joseph L. White, January 6, 1855, he praised the latter's stand against Kinney, and inserted a very revealing postscript: "I shall be very happy to correspond privately with you on this or any other topic."<sup>12</sup>

Don Felipe was indeed busily laying the groundwork to lure the Nicaragua Transit Company into the Costa Rican camp. Death frustrated his design: far advanced tuberculosis carried him away on February 1, 1855, at 43 years of age. His brother Luis, who succeeded him as Minister in Washington, though capable, lacked the talent and experience to carry on.

As 1855 advanced, the evils of a cruel and protracted civil war left Nicaragua entirely ruined, while Costa Rica continued to progress in power and prosperity. Under those circumstances, it was not surprising to see the Costa Ricans

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<sup>11</sup>Molina to Calvo, Washington, May 31; July 1st, 1854, Caja de Relaciones 1854, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>12</sup>Felipe Molina to Joseph L. White, Washington, 1/6/1855; Molina to Thomas G. Lord, Washington, 12/8/1854; Molina to President, Vice-President and Directors of the Nicaragua Transit Company, Washington, 10/20; 11/13/1854; Molina to Calvo, Washington, 8/17; 10/24; 12/24/1854, Caja de Relaciones 1854, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

taking advantage of a weakened Nicaragua. While Jerez and Chamorro mutually destroyed each other at Granada, Baron Alexander Von Bülow, Chief Engineer of Public Roads in Costa Rica, quietly opened a road at the southern margin of Lake Nicaragua, between Tortuga and the river Sapoa, and another Prussian, Don Bruno Von Natzmer, with a squad of Costa Rican soldiers, silently planted the Costa Rican flag on the San Carlos island in the San Juan river.<sup>13</sup>

These flagrant usurpations of Nicaraguan rights covertly set in motion the Costa Rica Transit Company scheme, and such deliberate trespassings were performed with impunity. On the other hand, when Legitimist troops, in hot pursuit, captured eight Leonese soldiers in Guanacaste after the June 29, 1855 Battle of Rivas, the Costa Rican authorities protested loudly. Reports of the "outrageous violation of national sovereignty," naturally aroused a wave of popular indignation against Nicaragua. Correspondence from San José, July 25, 1855, showed Costa Ricans eager for a fight:

. . . Well, for the invasion of territory we have sent Mr. Cañas to Guanacaste to raise at once 5,000 men and demand an apology, restoration of the prisoners, and delivery of the authorities that ordered the act of invasion. If it is not granted we send 1,500 men at the instant from here, and march to Granada and there dictate our terms. You cannot imagine how great is the improvement in our troops since you saw them. We have to-day 5,000 men at thirty-hours' notice, every way better, new arms, better drilled, new cannons and artillery, 500 new rifles, &c.--in fact we are rather eager for a fight, and think now is the time.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>After serving three months in the Costa Rican Militia as "Comandante del Punto San Carlos," Don Bruno abandoned his post in December, 1854, and afterwards joined Walker in León.

<sup>14</sup>"Central America," *New York Tribune*, August 7, 1855, p.6, c.1.

The time was not yet ripe for a fight, however, nor was a "march to Granada" to dictate terms being formulated by the Costa Rican high command. As expressed by Don Luis Molina, this would cause "enormous difficulties . . . it would place Costa Rica in dire necessity of conquering inch by inch the entire territory of Nicaragua."<sup>15</sup> Thus when Nicaraguan Minister Mateo Mayorga offered ample apologies for the Guanacaste incident, they proved satisfactory to the authorities at San José and the episode was closed.

Of course, the Costa Ricans allowed Col. Mariano Méndez and fifty Leonese soldiers interned in Guanacaste to return to León to rejoin Walker. They gave them free passage from Puntarenas to Realejo, for prior to the battle at Virgin Bay Walker didn't seem a threat to Costa Rica. Walker's men were actually seen in San José as involuntary allies, so long as they diverted the attention of the Legitimist government from Costa Rican encroachments along the transit route.

Walker's image changed overnight after he captured Granada, when he suddenly loomed as a real menace and President Mora sounded the alarm:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COSTA RICA TO  
ALL ITS INHABITANTS--

CITIZENS --Peace, that happy peace which together with your laborious perseverance, has added so much to our credit, our wealth and public welfare, is treacherously threatened.

A gang of adventurers, the dregs of society, condemned by the laws of the American Union, not finding any other prey for their voracity, intend to invade Costa Rica, in order to satiate, on our wives and our daughters, on our homes and property, their unquenchable thirst of pillage.

Need I describe the dreadful evils that would fall

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<sup>15</sup>Luis Molina to Joaquín Bernardo Calvo, Washington, August 18, 1855, Caja de Relaciones 1855, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

upon us should we patiently wait for the time of that barbarous invasion?

No--you comprehend them; you know what can be expected from that band of adventurers--renegades of their own country. You know your duty.

Alarm, citizens! Abandon not your daily labors, but prepare your arms.

I watch for you, fully persuaded that in the moment of danger, at the first roaring of the cannon of alarm, you all will rally round me, under our free national flag.

The invaders will never find here parties, spies nor traitors to aid them. Wo to the citizen, or the alien, who would try to seduce the innocent, to foment discord and betray us! Here they will find but brothers, firmly decided to defend their own country as the holy mother of everything that is dear to them, and to annihilate its enemies, to the last of them!

JUAN RAFAEL MORA.

San José, Nov. 20, 1855.<sup>16</sup>

Coupled with President Mora's proclamation after the fall of Granada, incessant propaganda inflamed the Costa Rican people against the filibusters. No move was yet made to march to the aid of Nicaragua, however, for coffee harvest time was at hand. Indeed, the expected yield was remarkably good: nine million pounds of coffee, worth one million dollars. President Juan Rafael Mora, with his two brothers, were the largest coffee planters in Central America, and they knew that the crop had to be gathered before war could start. As the harvest proceeded, on Christmas eve President Mora reviewed his troops on a savannah outside San José:

. . . soldiery or militia, from all quarters. Tents pitched, stalls erected for the sale of refreshments . . .

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<sup>16</sup>"Proclamation of the President of Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, January 6, 1856, p.8, c.3.

Dozens of women are seen cooking . . . two eighteen pounders (brass), and about twenty other cannons of brass and iron . . . a front of about 5,000 men under arms. They then underwent a military exercise and practice of the big guns, and after a few rounds of fire, they dispersed, each apparently well pleased . . . each took good care of himself, and returned home safe and sound.<sup>17</sup>

Aware of events south of the border, on January 17, 1856, Walker wrote to President Mora, reassuring him that he did not "harbor hostile intentions towards Central America," and expressing "fervent and weighty desires for the peace and good accord of the sister republics of Costa Rica and Nicaragua."<sup>18</sup> Having received no answer, two weeks later he sent Major Louis Schlessinger as commissioner to Mora, hoping "to correct some of the errors which had spread in Costa Rica,"<sup>19</sup> to forestall the attack and postpone the confrontation while he continued strengthening his forces.

Schlessinger was one of the few foreigners attached to Walker's army who had any knowledge of Spanish, was "highly recommended by people of repute," and as he had "some tact and address," Walker thought he might succeed. He went accompanied by Captain W. A. Sutter and Col. Manuel Argüello, the latter a Legitimist who had fought at the Battle of Rivas (see p. 159), sent by Walker to induce Nicaraguans in exile to return to their homes.

Early in February, Walker's envoys traveled overland to Guanacaste (then called Moracia); by then the coffee harvest was about over and Costa Rica was ready for war. The Governor of Moracia, Don José María Cañas (brother-in-law of

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<sup>17</sup>"News from Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, 2/17/1856, p.2, c.2.

<sup>18</sup>"From Gen. Walker to His Excellency Juan R. Mora, President of Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, March 15, 1856, p.1, c.3.

<sup>19</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 165.



President Mora), ordered Schlessinger and Sutter out of the country forthwith. They left on February 23 from Puntarenas, aboard the schooner *Amapala*, bound for San Juan del Sur. Argüello remained behind, and joined the Costa Rican army.

With the coffee crop safely gathered and being exported, on February 27, 1856 the Costa Rican Congress authorized President Mora to go to war "against the republic of Nicaragua," in order to defend its inhabitants from "the ominous oppression of the filibusters and drive them from the soil of Central America."<sup>20</sup> On the same day, by executive decree, the national army was raised to 9,000 men, and new divisions of 1,000 men each were ordered organized in Alajuela and Heredia. Next morning, a war loan of 100,000 pesos was raised from the capitalists in the country. And on March 1st, President Mora issued a Proclamation:

FELLOW CITIZENS-- To arms! The hour has arrived . . . Let us march on Nicaragua to destroy that impious phalanx . . . We do not go to contend for a piece of land . . . No! we go to struggle for the redemption of all our brethren from the most iniquitous tyranny . . .<sup>21</sup>

Poor Nicaragua had found a second foreign redeemer in President Mora. The mighty *hermaniticos*<sup>22</sup> were on their way to drive the Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny from her soil, and incidentally to take possession of her canal and transit route. General Walker was now faced with a formidable rival in the person of President Mora.

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<sup>20</sup>"Interesting from Costa Rica," *NY Herald*, 4/4/1856, p.8, c.2.

<sup>21</sup>See full text in Appendix D.

<sup>22</sup>Witty contraction of *hermanitos ticos* (little Costa Rican brothers), widely used in Nicaragua in 1856.

## 24. Walker's Rivals Banished

"On the first of March, 1856," Walker opened a detailed analysis in chapter V of *The War*, in which he examined "some of the causes" which led to President Mora's declaration of war against the filibusters.<sup>1</sup> "On the first of March, 1856," begins chapter VI, the repetition of the date serving as a visual parenthesis encasing the analysis in whose twelve pages Walker examined events outside of Central America, to conclude: "Let us pass Mora in exile, as Ugolino in hell, afar off and with silence."<sup>2</sup>

In so doing, Walker focused his lens on the periphery while leaving the subject of his quest in total darkness. Moreover, Walker erred, because Dante's "Let us not speak of them; look, and pass on," in Canto III of *The Inferno*, refers to The Opportunists, in the Vestibule of Hell. Count Ugolino is at the very bottom of The Pit, and Dante narrates his story in detail in a series of stanzas in Canto XXXII.<sup>3</sup>

During the respite imposed by the Costa Rican coffee harvest, Walker swiftly disposed of another rival. Despite his ominous threat to hang Kinney the previous November, mutual friends believed that conciliation and compromise were possible. Carlos Thomas and Thomas F. Fisher invited Kinney to visit Granada, telling him "that Walker was friendly, and

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<sup>1</sup>walker, *The War*, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, translated by John Ciardi (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1954), pp. 41-43; 266-277. Unconscious, irresistible psychological forces led Walker astray. They will be analyzed in Book Five.

was anxious to come to some understanding with him."<sup>4</sup>

Kinney arrived unexpectedly in Granada on the morning of February 11, only three days after the government had issued a decree declaring that the title of Nicaragua to the Mosquito Territory, including San Juan del Norte, was "notorious and incontestable," and that Kinney's purchase from Shepherd & Haley was null and void. Moreover, any claim of such unlawful acquisition was "an attempt against the integrity of Central America."<sup>5</sup> As recorded in *El Nicaraguense*:

Monday came cloudless and delightful. Religious ceremonies filled the square with people. Early matins had passed away in the breath of ten thousand people. The tones of martial music swept upwards at the hour of mounting guard, when, lo! the shrill scream of the steamer was heard, and anon the rumor spread that Col. H. L. Kinney had arrived in Granada. How or why he came, no one could explain. He almost forfeited his reputation for sanity, and to-day a great many point knowingly, and with a peculiar expression, to the head, when he is spoken of. He did not improve this impression by his conduct after his arrival. The Colonel entered the city on foot, and after composing his toilet, prepared for a formal visit to Gen. Walker, or "Uncle Billy" as he is known in this vicinity.

About ten o'clock on Monday morning, therefore, as Gen. Walker was sitting at his table overlooking a dispatch from a neighboring State, Colonel Kinney entered the room, and advancing to the Commander-in-Chief, introduced himself. He was invited to take a seat, which he did; and as General Walker talks but little, and never, during business hours on irrelevant matters, the visitor was constrained to open the conversation, which

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<sup>4</sup>"Interesting Political Review," *NY Herald*, 2/29/1856, p.1, c.4.

<sup>5</sup>"Col. Kinney in Granada!" *El Nicaraguense*, 2/16/1856, p.1, c.3.

we give, in substance:

*Col. Kinney*--The difficulties under which we labor in forming a peaceable government for Nicaragua, may be consummated by dividing the country and creating two States, one of which shall be called Mosquitia.

*Gen. Walker*--If Nicaragua chooses to divide her territory, she will do so without advising with any one, and last of all with Mr. Kinney.

The visitor felt disconcerted, but he was not discouraged, as what follows will show:

*Col. Kinney*--I have come to offer my services to the Republic, and feel confident my financial ability will be of great benefit in the procurement of money, the negotiation of loans, and so forth. I succeeded very well in such matters, in Texas.

*Gen. Walker*--Your antecedents preclude the possibility of the State's placing you in any official position.

Col. Kinney was dismayed, and the interview ended, with the impressive caution from Gen. Walker to his visitor that he should be particular in his speech, or he might be guilty of uttering treasonable language.

Another interview was held in the afternoon, but it was curt, and ended in nothing.

But a short space elapsed after the first interview before orders were issued to the officer of the day, that Mr. Kinney could not be allowed to leave the limits of the city--he was a prisoner of the State.<sup>6</sup>

Eyewitnesses chronicled that on the second interview, when Walker ordered Kinney arrested, the latter asked: "What for?" and Walker turned around without answering and left the room. "It was only when the circumstances under which Kinney had visited him had been represented to Walker by the prisoner's friends, that he was permitted to return to

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Greytown in custody of Capt. Martin."<sup>7</sup>

As Walker ordered Kinney to leave the State, the *New York Tribune* captioned the news in good spirits: "Col. Kinney Banished from All the Nicaraguas!"<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the colonel was lucky to be banished alive, thanks to the pledges of Don Carlos Thomas and Col. Thomas F. Fisher; otherwise Walker would have facilitated Kinney's involuntary exit from earth through the instrumentality of a hempen auxiliary, as promised to Joseph W. Fabens in November.

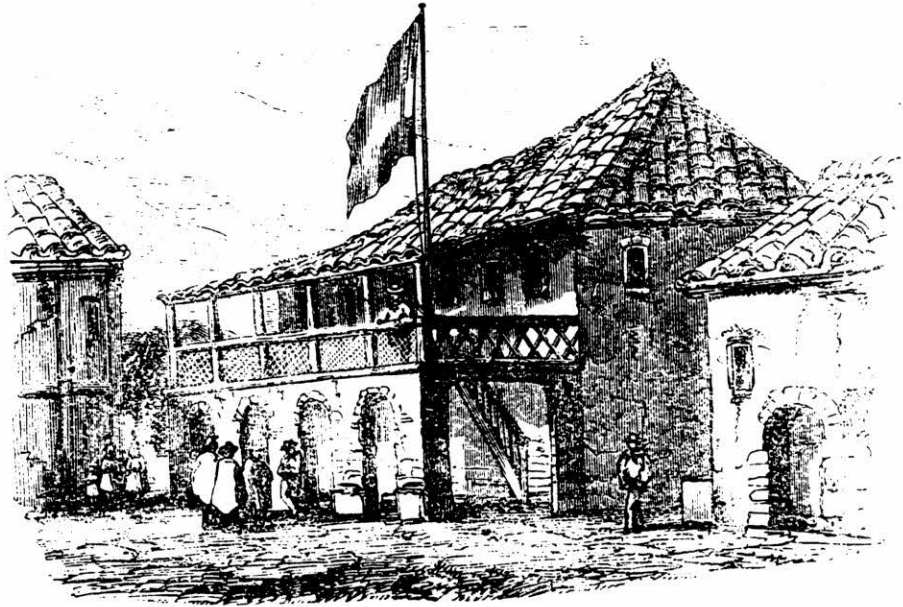
In regard to the other rival, Walker never got hold of President Mora to facilitate his exit, but he corrected the deficiency and banished him in *The War*, when he passed him afar off and with silence, in exile.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Interesting Political Review," *NY Herald*, 2/29/1856, p.1, c.4.

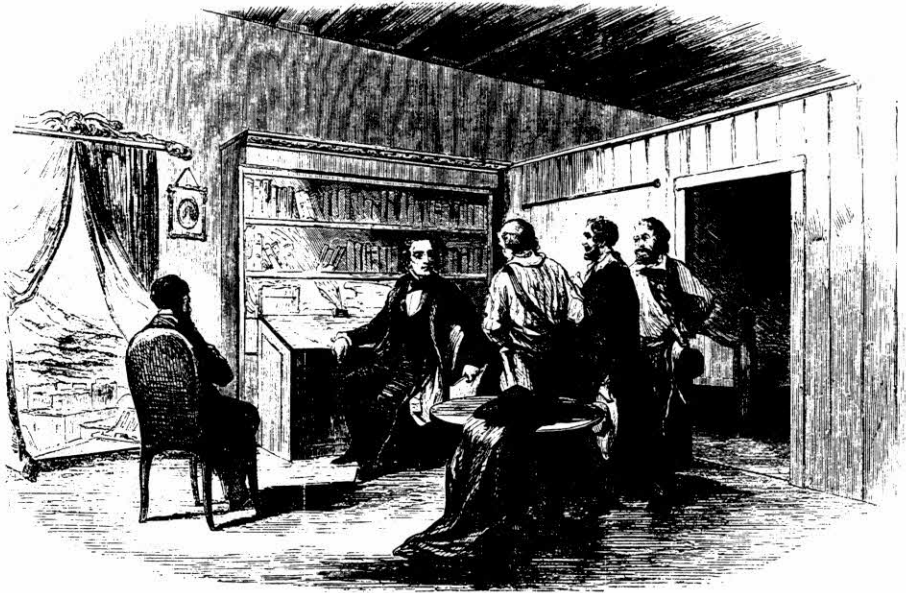
<sup>8</sup>"Col. Kinney Banished from All the Nicaraguas!" *New York Tribune*, February 29, 1856, p.3, c.2.

<sup>9</sup>President Juan Rafael Mora was actually in exile when Walker wrote *The War in Nicaragua*. It was then an irony of fate, that General Mora should perish in the same month and in the same manner as William Walker. Mora had been overthrown by Gen. Máximo Blanco and banished from Costa Rica in August, 1859. In September, 1860 he landed at Puntarenas and attempted to regain his power. He collected three or four hundred followers, but was attacked before beginning his march on the capital. His supporters fled, and he surrendered. Tried by a drum-head court-martial on September 30, he was condemned to die, and was shot within three hours after sentence was passed. Two days afterwards, his brother-in-law, Gen. José María Cañas, incurred the same penalty.



**Walker's residence**  
*on the Plaza at Granada*

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**Walker's office**

*"Gen. Walker was sitting at his table . . ." (p. 293).*

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## 25. The Truth About Nicaragua

Profuse newspaper propaganda easily prompted the American people into supplying the flow of emigrants desired by Walker. Were we to rely on the *New York Herald's* correspondence emanating from Granada during February, 1856, we could be assured that in General Walker's domain,

. . . all that has been said of the fertility of the soil and the nature of its productions is quite correct; the one thing needful is its development. When that is effected by the influx of settlers, this country must become the Paradise of North America. The climate is delightful . . .

The city of Granada is in a healthy condition . . . The streets are quiet at night, and one may walk from the lake shore to the suburbs with less fear for personal safety than is generally felt during a walk of such a distance in the city of New York . . .

Granada has now one good hotel, kept by an American, and several restaurants, where meals can be obtained furnished with all the products of the country. A few American stores have been opened, and the prospect is encouraging for the establishment of a heavy commercial business . . .

Real estate is quite low in this city, and vast fortunes must be made by capitalists who embark in that line . . . The city of Granada must become the business centre of the State . . . Capital and enterprise will hasten the work of improvement already commenced, and the first to embark in it will realize the earliest and richest fruits of their labor . . .



The military force have a dress parade every day at 5 P.M., on the plaza, and much has already been done to the improvement of the drill during my short stay here. Uniformity of dress and equipment would at once make the army here not only the best fighting men in the world but among the best in drill and appearance.

General Walker is very highly esteemed by all parties here, the citizens respect him, and he is idolized by the soldiers. Every native with whom I have had any conversation is satisfied with the condition of things, and speaks in high terms of praise of General Walker. As for the General, I can say but little from personal knowledge. I have had the honor of several interviews, and have learned to admire him. He is constantly pressed with business, and yet despatches it with perfect tranquility; is quite deliberate in speech and movement, and seems to weigh well every word he speaks or hears, and to scrutinize every movement. He is of small figure, sandy hair and complexion, blue eyes, rather inclined to a hazel, and is perfectly unostentatious in dress, manner and action, and seems made upon the same mould which has produced to the world men qualified for counsel and command. His success is decided, and if Providence spares him, as a leading mind in this State, I am confident that Nicaragua will in a short time take a rank among nations that will be the envy of older States.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Walker was entirely confident of success. The Nashville *Patriot* published in March an extract of a letter he wrote on Feb. 28 "to a relative" in that city:

I suppose you get all the news--probably far more than is correct--about Nicaragua from the papers. Everything is now quiet within the Republic. A number of settlers are coming out by every steamer, and I think

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<sup>1</sup>"Our Nicaraguan Correspondence," *NY Herald*, 3/2/1856, p.3, c.1.

within a few months we will have a vigorous, permanent population. None of the neighboring States have power, though they may have the disposition to trouble us.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, Walker's younger brother, James Jr., bid farewell to his father and joined William and Lipscomb Norvell in Nicaragua.

The true picture of affairs was quite different than suggested by the preceding letters. As James Jr. personally attested upon his arrival at Granada, the new settlers were dying at an alarming rate.<sup>3</sup> A single entry in Minister John H. Wheeler's private diary told what was happening: "Monday, February 25: Much sickness in Granada--Ten coffins passed my house to the mournful music of 'Venite Adoremus' followed by the troops. My heart is heavy enough without these mournful sights."

On the 9th of February, the recently organized Young America Pioneer Club presented a sword to the Commander-in-Chief, and the General having intimated his desire to avoid any public ceremony, Mr. Prescott Tracy was delegated to bear the address and sword to Headquarters. Mr. Tracy's words, unintentionally or on purpose, directed a blast of reality to General Walker:

. . . And now, General, we deliver up to you the charge committed to us, with unshaken confidence that the lustre of this blade will never be tarnished in the hands of a chevalier "*sans peur et sans reproche*."

Should danger menace the flag of our adopted country, you will find the members of the "Young America Pioneer Club of Nicaragua" among the citizen soldiery; and should death (which calamity may Provi-

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<sup>2</sup>"Affairs in Nicaragua," *New Orleans Picayune*, 3/29/1856, p.1, c.6.

<sup>3</sup>Three weeks after his arrival, James Walker died of "inflammatory rheumatism" and was buried in Granada on Friday, May 16. "Funeral of Capt. Walker," *El Nicaraguense*, May 17, 1856, p.2, c.2.

dence avert,) become your victor, we shall embalm your memory in common with that of the immortal patriots of the past.

*"For to the hero, when his sword  
Has won the battle for the free,  
Death's voice is as a prophet's word:  
And in that hollow note is heard,  
The thanks of millions yet to be."<sup>4</sup>*

*El Nicaraguense* informed that General Walker accepted the present, and in return dispatched the following reply:

Head Quarters of the Army, Granada, February 9, 1856.

Mr. Prescott Tracy-- Dear Sir: Please tender my thanks to the members of the Young America Pioneer Club for the sword presented to me by them.

Your obedient servant,

WM. WALKER.

Walker's curt acknowledgment rings a little hollow, suggesting that the allusions to death were unwelcome. That same morning, the first case of "mutiny, and inciting to insubordination the members of the army" was tried by a Court Martial in Granada.<sup>5</sup> The first notice of Reward offered for a deserter, appeared in *El Nicaraguense*, February 23, 1856. These and other incidents indicate the actual state of affairs, but "The Truth About Nicaragua" was best exposed by a returned emigrant (William D. Snyder) in the columns of the *New York Tribune*, reproduced here in Appendix E.

In a few words, the truth told by Snyder, is a history of sickness, death, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. Granada was the great deadhouse of the country. Four months after

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<sup>4</sup>"Sword Presentation," *El Nicaraguense*, February 16, 1856, p.1, c.5.

<sup>5</sup>"Court Martial," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.3.

the shooting of Corral, not a spade had been struck into the ground by an American. Many a fillbuster who had left New York in high spirits, was tame and submissive as a sick lamb once in the power of Gen. Walker, and in tears over his desolate situation. (See Appendix E for the details).

As William D. Snyder aboard the *Northern Light* left behind San Juan del Norte on the 5th of March, fresh contingents of recruits from New York and New Orleans started up river "in high spirits," on their way to Granada. With them traveled Major and Mrs. John P. Heiss, the Major bearing confidential dispatches from the State Department to Minister Wheeler and two grist mills and tools for the manufacture of corn bread in the new Republic. Although a native of Pennsylvania, Heiss had been a resident of Nashville and was a Major in the Tennessee militia, besides being a journalist, editor of the *Washington Union* during the Polk administration, and a former chief proprietor of the New Orleans *Delta*.

At San Juan del Norte the new arrivals learned of the seizure of the Transit Company property by Walker and met Mr. Byron Cole, one of the government appraisers, on board and apparently in charge of the up river boat on which they travelled. Many questioned the policy of an act which might possibly impair the flow of emigrants to Nicaragua. Cole reassured them that before the government had rescinded the charter of the Accessory Transit Company, "complete arrangements had been made with Messrs. Garrison and Randolph, of San Francisco, and Morgan and others of New York, to have the route well served by superior steamers on both oceans; and that instead of there being any fear of interruption in the communication with both sides of the United States, it was certain the facilities would be very much increased."<sup>6</sup>

Walker's new recruits, 150 from New York and 160 from New Orleans, included two companies of French and Germans, "soldierly and fine looking men," and a small group of Cuban

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<sup>6</sup>"Our Nicaragua Correspondence," *NY Herald*, 4/11/1856, p.1, c.6.

exiles, under Gen. Goicouría, most of them veterans of the López campaigns. As they approached Castillo at night, a cannon thundered forth a welcome and a huge bonfire lighted the landing:

. . . and around it moved a band of black shadows stirring up the brands, and now and then plucking them from the fire and whirling them around their heads in flaming emphasis, to a song which, at our first distance, seemed a sort of incantation. Soon, however, all on board detected it to be the Marseilles hymn, and at once the French company from New Orleans, half crazy with excitement, took it up. The Germans followed, and soon the whole of our six hundred passengers united in the strain--men, women and children all involved in the enthusiasm, and as solemn as if chanting in a church. It was a brave sight, and those who looked on it as we debarked by torch light, who saw us step involuntarily into line to the time of that revolutionary hymn, who heard us hailed by armed men with ringing cheers, and saluted by the applause of cannon, observed a scene as momentous in its character as the ouster of the Saracen, the advance of Cortez with his songs of faith, or the landing of the prayerful Pilgrims upon Plymouth Rock.<sup>7</sup>

Such stirring propaganda could not hide the fact that Castillo was an armed camp, with "the omnipresence of armed men . . . military surveillance every side . . . Patrols were established in every quarter, while at the doors of the hotel stood sentinels with fixed bayonets, looking as grim in their check shirts, felt hats and set Saxon jaws, as any of the old moustaches of Napoleon's campaigns . . . Gen. Walker seemed to be personally present."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Our Nicaragua Correspondence," *NY Herald*, 4/12/1856, p.8, c.3.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

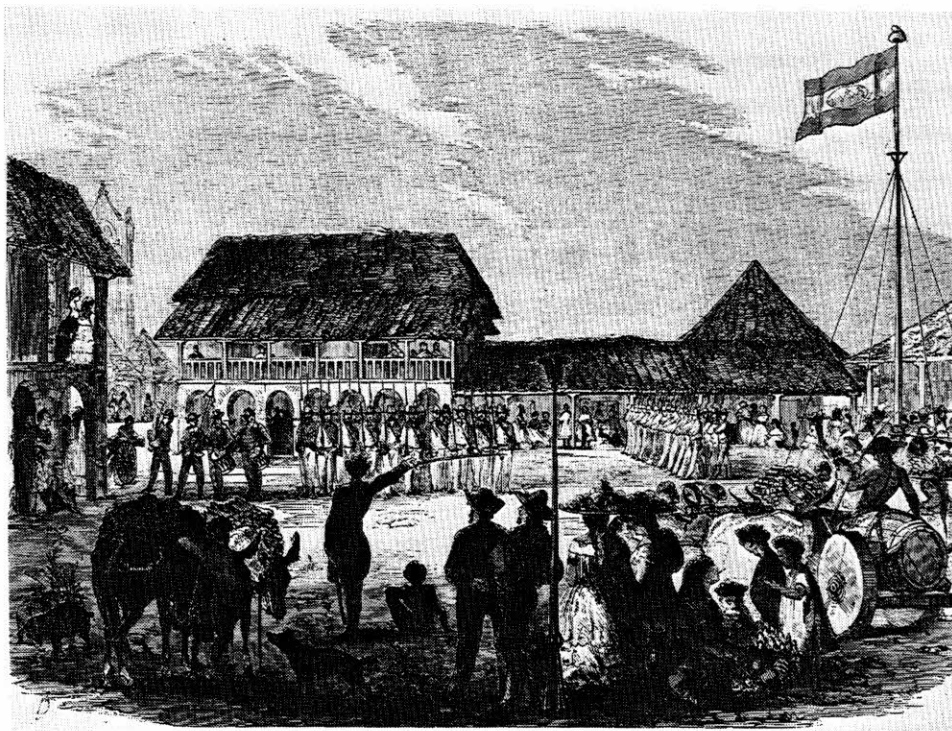
At Change Bend, the California passengers went on ahead to Virgin Bay on the *San Carlos*, while the recruits went behind on a separate steamer, *La Virgen*. When *La Virgen* arrived at Virgin Bay, the California crowd had vanished, but even so the recruits were not allowed to land, so that none could attempt to slip off for San Francisco. At Virgin Bay, *La Virgen* picked up Schlessinger and Sutter, who had just returned from Costa Rica, and on Sunday, March 9, at sunrise it dropped anchor by the new wharf at Granada. In a few minutes, Schlessinger and Sutter set spurs to two horses, which had been held in waiting for them, in swift expedition to headquarters.

That day in the plaza, the entire body of the new recruits joined in parade the troops stationed in the city, between the Nicaraguan flag, which floated near Gen. Walker's quarters, "and the brilliant folds of the beloved stars and stripes which waved before the house of the American Minister."<sup>9</sup> Col. Justo Padilla, envoy from El Salvador then in town, exclaimed "*Muchos soldados!*" and then shook his head as he walked away. As for Walker, an old acquaintance described him that day:

Indeed, though in the habit of seeing him daily for a long time in California, I found something in his face that I had not observed before, and I may add, that I never saw him look so well. There was the same genial smile, the same quiet cordiality of manner, the same mild, musical and even tone of voice, the same simple, unostentatious bearing; but his lower face, which had previously been full, had been reduced by thought, and the intellectual portion of the head loomed above it like a globe. His eye, too, which I had always recognized as fine, seemed to have expanded and strengthened under the new responsibilities of mind, and exhibited new grasp as well as the repose of conscious power. Pale

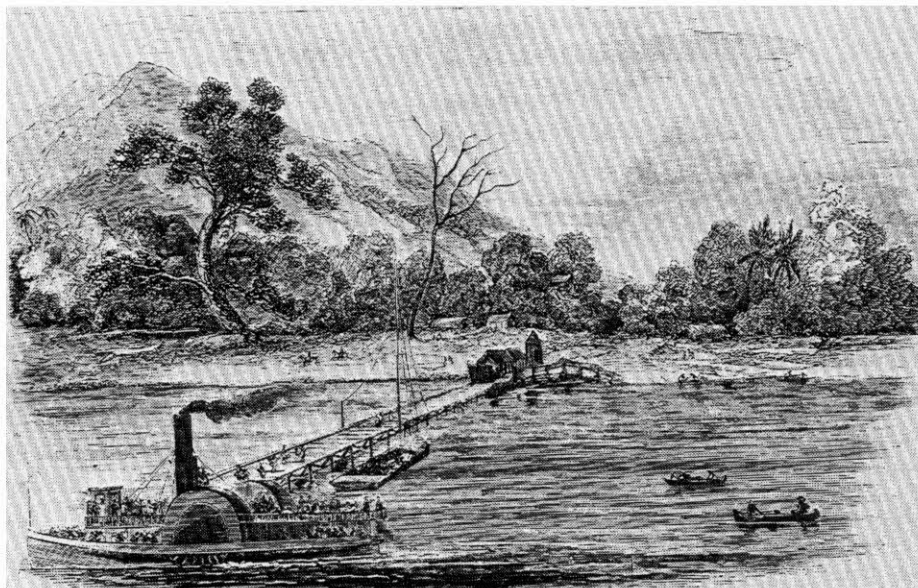
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<sup>9</sup>"Our Nicaragua Correspondence," *Ibid.*, 4/13/1856, p.8, c.3.



**Walker reviewing troops  
on the Plaza, at Granada**

"the new recruits joined in parade . . ." (p. 304)



**the new wharf at Granada**  
*built by order of Gen. Walker*

"at sunrise it dropped anchor by the new wharf . . ." (p. 304)



blue in color--so pale as, with some, to pass for gray, it is full of limpid light and deep expression. Though penetrating, it cannot be called keen or sharp, but it makes its way to the observer's mind by the slow, steady pressure of unwavering volume. Altogether, for a man so utterly unstudied in display, I never saw one of more impressive presence . . .

It is not necessary, however, to study General Walker's countenance for proofs of his ability--they are found much more abundantly in his career; and, if I am not greatly mistaken in him, they will appear still more abundantly in those portions of his life that are yet to come. His presence where he is, the numbers by which he has surrounded himself, the absolute authority which all cheerfully concede to him, the love and the fear which he inspires, the charm by which he keeps an idle army faithful without pay, and unmurmuring without action, is a proof of qualities which stamp him worthy of command, and which will easily bear him through all such casual errors as are inevitable to the complications of the great task he has undertaken. In short, he has already overcome the main dangers of his mission; and, as I remarked in a previous letter, "he cannot now make mistakes enough to fail."

As it is, however, he depends almost entirely upon himself--seldom seeking advice, and working from 6 in the morning till 10 o'clock at night. His only relaxation is the ride he takes every afternoon, (with an orderly behind him), and the interviews he grants during the course of the day . . .

The apartments which he occupies in the Government House are spacious, and the road to them is continually swarmed with young officers, in elegant new uniforms, which, despite the climate, they persist in wearing all the while. I say "young officers," but without necessity for such distinction, for there are no old ones here--the general's age, which is barely thirty-two, being much beyond the average, both of his council and of his

camp. Indeed, I do not think the average will exceed twenty-five; and yet this swarm of boys are equal to the sound foundation of an empire that will last for ages, and perhaps be the admiration of the world.<sup>10</sup>

The March 9 recruits arrived just in time, when the people of Granada were showing signs of resistance and revolt, preparing for liberation by acting in conjunction with their friends in the other States, especially Costa Rica. Thereafter, "the chopfallen Chamorristas suddenly became pliantly civil, or sullenly respectful." Looking from his balcony at the new three hundred troops with pleasure, Walker immediately wrote a Proclamation:

TO THE PEOPLE OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

Invited to Nicaragua by the Democratic party of the Republic, the American force under my command has steadily struggled to carry out the principles for which the Revolution of 1854 was undertaken. In order, however, to consolidate a general peace, we were willing to bury past differences and endeavor to amalgamate the two parties into one. For this purpose we have, since the Treaty of October last, held in check our old friends the Democrats, and have attempted to conciliate the men formerly attached to the Government of Estrada.

With the same view the Provisional Government of Nicaragua, although differing in ideas and principles from the Governments of the other States of Central America, attempted to establish frank and friendly relations with the neighboring Republics. Our overtures of peace have been rejected. Our propositions of friendship have not only been disregarded, but treated with scorn and disdain. Contempt and contumely have been returned for the amicable messages we sent to the other

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

Governments. The only reason given for such conduct is the presence of American forces in the State of Nicaragua.

The self-styled Legitimist Party of Nicaragua has repulsed our efforts at conciliation. They have maintained communication with their fellow-Serviles in the other States. They have, by all means in their power, attempted to weaken the present Provisional Government, and have given aid and encouragement to the enemies of Nicaragua outside of the Republic.

In this condition of affairs, nothing is left for the Americans in Nicaragua but hostility to the Serviles throughout Central America. A very large portion of the so-called Legitimists of this State are either open or secret enemies to our presence on this soil. They owe us for the protection they have had for their lives and property, they paid us with ingratitude and treachery.

Against the Servile parties and Servile Governments of Central America, the Americans in Nicaragua are bound by the common law of self-protection, and declare eternal enmity. Our proffered friendship has been rejected. We can only make them feel that our enmity may be as dangerous and destructive as our friendship is faithful and true.

The troops of the Army of the Republic will assume and wear the *Red Ribbon*.

By command of WILLIAM WALKER, General Commanding-in-Chief.

Ph. R. Thompson, Adjutant General Nicaraguan Army.  
*Headquarters, Granada, March 10, 1856.*<sup>11</sup>

Facing war with Costa Rica, Walker tried to divide the Nicaraguan people and Central America with the old *red ribbon*, in a vain attempt to create a Servile/Democratic conflict. But not a single Leonese or Democrat flocked to his

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid; *El Nicaraguense*, March 15, 1856, p.1, c.5.

banner to fight the invaders when next afternoon the steamer *La Virgen* brought to Granada the Costa Rican declaration of war against the filibusters, and the news that an army of eleven hundred Costa Ricans were within a day's march of San Juan del Sur.

Walker promptly directed President Rivas to draw up a declaration of war against Costa Rica, and in the same breath he ordered the new recruits to embark for Virgin Bay, under the command of Schlessinger, who by the way, was highly recommended by Goicouría.<sup>12</sup> They left Granada at midnight on the 12th. Walker accompanied them as far as Virgin Bay and returned to Granada aboard the *San Carlos* next day, in time to pen his current train of thought in a trilogy for the readers of *El Nicaraguense*:

. . . we are in the midst of war. The dire alternative has been forced upon us . . . Nicaragua would have preferred a peaceable adjustment of her difficulties with Costa Rica . . . but she does not shrink from the sterner arbitrament of the sword. . . . It is highly probable our army is to-day within the borders of Costa Rica, and in a few days we shall hear of the capture of Guanacoste [sic].<sup>13</sup>

. . . The history of General Walker in Central America furnishes a record as fair from blot, as distinct from the usual course of destructive war, as can be found in the annals of the world. . . . The army under General Walker, has created order where before all was confusion . . .

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<sup>12</sup>Goicouría knew Schlessinger well: both served under López in 1851, both were captured, and both were sent to Spain. Goicouría was banished from Cuba: He escaped the garrote, to which he had been condemned, through the personal intercession of his uncle, the Archbishop of Havana. Major Schlessinger went to prison in the Spanish penal fortress of Ceuta, in Africa, and escaped. He then published a detailed "personal narrative of adventures in Cuba and Ceuta" in the *New York Democratic Review*, Sept.-Dec. 1853 (pp. 210-224; 352-368; 553-592.)

<sup>13</sup>"War With Costa Rica," *El Nicaraguense*, March 15, 1856, p.2, c.1.

It is the character of our race to suppress disorder . . . It is wholly repugnant to the education of the white race to live in the midst of confusion. It is equally repugnant to its chivalry to oppress the poor and feeble. An American man feels contemned in his own heart if he stifles an inferior, and as all the race of Central Americans are acknowledged to be his inferiors, he cannot impose upon them with blows. . . .

. . . the world moves on rapidly to its great destiny. The democratic element, of which General Walker is the representative, crushes on to its goal of final relief to all the world. . . .<sup>14</sup>

European politicians are blind in their jealousy of the United States. . . . In the annexation of Texas, English intrigue precipitated the event; in the acquisition of California, the negotiations of England consummated the purchase. Thus, while striving to retard, Europe has actually accelerated the United States. The cotton fields of Texas and the gold fields of California, the strength of the Gulf of Mexico and the command of the Pacific, all, have been prematurely forced into that northern confederation whose growing power already overshadows the ocean. . . .

The past, therefore, should teach to European statesmen the wisdom of re-considering their line of policy. . . .

The spread of the United States, to check which Europe, and particularly England, has expended so much exertion, can now be successfully arrested. The erection of a new confederation of Republics on this continent, the division of power and sympathy, the creation of a counteracting influence--in full, the institution of a balance of power in this hemisphere--offers the easiest solution to the difficulty imaginable. There are five large

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<sup>14</sup>"Cool Proposition," Ibid.

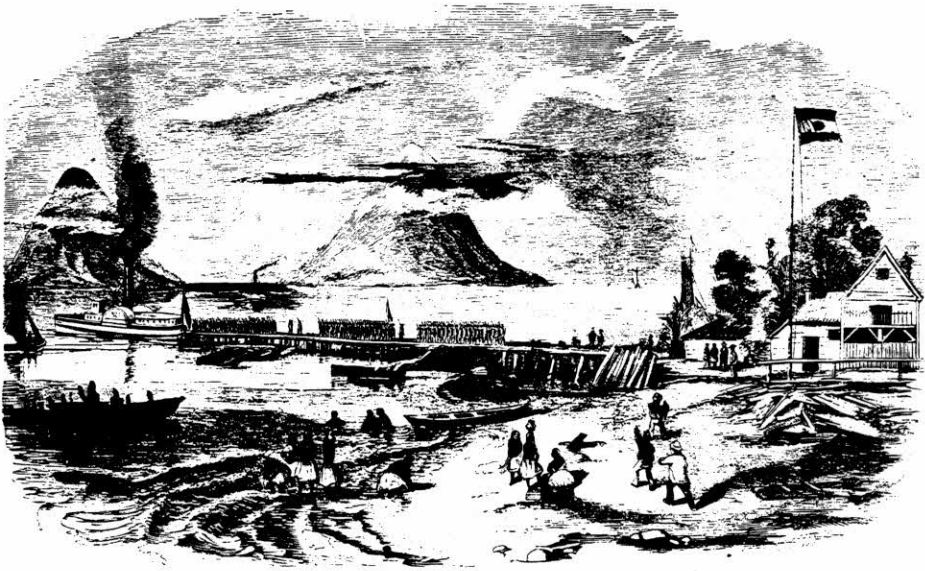
States on this Isthmus, situated to intercept the trade of Asia and Europe--commanding the commerce of the western coast of South America--capable of competing with the United States in the production of those agricultural articles so necessary for manufacturing purposes--and these five States offer to consolidate their forms of government in a Republic that shall serve as a rival to the United States. The project is not a speculative idea, but a fact. Then, when we publish its existence to Europe, we ask to be treated as *our* position and *her* interest demands, what response would good policy dictate? The answer need not be told--Nicaragua should be recognized at once among the family of nations. . . .

. . . as a matter affecting the ultimate policy of the world, and one in which Nicaragua must be the architect of immense destinies, we feel an increasing interest in the decision to which European cabinets may come.<sup>15</sup>

"War With Costa Rica," "Cool Proposition" and "European Policy" on March 15 and Walker's proclamation on March 10, display his Southern Dream of Empire and the isolation of his "Republic." The truth about Nicaragua at the start of the war with Costa Rica was that not a single foreign power had diplomatic relations with the Walker-Rivas government. As Walker found himself entangled in international conflict, he groped for official recognition and support from any quarter.

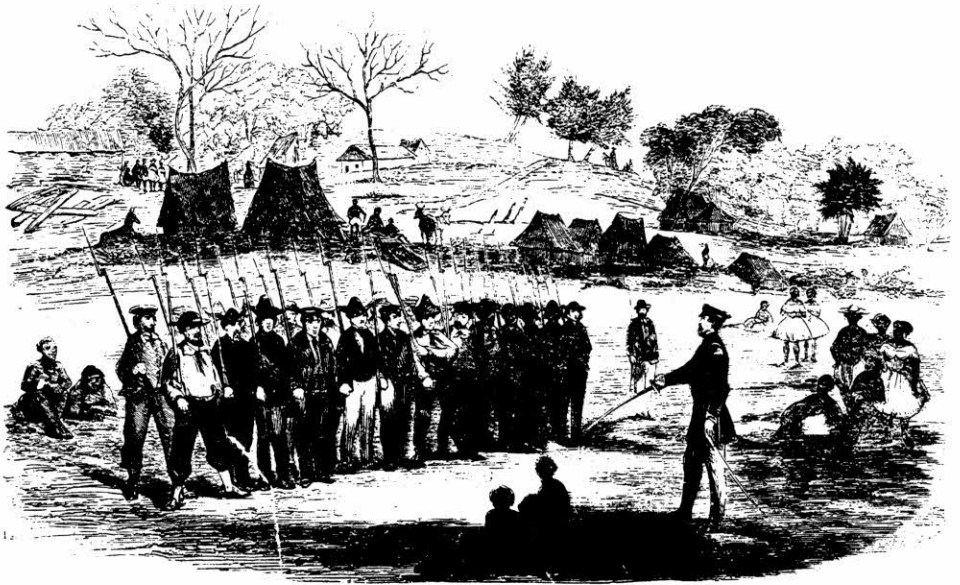
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<sup>15</sup>"European Policy," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.2.



**troops landing at Virgin Bay**  
*en route to Costa Rica*

"Walker accompanied them as far as Virgin Bay" (p. 310)



**examining a squad of men  
at Virgin Bay, about to depart for the scene of war  
"poorly armed and undisciplined troops" (p. 316)**



## 26. Rout of Santa Rosa

Following President Mora's proclamation of March 1, 1856, 3,500 Costa Rican troops were immediately under way to Nicaragua. The body of the expeditionary army gathered in the main square in San José on Monday, March 3, as it prepared for the march. They received the benediction of Archbishop Anselmo Llorente y Lafuente, whose eloquent allocution reminded them "of the strict obligation which you are under as Christians and as citizens to defend the rights of your native land, now more than ever before threatened by men full of ambition and covetousness. . . . Go then full of confidence that your triumph is sure."<sup>1</sup>

As the troops departed in the highest spirits and well armed, Costa Ricans were told by the *Boletín Oficial* that Nicaragua was in open rebellion against Walker and that the Leonese "had begun hostilities cutting many throats of filibusters."<sup>2</sup> All kinds of rumors were current, and it was believed that Walker planned to attack Puntarenas to supply his stores of coffee and dry goods. Baron Bülow was therefore busy with 300 men fortifying the port. One thousand men under Gen. José Joaquín Mora (the president's brother) hurried on ahead to Liberia, where they arrived on the 13th. The president with the rest of the army followed at a slower pace, reaching Bagaces on the 18th of March.

Gen. Mora's expeditionary army had opened its books on March 3 with \$5,000 in its coffers; three weeks later it carried \$24,564 with which to pay expenses along the way. Having

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<sup>1</sup>"Important from Central America, *NY Tribune*, 4/3/1856, p.5, c.2.

<sup>2</sup>"Noticias de Nicaragua, *Boletín Oficial*, San José, 3/14/1856, p.382.

over 3,000 highly motivated, well trained, well provided, and well armed soldiers fighting in defense of their homeland; with modern artillery and with intimate knowledge of the terrain and accurate intelligence of the enemy's movements, the Costa Rican general was certain of success. On the 18th, he reported from Liberia:

Now, at 9:30 P.M., I just received a despatch from our outpost at Sapoá, announcing that the enemy vanguard arrived at that point.

Tomorrow at dawn I will march with my Division and my General Staff to give them battle.

The occasion could not be more propitious. I am convinced of it and my troops are confident of the success of this action, of which I expect to send you a satisfactory communiqué within three days.<sup>3</sup>

The filibusters under Schlessinger numbered 284 and were organized into five companies: German, French, New York, New Orleans, and Voltigeurs. Schlessinger's knowledge of German, French, English, and Spanish was a plus, as was his desire to avenge his ignominious expulsion from Costa Rica. On the field, however, his being "a Dutchman" and "a Jew," his "capricious, violent and despotic nature," and the envy of fellow officers at "his rapid rise and brilliant opportunity," were big minuses.<sup>4</sup> His heterogenous force of poorly armed and undisciplined troops contributed to the coming disaster.

On March 13 Schlessinger marched on the Transit Road from Virgin Bay to San Juan del Sur. On the 16th the march continued through a rough, hilly country. The troops suffered from the rocky nature of the ground, but mostly from the torrid sun. Two guides, secured at San Juan, ran away at Sapoá. After spending a night upon the beach, at

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<sup>3</sup>José Joaquín Mora to the Minister of War, Liberia, March 18, 1856, Guerra #8815, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>4</sup>"The following documents," *New York Herald*, 4/17/1856, p.1, c.2.

Salinas, where they enjoyed plenty of beef and water, at one o'clock a.m. on the 20th, the filibusters reached the hacienda of Santa Rosa, some eighteen miles from the ancient town of Guanacaste (then and now called Liberia). Aware of their presence, the Costa Rican vanguard had already left the town the day before, to drive them out.

The hacienda was a spacious and strongly built old Spanish house, situated on a rise of about ten feet from the road, and surrounded on three sides by a strong stone wall of solid mason work, some four or five feet high, and which being filled in with earth, formed an even platform on which the house was set. This stone wall faced all approaches to the mansion from the road on the Pacific side, while in the rear it was not needed, since the platform ran into the tangled mountain side, which rose gradually for three or four hundred yards, and then shot abruptly upwards to a great height. From the rear, therefore, the house could not be attacked at all. On one side, to the right, it had a kitchen as an outpost; in front, on the opposite side of the road, there was an open shed, and behind the shed ran a long stone corral, with a partition wall between--the whole built strong enough to withstand for some time the attacks of the small artillery of the country.

The filibusters rested, never suspecting the superior Costa Rican army nearby was poised for attack. Their weapons were inferior; some of them had been loaded at Granada, some at Virgin Bay, and, except those which had been discharged along the road in the killing of cattle, all had been loaded for at least a week. Those weapons possessed by the German company were hardly worth bringing along. Many had been rendered useless by having served as leaping poles, in crossing streams--the muzzles being planted in the water, and when reversed, wetting both lock and load. Many were missing a screw to draw the charge, and some of the men were so ignorant of the use of arms that they did not know which end of the cartridge to bite off in order to load.

Col. Schlessinger ordered an inspection of arms at 2 p.m., but when the time arrived he postponed the ceremony until



**Santa Rosa**

*(Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, June 21, 1856)*

"to the right, it had a kitchen as an outpost" (p. 317)



**Santa Rosa**  
(1976)

"Spanish house, situated on a rise of about ten feet" (p. 317)

three, while his men ate lunch. The Costa Ricans attacked shortly after two-thirty: roughly one thousand men, with three pieces of artillery, "handsomely deploying in the plain, with all the coolness and precision of old troops."<sup>5</sup> From the moment the picket guard ran in crying "The greasers are coming!" to the last shot fired, only fourteen minutes elapsed:

[The Costa Ricans] manoeuvred with the utmost celerity and precision, deploying and discharging, and managing their field pieces with the same coolness and order in the field as if upon parade. Their evolutions were performed to the sound of the bugle; they would drop and rise in order to load and fire; and a proof of the excellence and great superiority of their arms is found in the fact that many of them discharged a cone shaped bullet, which indicated the possession on their part of the Minie or some other patent rifle.<sup>6</sup>

Adding to the filibusters' confusion, a party of Costa Ricans on the hill wore the red ribbon, and were mistaken for friends. Schlessinger cried out "There they are, boys, there they are!" followed by "*Compagnie Francaise!*" as he ran back; the French company, imagining he wished them to execute a flank movement, ran off after him, and they were followed by the bewildered Dutch company, the latter actually throwing their useless weapons on the ground and running away empty handed. The other companies followed suit

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. In his official report, Gen. José Joaquín Mora enumerated his troops at the battle of Santa Rosa: 280 men under Col. Lorenzo Salazar, 200 men under Capt. José M. Gutiérrez, 200 men from Moracia, a Cavalry Squadron, and the Artillery Corps in charge of two three-pounders. "Parte que el General don José Joaquín Mora da al Gobierno respecto de la batalla de Santa Rosa," Manuel J. Jiménez y Faustino Víquez, *Documentos relativos a la Guerra Nacional de 1856 y 57 con sus antecedentes* (San José, Costa Rica; Tipografía Nacional, 1914), p. 326. Adding up, the Costa Rican troops totaled 680 infantry plus cavalry and artillery, for a total in the neighborhood of one thousand men.

<sup>6</sup>"The following documents," *NY Herald*, 4/17/1856, p.1, c.2.

shortly.

Four Costa Rican officers and fifteen soldiers lost their lives. The filibusters left 26 dead strewn on the battlefield. The survivors fled northward, leaving behind all their mules, horses, ammunition, and belongings, scattering themselves wildly over a barren and mountainous country with which they were wholly unacquainted. Fearful of passing along the road where they might be captured, they broke up in small parties, fleeing through the thorny undergrowth of the forest paths.

Several days later, the wretched remnants of Schlessinger's force began pouring in at Virgin Bay, some in squads, some alone, some hatless, all shoeless, and several practically naked, sorely sunburned, having torn their clothing in successive installments to bind round their suffering feet. Schlessinger himself arrived on the 26th, downcast, disgraced, and shunned by everyone: the fresh blue military coat, with its bright buttons, had given place to a ragged and filthy woolen shirt; the jaunty French military cap to a slouched hat fastened with a rope yarn; and instead of the glossy patent leather boots, his leggings were in shreds, and a mush of torn leather hung about his feet.

The badly wounded could not flee. Twenty filibusters were captured, courtmartialled on the 23rd, and condemned to death within 48 hours. One sentence was commuted by President Mora to imprisonment. Nineteen filibusters were shot at 4 p.m. on the 25th of March: 5 Irishmen, 3 Americans, 3 Germans, 2 Prussians, 1 Englishman, 1 Frenchman, 1 Roman, 1 Panamanian, 1 from Samos Island, and 1 from Corfu Island. The farewell letter of an Irishman was one of two singled out by the Costa Rican high command for propaganda purposes:

LETTER FROM PETER GONNAN TO JOHN CONNOLLY.

Liberia (Costa Rica), March 25, 1856.

My dearest cousin John-- You cannot imagine with what anguish I write this to inform you of my fatal destiny. I was taken with sixteen others. At this very

moment we are receiving the last exhortations of the Costa Rican priests. It is now two o'clock in the afternoon, and at four we are condemned to suffer the penalty of death. God have mercy upon us!

I charge you to say to all my relatives and friends in general, and particularly to Thomas and his friends, that they must not come to Nicaragua; because, for them and for many others, it is much better to remain at home. Nobody receives the 250 acres of land there, but every one is forced by Walker to take arms, whether they have money or not. I believe that Collman and David Ferrier have escaped. No more at present, from your most affectionate cousin,

PETER GONNAN.<sup>7</sup>

Upon Schlessinger's return from Santa Rosa, on March 27 Walker appointed a Court of Enquiry in Rivas, "to investigate and report upon all the circumstances connected with Colonel Schlessinger's march and command, from San Juan del Sud to Santa Rosa, the action before that place, and the retreat from it."<sup>8</sup> As a result of the investigation, Walker issued General Orders No. 73 on March 31st, convening a General Court Martial for the trial of Col. Louis Schlessinger. Charges and specifications accused him of neglect, incompetence, ignorance, and cowardice in the discharge of his duties. During the trial he was allowed to go at large on his word of honor, restricted, however, to the city of Granada.

Soon after the privilege was granted, and before the decision of the Court was known, on or about the 12th of April Schlessinger wisely fled from Granada, and the charge of desertion from the army was added to the others. The Court then found him guilty on all charges except "neglect of

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<sup>7</sup>"Letters from Two Prisoners Taken by the Costa Ricans," *New York Herald*, May 1, 1856, p.2, c.1.

<sup>8</sup>General Orders No. 64, General Order Book, Nicaraguan Army (Item 111, Fayssoux Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane University).



duty," and unanimously passed sentence which Gen. Walker approved on May 3, 1856, with these remarks:

The sentence of the Court on the specifications and charges preferred against Col. Louis Schlessinger, of Second Rifles, is approved; and he is therefore degraded from the rank of Colonel, will be shot as a deserter wherever found, and will be published as such throughout the civilized world.<sup>9</sup>

Schlessinger retaliated by joining the Legitimist rebels who gathered around Matagalpa, at a safe distance from Walker. When writing *The War*, in 1859, Walker (like Aesop's fox and the bunch of grapes), consoled himself with the rationalization that "in such society he sank, by the way he permitted himself to be treated, beneath the contempt of the lowest soldier in even a Central American army. He is now fallen so far that it would be an unworthy act to execute on him the sentence of an honorable court."<sup>10</sup> In his recollection, Walker naturally threw the entire blame of the Santa Rosa rout on Schlessinger.

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<sup>9</sup>General Orders No. 94, Virgin Bay, May 3, 1856, *Ibid*; "Court Martial of Colonel Louis Schlessinger," *El Nicaraguense*, May 10, 1856, p.3, c.3.

<sup>10</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 206.

## 27. Imminent Invasion

When Schlessinger was routed in Santa Rosa on Thursday, March 20, 1856, Granada was in a state of great religious enthusiasm. The Holy Week with all its imposing ceremonies, its grand and solemn memories, its infinite commemorations, was upon the city.

On March 16 (Palm Sunday), the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was commemorated. The procession marched in front of Walker's quarters, to the Parochial church--the figure of Christ mounted upon a richly caparisoned ass. On Tuesday and Wednesday other processions passed along the same route--the figure of Christ crowned with thorns, mocked King of the Jews, accompanied by the figures of the Virgin Mary and San Sebastian. Wednesday evening, Gen. Walker fell ill.

The prevailing epidemic (an unnamed febrile illness) had already killed many Americans and a general feeling of uneasiness permeated the American contingent when it was announced that Walker was worse:

No person could escape the solemn impression--for the welfare of all was too deeply linked with that of the Commander-in-Chief, to feel quiet when he was sick. Never did the genius of a single man impress itself so thoroughly as then--never did the mysterious influence of a human mind manifest its power more completely. All other thought was lost in the consideration of one subject, and that subject was felt to contain the fate of a nation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Sickness of Gen. Walker," *El Nicaraguense*, 3/22/1856, p.2, c.2.

The Americans in Granada numbered 450, more than 300 of them attached to the Army. They comprised Col. Birkett D. Fry's Light Infantry Battalion, the General Staff, Subsistence, Medical, Pay, and Ordnance departments. That day, *Jueves Santo*, the ceremony of Christ's trial was rehearsed at the Parochial church, across the Plaza from Walker's residence. President Rivas and Minister Ferrer were present on the occasion, "and had seats arranged near the oratory from which Father Vijil delivered his eloquent discourse."<sup>2</sup> The priest "ordered prayers to be offered for Walker's restoration."<sup>3</sup>

During Thursday, Friday, and a great portion of Saturday, no work was done. The bells of the churches were silent, the animals were turned out to graze, and the fires in the kitchen extinguished. "No work was done by the laborer or his master, but every one gave up his time to the service and honor of the crucified Son of God."<sup>4</sup> The doors of the General's quarters were closed, so that the utmost quiet might be maintained. Col. Moses, the head of the Medical Department of the Army, was unremitting in his attentions to the patient. Thursday night, the scene in front of Walker's quarters was solemnly resplendent:

The church was illuminated with innumerable candles, and the devout ceremonies continued until 12 o'clock, when a procession was formed and marched to the church of San Sebastian. From the time of early candle lighting until the hour of twelve, the congregation continued to increase until soon the whole paved space in front of the church, was involved with men, women and children. The scene was romantic, to see a thousand women crowded together in the front of the

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<sup>2</sup>"Holy Week in Granada," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.3.

<sup>3</sup>"Capt. Bushnell's Statement," *New York Herald*, 4/17/1856, p.1, c.1.

<sup>4</sup>"Holy Week in Granada," *El Nicaraguense*, 3/22/1856, p.2, c.3.

church waiting patiently the hour when the procession would form. The sight was lovely as a full moon could make it, and every thing was beautiful and sublime.

At twelve, exactly, the signal of departure was announced, and the procession formed and marched away through the streets and after a while returned to the Parochial church.<sup>5</sup>

*La Procesión del Silencio* (The Procession of the Silence) crossed twice in front of Walker's quarters, returning to the Parochial church at dawn on Good Friday. On a base carried by the people on their shoulders, the erect, tall and slender statue of Christ with flowing hair, robed in a long, white tunic, his hands tied and his eyes blindfolded, dominated the scene. Behind him, at a very slow pace down the street, the people of Granada followed quietly, hundreds of women praying in silence, only the mute shuffling of devout feet disturbed the stillness of a scene illuminated by the full moon at midnight and the twilight at dawn. And at each corner, a long and plaintive bugle sound rustled the hushed stillness.

Walker's health improved immediately, and on Saturday morning, March 22, *El Nicaraguense* announced the good tidings of his almost complete recovery. Under it, the fabricated news of imaginary Schlessinger victories in Costa Rica was printed. Preparations were under way to send more troops to him. The First Rifle Battalion under Col. Mark B. Skerrett had been recalled from León, leaving behind a token garrison in charge of a lieutenant, George R. Caston, wounded in a duel.

On Wednesday, March 19, President Patricio Rivas had issued two decrees in Granada. By the first one he announced that on the 22nd (afterwards postponed to the 25th), his Provisional Government would go on a visit to the Occidental Department. By the second, he empowered the Commander-in-Chief of the Army to maintain order and security in the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Oriental and Meridional departments during the absence of the chief executive, therein specifically authorizing Walker "to exercise all means leading to that object."<sup>6</sup>

At 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, March 22, the steamer *La Virgen* brought to Granada the 204-men Parker H. French battalion from New Orleans and a small company from New York--some 250 recruits altogether. A few hours later, Col. Skerrett's Rifles marched in from León, on their way to Costa Rica. Orders were then given to move army headquarters from Granada to Rivas, and the various departments began to pack while at midnight Skerrett's Rifles departed on the steamer for Virgin Bay. "The General is crowding his troops with such rapidity upon the enemy," boasted *El Nicaraguense*, "that the Republic of Costa Rica will scarcely have time to call upon the militia before her cities are overrun with Americans."<sup>7</sup>

That same day, Parker H. French was arrested on his arrival at headquarters, and kicked out of the country.<sup>8</sup> Walker "hauled him over the coals. An angry scene and a definitive rupture ensued." French left Nicaragua "full of bitterness . . . but if he has gone off with the iron in his soul, it surprises none, except possibly himself, as the causes of his separation from the government have been long at work . . . His own conduct in the States was an active and fatal agent in his downfall."<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of that bustle, Walker read the intercepted mail from England to Costa Rica, seized by Lieut. John M. Baldwin at the San Juan river on the 16th and brought on *La Virgen* to Granada. The letters documented British arms sales to Costa Rica under very favorable terms. Walker instantly summoned Minister Wheeler and gave him the captured mail

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<sup>6</sup>"República de Nicaragua--Ministerio de Gobernación," *Ibid.*, p.3, c.1.

<sup>7</sup>"Light Infantry Battalion," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.2.

<sup>8</sup>"Col. Parker H. French," *Alta*, April 13, 1856, p.1, c.1.

<sup>9</sup>"Our Nicaragua Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 5/2/1856, p.2, c.2.

for transmittance to Washington. At Granada, that *Sabbatum Magnum*, events seemed to be going Walker's way.

Next afternoon, Easter Sunday, the *La Virgen* returned to Granada with an urgent dispatch for the Commander-in-Chief. Still weak from his recent illness, Walker was shocked into instant health by a confidential note from Major A. S. Brewster, commander at Rivas, bearing the first hasty news of the reverse at Santa Rosa three days earlier. Walker and his staff were aboard the steamer before midnight, and landed at Virgin Bay Easter Monday at dawn. Col. Fry and command followed on the *San Carlos* two days later, so that practically the entire filibuster army thronged about the Transit route when the stragglers from Santa Rosa drifted into Virgin Bay on Wednesday, March 26.

Fearing an imminent Costa Rican attack, Col. Fry set about putting Virgin Bay into a state of defense. The powder was hurriedly debarked; the small brass three-pounder belonging to the *San Carlos* was placed in the road in front of the Transit Company's office; arms were distributed to all who were disposed to volunteer; double picket guards were posted; in the emergency, "no man was permitted to play an indifferent part."<sup>10</sup> But the night wore away without alarm, and on the following morning Col. Fry forwarded a large portion of the powder to headquarters in Rivas.

The town of Rivas looked gloomy as the first of Gen. Walker's troops entered. There were many reports that the Costa Ricans were about to enter San Juan del Sur, and hence people were in a state of panic: trading women were gathering up their wares and lugging off their tables; doors were being locked and secured; and all avenues leading out of town were lined with laden mules and women bending over bundles, fleeing from the anticipated hostilities.

Col. Fry was at once ordered to Rivas with his entire force, since his position at Virgin Bay was vulnerably exposed. Walker planned to meet the enemy either at Rivas or on the Transit road. He set his headquarters in the plaza

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

of Rivas, which was "a dirty, unornamented square, flanked on one side by an unmeaning ruin, and surrounded for the most part by a string of vile houses, which seemed to be in possession of the lowest order of inhabitants. One side alone, which had been appropriated by General Walker for himself and the government offices, was decent in its exterior."<sup>11</sup>

The 27th and 28th wore away, but the only incidents of note were the court of inquiry upon Schlessinger and the arrival of Gen. Goicouría from Granada, with the news that Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras had united against Walker and that their armies were marching towards León. The decorum of the filibuster camp left much to be desired, with a number of officers indulging "in continuous carouse." Walker put a stop to it on the 29th: he made "a severe example . . . of his own brother, by degrading him from the captaincy to the ranks, for the offence of being irregular in his habits as an officer."<sup>12</sup>

On the 29th, Walker disbanded the French and German companies and drafted most of the men into other units, but those who could not speak English were discharged from the army. Sixty armed natives from San Jorge who placed themselves at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief, formed a separate unit. On the 30th, the outstanding event was the Walker speech at the general review of the troops in front of his quarters on the plaza.

In his speech (transcribed here in Appendix F) Walker carried the banner of American civilization for the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* *La Parroquia*, the church on the east side of the Plaza, had been destroyed by an earthquake in 1844, and the ruins were still there in 1855, when the new, larger church was under construction.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Another correspondent informed that Lipscomb Norvell Walker was the very opposite of his brother, for "when he is not drinking he is talking, and when not talking he is drinking. He has held the office of captain till reduced to the ranks a few days ago for perpetual drunkenness." "The Nicaraguan War," *New York Tribune*, May 1, 1856, p.6, c.2-6; p.7, c.1-2. The official record reads: "Captain L. Norval [*sic*] Walker is dropped from the army on account of intemperance . . . By command of Wm. Walker, General Commander in Chief." General Orders No. 67, Rivas, March 29th, 1856, General Order Book, Nicaraguan Army.

"redemption" of Spanish America and "the interests of humanity." When years later he recorded it in *The War*, he closed the episode with these thoughts:

The words were few and simple, and drew little force from the manner of him who uttered them; but they had the desired effect and created a new spirit among the men. It is only by constant appeals to the loftier qualities of man that you can make him a good soldier; and all military discipline is a mere effort to make virtue constant and reliable by making it habitual.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding his earnest appeal to the loftier qualities of man, Gen. Walker failed to create a new spirit in the two sentinels at his own quarters, one of whom was a Vesta immortal, a Chilean named Carlos Travilla. Both sentries together were found asleep that very night. Next day, a Court Martial sentenced them to be shot. Walker approved the sentence and ordered that it be carried out at sunset on April 1st.

At the prescribed time, the officer of the day led out the prisoners between two rows of soldiers, and the solemn procession moved past Walker's quarters, to the mournful music of the Dead March. It halted in front of the church. Confession administered, the shooting party stationed, the bandages tied, and the victims with their backs against the wall, Gen. Walker announced a pardon "and instantly a thousand voices proclaimed the magic word. The Chileno was raised on the shoulders of the crowd and carried in front of the General's quarters, where a round a cheers was given. The clemency of the General met a responsive chord in every heart."<sup>14</sup> The unheard-of clemency of the General was not mentioned by Walker in *The War*, and was seldom if ever repeated before or after.

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<sup>13</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 188.

<sup>14</sup>"Act of Clemency," *El Nicaraguense*, April 14, 1856, p.1, c.4.



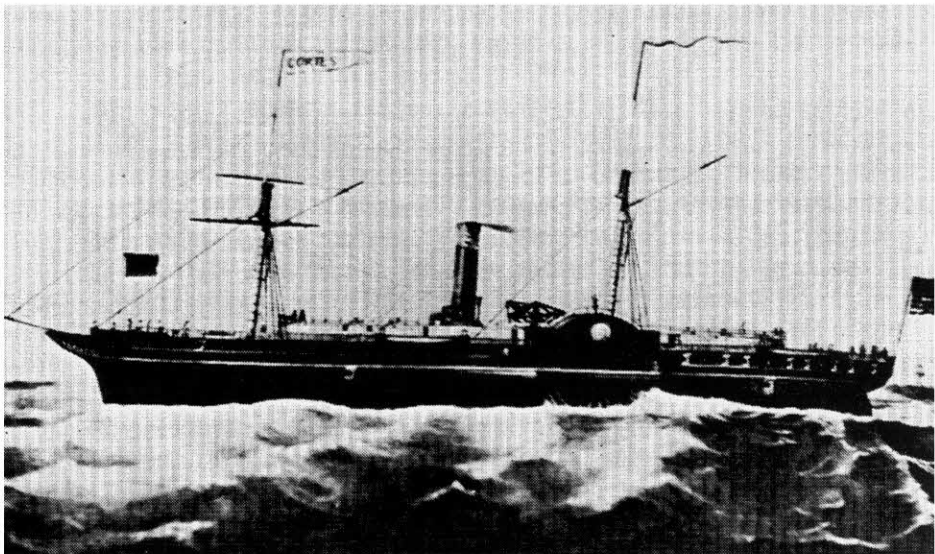
## 28. Walker's "Ruse de Guerre"

Towards the end of March, Walker expected large reinforcements from New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco, and he devoted his time in preparing large amounts of munitions. On the evening of April 1st, the *La Virgen* lied at anchor at Change Bend, while the *San Carlos* was at Virgin Bay, ready to carry the throngs of Transit travellers due to arrive at any moment.

There were reports about town that the filibuster garrison at San Juan del Sur--some 250 men--would seize the Transit Company steamer *Cortes* as soon as it got in from California, and Walker would use it to attack Puntarenas. The *Cortes* had left San Francisco on March 20th with about 400 passengers, one fourth of whom intended to become permanent residents of Nicaragua. They included a party of filibusters under Captain Horace Bell, accompanied by W. R. Garrison.

Just before reaching its destination, the *Cortes* met the Pacific Steamship Company steamer *Golden Gate* on its way up from Panama, and one of the passengers from New York, Mr. George S. Porter, was transferred to the Nicaragua steamer, allegedly with intentions of stopping at San Juan. In private, however, Porter exhibited to Captain Napoleon Collins [or Collens], of the *Cortes*, his authority from Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, with peremptory instructions for Collins to by-pass Nicaragua and proceed to Panama.

The *Cortes* anchored in the bay of San Juan at 9 p.m. on April 1st. Garrison went ashore, but passengers and filibusters remained on board, awaiting for daylight before landing. Captain Collins immediately held a secret conference with the masters of three coal vessels in port, and at 2 a.m. the four ships lifted anchor and silently drifted out of the harbor,



**Cortes**

*"The unforeseen escape of the Cortes . . . " (p. 333)*

neither making any sail lest the noise should create suspicion. They sailed off the coast at sunrise on April 2nd, out of Walker's reach, and the *Cortes* proceeded to Panama taking one of the coal vessels in tow.

The unforeseen escape of the *Cortes* destroyed any hope Walker had of using the steamer to attack Puntarenas. It also severed his vital link with California at a critical instant, for it was several weeks before Garrison replaced the vessel to restore the connection.

Concurrently, Walker received a letter from fellow-Tennessean John L. Marling, U.S. Minister in Guatemala, safely sent through the diplomatic channels of Minister Wheeler, together with urgent messages from President Patricio Rivas at León, concerning the movements on the part of Guatemala and El Salvador to join in the war against him. Meanwhile, two weeks after Santa Rosa, there were no signs of any Costa Rican advance beyond the frontier of Guanacaste. Under those circumstances, Gen. Walker reacted by changing tactics.

He issued orders in Rivas for a general movement of the army, and sent Edmund Randolph to León, to keep close watch on developments there. The General gave no notice of his plans of operations to anyone; subalterns were left to infer his designs from the movements themselves. Even Minister Wheeler was kept in the dark at Granada. Wheeler recorded in his diary, on April 4th: "Randolph arrived--called on him--not communicative--troops left Rivas . . ."; 5th: "Randolph goes to León . . ."; 7th: "Reports that Genl. Walker has gone to San José."

When Walker ordered the army on April 3 to march from Rivas to Virgin Bay, allowing but 15 lbs of baggage to each soldier, it was generally supposed that they were bound for San José. On Saturday, April 5, almost all the American soldiers and other persons attached to the army in different capacities boarded the steamer *San Carlos*. Only the native garrison remained at Rivas, headed by Col. Machado, a Cuban, under the vigilant eye of Lieut. Col. Byron Cole with a few Americans.

From Virgin Bay the boat proceeded to Fort San Carlos,

where it took on board Captain Linton's Company D, Light Infantry. A few miles down river, all the troops embarked on two river steamers. The widespread belief that they were on their way to San José, via the Sarapiquí river, was soon dispelled at the Toro rapids when only Gen. Walker with one company of soldiers and a few passengers bound for New York and New Orleans, went on to Castillo. Walker merely oversaw the river defenses, leaving Captain Kelly with 40 men at Castillo while Captain Baldwin with 30 men guarded Hipp's Point at the Sarapiquí junction downstream.

Returning to the Toro rapids on Monday afternoon, April 7, the General reembarked all the troops on the *San Carlos*. He ordered the *La Virgen* (which had waited two weeks at Change Bend for westbound passengers that never arrived) to proceed to Virgin Bay. Both vessels started together at sundown across the lake, but to the surprise of all, the *San Carlos* with Walker and his troops took a course near the Chontales coast which brought them to the city of Granada next morning. The boat, with all its soldiers, passengers, and cargo was discharged in four hours, and the various departments were soon again actively at work in their old quarters.

Meanwhile, Mora, learning that Walker had occupied Rivas in force, took his time while he watched his adversary. The Costa Rican army headquarters remained at Liberia until March 28, when Mora moved on to Sapoá. When Walker left Rivas, Mora advanced to Peña Blanca, eight leagues distant from the Transit road. After Walker sailed away across the lake, the Costa Ricans marched on to Santa Clara on the 6th, and two divisions of 300 men each took possession of San Juan del Sur and Virgin Bay on the 7th. The skeleton filibuster garrison fled from Rivas, and Mora captured the town at 10 a.m., Tuesday, April 8, without firing a shot.

Costa Rica had taken possession of the prized Transit road at the cost of only one casualty, during the scuffle with the Transit Company employees at Virgin Bay in which nine Americans were killed. When the steamer *La Virgen* approached at 5:30 a.m. on the 8th, her master Thomas Ericsson, found the wharf on fire, burnt to the water's edge to keep the

filibusters from landing. Charles Mahoney, a company employee wounded in the scuffle, was allowed by the Costa Rican commander to depart aboard the steamer. Stopping at Ometepe for wood, the *La Virgen* reached Granada at 5:30 p.m., shortly after a courier on horseback had brought to the capital the news of the Costa Rican advance. Minister Wheeler recorded the momentous events of that day in his diary:

Tuesday, April 8-- . . . Steamer *Virgin* [*sic*] in with Genl. Walker and troops--courier in from Rivas--enemy taken San Juan del Sur and Virgin Bay--1,500 strong--killed unarmed persons--Intention of campaign changed instead of marching to León--preparing for Rivas. . . .

Wednesday, April 9-- Up at 4 o'clock . . . Troops left.

At the same time that Walker received the news of Mora's advance on Rivas, letters from León told him that the alarm there had subsided. Consequently he left only two companies to garrison Granada and marched south with his entire army. In his dispatch from Granada, Saturday, April 12, *The New York Herald* correspondent chronicled the tremendous tension left behind in the capital when the troops set off for Rivas:

Tuesday night news arrived that the army of Costa Rica had entered Virgin Bay, burnt down the splendid wharf of the Transit Company, and were on their march to Rivas. Early Wednesday morning General Walker was on the march, at the head of about 600 Americans, to meet the enemy at Rivas. On Friday we received intelligence that he was joined by 300 native volunteers from Masaya, and the native garrison from Rivas. It was now discovered that the trip down the San Juan was a *ruse de guerre* on the part of General Walker to draw the army of Costa Rica into this territory. Its success was admirable. We have today rumors of a terrible battle, and are anxiously expecting the arrival of couriers with despatches. Will it be a victory or a reverse? If a reverse, who will escape? What course shall we here

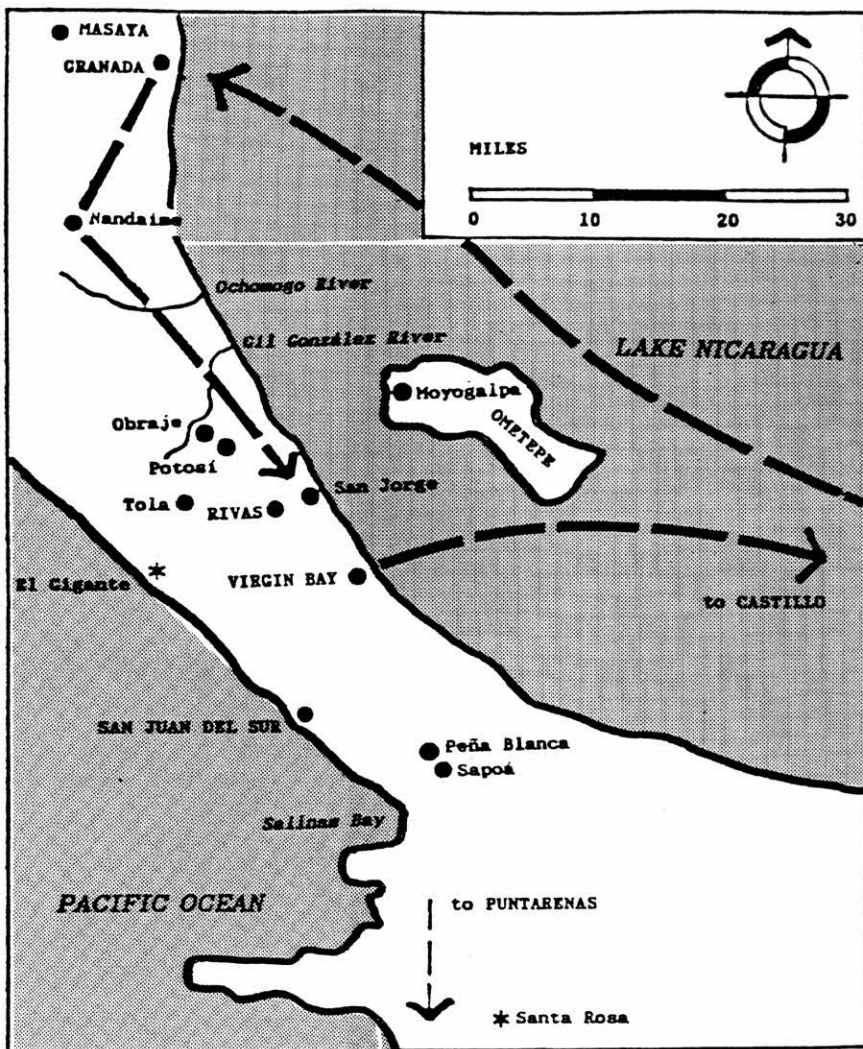
pursue? How long can we maintain the town? How soon can we get reinforcements from León? These and kindred questions pass from mouth to mouth at every cross path. What a jubilee the plaza will present when the booming cannon announces a victory! What a determination of spirit will every American manifest if the courier announces a defeat! I have not heard the first American in this city speak of leaving--the unanimous determination is to defend the city and fight to the death if Walker is defeated and the enemy approach and attack us. How much there is now depending upon the life of one man! Walker cut off, the army is without a leader, and the Americans here without a head. Confusion and dismay would everywhere prevail, and a panic seize everyone, that would end in a rout and massacre . . . If friends in New York can gather from this rambling recital of thought . . . they can judge the position of some two hundred Americans in this city, who this night are on the *qui vive* to hear of victory or to learn the worst and prepare for it.<sup>1</sup>

The 300 native volunteers from Masaya who supposedly joined Walker existed only in the imagination of whoever invented the story; and Walker's native commander at Rivas, José Bermúdez, stayed in town and took service under Mora against the filibusters. Some of his men, however, followed Col. Machado when he evacuated Rivas; the Cuban met Walker near Nandalme and turned around to fight alongside the Americans against the Costa Ricans. That evening, Walker's army encamped for the night by the Ochomogo river.

Next day it advanced to the Gil González. The main body of the Americans left the high road half a league from the river, took a trail to the left, and struck the stream at some distance from the road. "About sunset Walker camped for the night on the south bank of the Gil González, and due silence

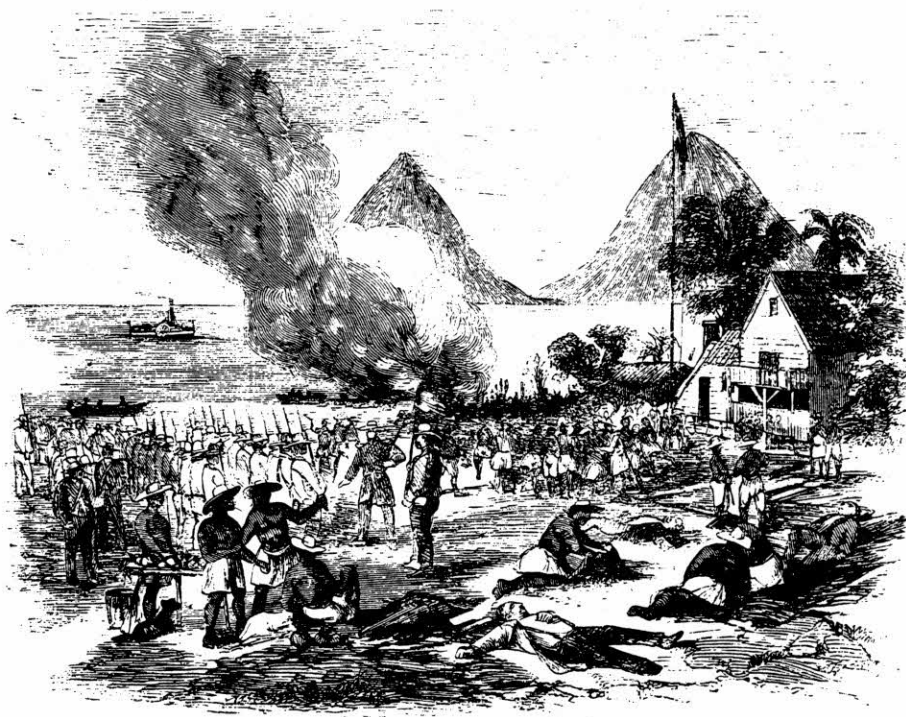
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<sup>1</sup>"Our Nicaragua Correspondence," *NY Herald*, 5/2/1856, p.2, c.2.



Walker's "ruse de guerre"  
 "a ruse de guerre on the part of General Walker" (p. 335)

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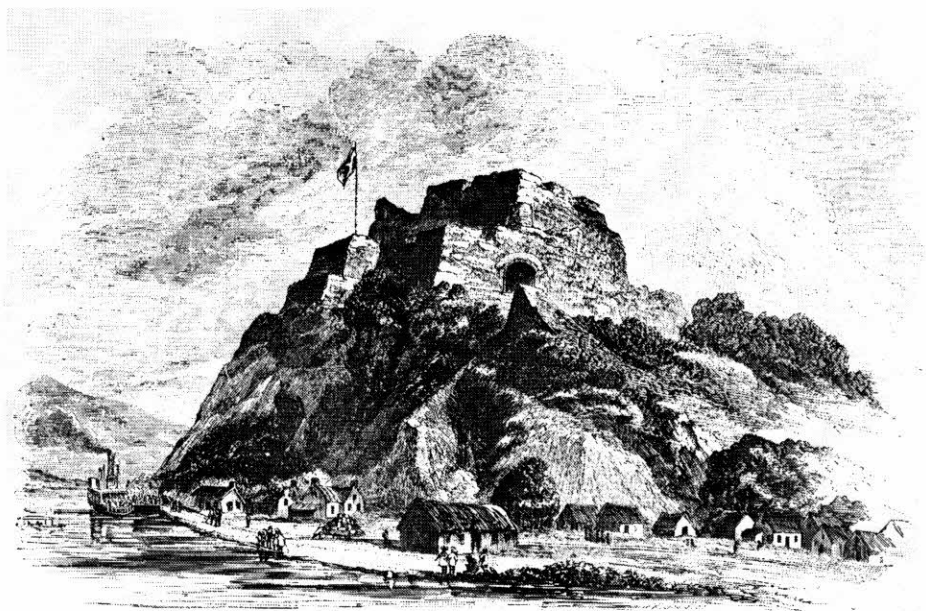


**Costa Ricans at Virgin Bay**

*April 7, 1856*

" . . . took possession of San Juan del Sur and Virgin Bay" (p. 334)





**Walker at Castillo**

*April 7, 1856*

"Gen. Walker . . . went on to Castillo" (p. 334)



**Gil González, 1977**

*(site of the filibuster bivouac, April 10, 1856)*

*"Walker camped for the night on the south bank . . . " (p. 336)*

was kept in order to prevent the enemy from perceiving his presence there."<sup>2</sup>

Along the way, they had met a woman from Rivas who estimated that at least three thousand Costa Ricans had entered the town, "but as the ideas of the people of the country about numbers are rather vague, not much confidence was put in the report."<sup>3</sup> Walker also caught a herdsman hunting cattle for the Costa Ricans and a native from Rivas carrying proclamations from Mora to his Legitimist friends about Masaya, "and, after some threats, much information was educed from the messenger concerning the position and strength of the enemy." Then, at the Gil González,

. . . a man, found skulking near the river, was brought to the general-in-chief. At first he denied all knowledge of the enemy at Rivas, but a rope thrown around his neck and cast over a limb of the nearest tree brought him the use of his memory, and he gave an accurate and detailed account of the several points at which the Costa Ricans were posted. He stated the houses in which Mora and the principal officers quartered, the place where the ammunition was stored together the quantity of it, not forgetting two pretty little pieces of artillery commanding some of the streets. Unfortunately for himself, he let out the fact that he had been sent to gather news of the Americans, and hence was punished as a spy. But his information was so full, and, after severe cross-examination there was so little contradiction in his story, that Walker formed his plan of attack on the facts thus obtained. The result showed that the statements of the spy were entirely accurate. The fear of death had so discomposed his mind that he could not

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<sup>2</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

invent a lie.<sup>4</sup>

In the preceding paragraphs of *The War*, Walker had chronicled occurrences from the arrival of the steamer *Cortes* at San Juan del Sur on the 1st of April, to the bivouac of the filibuster army on the south bank of the Gil González during the night of the 10th. The nine-day passage began and ended in the neighborhood of Rivas, crisscrossing by Virgin Bay, San Carlos, Toro rapids, Castillo Viejo, Granada, Nandaime, the Ochomogo, and the Gil González.

The events of that period opened with the Dead March in front of the unmeaning ruin in the plaza at sunset on the 1st of April, and closed with the drawn figure that swung stiffly in the wind of the forest on the night of April 10, mute evidence of the futility of the spy's appeal for his life. Other macabre spectacles impressed their marks on Walker's mind in between, like the herdsman, hunting cattle for the Costa Ricans, "made prisoner"; or the "threats" to the native from Rivas carrying proclamations from Mora, both of which were reported at the time by a *New York Tribune* correspondent:

. . . A circumstance of a very aggravated nature was related to me by Walker's orderly, McCarty, an Irishman. On the morning before Walker entered Rivas they met a man herding horses, supposed to belong to the Costa Ricans. McCarty tied a rope around the neck of the Spaniard, which he attached to the neck of his own horse, and pranced and galloped his animal about till he drew the Spaniard to the ground. After dragging him along the road a little way, General Walker said he had been punished sufficiently, and had better be allowed to go; but McCarty, thinking he was so far gone from the treatment he had received that he could not recover, shot him. Another incident in the march to Rivas was the taking a courier who was carrying letters to Granada

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

and hanging him to a tree.<sup>5</sup>

Walker did not disclose in *The War* that he intended to seize and use the *Cortes* for military operations. Had he captured the steamer, its mere possession would have altered the balance of power, probably triggering the withdrawal of some Costa Rican forces from Guanacaste to protect Puntarenas, naturally altering the course of the war.

Seizing the *Cortes* seems to have been part of Walker's strategy from the beginning of the campaign against Costa Rica. The Santa Rosa rout at the hands of Mora, and the escape of the vessel, engineered by Vanderbilt, completely disrupted General Walker's battle plans. His grandiose conception was thus nipped in the bud by the actions of Vanderbilt and Mora.

Notwithstanding the setback, early in April, Walker's dictatorial dominion over Nicaragua was still absolute. Unconcerned or unaware of the large force Mora had on the frontier, Walker abandoned Rivas to attend to threats from the north and restore confidence to the Leonese. His own unlimited self-confidence was never in doubt, not even when it was ascertained that Mora entered Rivas with a large army: at least three thousand, according to a woman who saw them. But Costa Rican numbers made no difference when pitted against Walker's megalomania.

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<sup>5</sup>"Nicaragua," *New York Tribune*, June 17, 1856, p.6, c.1.

29. Rivas, April 11, 1856

The clash between General Walker and General Mora came off in Rivas of Nicaragua on Friday, April 11, 1856. News of the battle reached Granada by courier at eight o'clock on Sunday morning, and in a few moments the thunder of cannon was heard on the plaza with great satisfaction by the two hundred Americans who speedily gathered there, for the cannon announced a victory. The shattered filibuster forces that returned to Granada that night told a different story; yet, on Monday the town was ornamented with flags and the morning was ushered in with fireworks and other signs of rejoicing, in frantic efforts to lift up morale. *El Nicaraguense* promptly joined in the propaganda campaign by rushing out on Tuesday morning its partisan account of the battle:

**SECOND BATTLE OF RIVAS! SIX HUNDRED COSTA RICANS KILLED!**

**AMERICAN LOSS THIRTY! TOTAL ROUTE OF THE ENEMY!<sup>1</sup>**

Befitting the headlines, the article chronicled a resounding Walker victory over Mora. Additional particulars appeared in succeeding issues.<sup>2</sup> Together with Walker's narrative in *The War*, they constitute the official filibuster version of the battle.

The *Boletín Oficial* published in San José on April 30, 1856

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<sup>1</sup>"Second Battle of Rivas!" *El Nicaraguense*, 4/14/1856, p.2, c.2-4.

<sup>2</sup>"Battle of Rivas," *Ibid.*, 4/19/1856, p.2, c.2-3; "List of Killed, Wounded and Missing," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.4; "Justice," *Ibid.*, 4/26, p.1, c.4; "On a Par with the Enemy," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.1.

the official Costa Rican report, written by Lieutenant-Colonel Don Pedro Barillier at the special request of President Mora, General in Chief of the Costa Rican troops. Don Pedro was a French career officer whose title was simply "Instructor of the Costa Rican Army," but whose military expertise was of the "utmost utility" for President Mora in the defense of Rivas.<sup>3</sup> President Mora's personal report to the Minister of War, dated at Rivas on April 15, did not appear in the *Boletín Oficial*: it was published by the *Revista de los Archivos Nacionales* in San José in 1940.<sup>4</sup>

From those documents, a clear though incomplete picture of the battle emerges. Neither Mora nor Barillier mentioned the number of Costa Rican troops involved, but of the 9,000 men in the Army, 3,500 formed the expeditionary force that left San José early in March.<sup>5</sup> An unspecified number of Guanacaste militia and Nicaraguan volunteers swelled their ranks along the way. Some 2,500 to 3,000 of those troops occupied the Transit road and Rivas early in April. *El Nicaraguense* estimated that 2,000 "Costa Ricans and Chamorristas" were in the town of Rivas on April 11; the remainder were at Virgin Bay and San Juan del Sur, but they reinforced the Rivas garrison during the fight.

Walker had less than 1,000 Americans capable of bearing arms in Nicaragua. He took about 500 to attack Rivas.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup>Juan R. Mora to the Minister of War, Rivas, April 21, 1856, *Boletín Oficial*, April 30, 1856, p. 423, c.1.

<sup>4</sup>"Informe del Presidente Don Juan Rafael Mora sobre la batalla de Rivas del 11 de abril de 1856. Archivos Nacionales S. A. Serie XII, No. 4747," Angelita García Peña, *Documentos para la historia de la Guerra Nacional contra los filibusteros en Nicaragua* (San Salvador: Editorial Ahora, 1958), p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>"Important from Central America," *NY Tribune*, 4/3/1856, p.5, c.2.

<sup>6</sup>According to *El Nicaraguense*, Walker marched on Rivas with "a force of 500 men including 100 native troops." (4/14, p. 2, c.2). In *The War* (p. 195), Walker says that "on the morning of the 9th, not more than five hundred and fifty men marched out of Granada toward Rivas," and that Machado "with a few native troops" joined them south of Nandaime.

remainder were scattered over his domain: a few dozen in León and Chinandega; about one hundred along the San Juan river; two hundred in Granada. Counting the natives under Machado, Walker's army in Rivas on April 11 (600 or 700 strong) was about one fourth the size of Mora's.

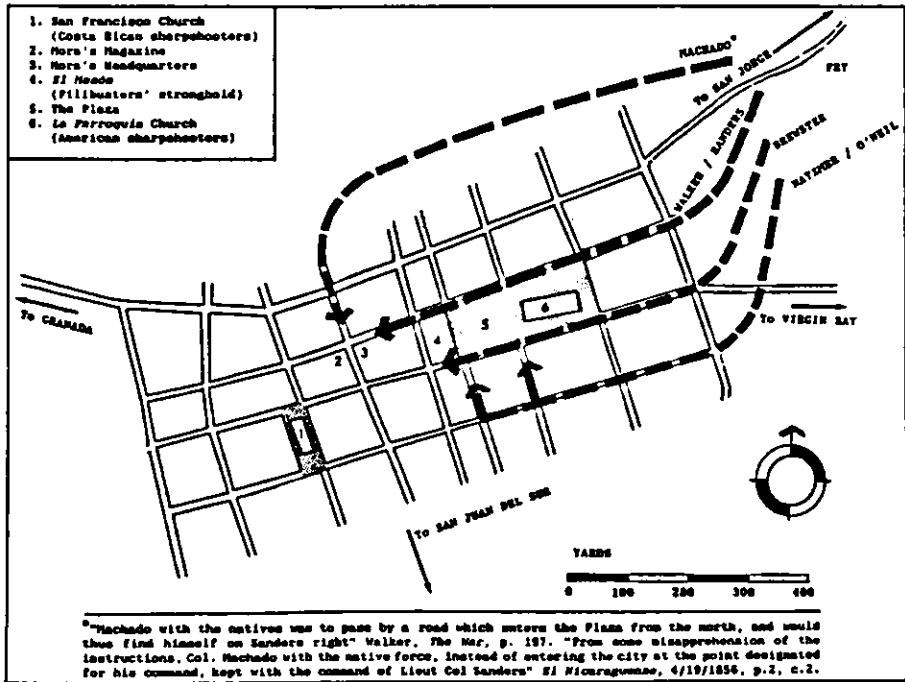
Walker planned to surprise and capture Mora in person, as well as the magazine in front of Mora's headquarters, about eighty yards west of the Plaza. Before retiring for the night at the Gil González, he explained his plan of attack for the next day and assigned tasks to his principal officers: Lieut. Col. Sanders, Major Brewster, Col. Natzmer, Major O'Neal, Col. Fry, and Col. Machado. They left the Gil González shortly after two o'clock in the morning on the 11th, crossed by Potosí just before sunrise, and detoured towards the lake to follow the road from San Jorge.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the filibuster army was at the Cuatro Esquinas, half a mile northeast of Rivas. Fifteen minutes earlier, Mora had sent four hundred men to scout in the opposite direction, after learning that Walker had passed by Potosí. The filibusters rushed in and took the plaza before the startled Costa Ricans began to shoot. Machado's and Sanders' men entered by the streets north of the Plaza; Brewster, Natzmer and O'Neal, on the southern flank; Fry's light infantry was held in reserve.

In a few moments, Walker had possession of the Plaza and all the houses around it. Advancing to the west, his men captured a Costa Rican brass gun standing in the street, about half way to Mora's headquarters, but could go no further. The Costa Ricans, shutting themselves up in the buildings west of the Plaza, poured on Walker's men a hail of bullets from doors and windows, as well as from the loopholes they soon began cutting through the adobe walls. Fry's reserve came in, but couldn't advance either.

Sharpshooters on the roofs of houses and in the belfries --Americans in *La Parroquia* and Costa Ricans in the church of San Francisco--claimed many victims on both sides. By eleven o'clock, it was clear to Walker that he had failed to dislodge Mora from Rivas. And when Costa Rican reinforce-





**Second Battle of Rivas**  
*April 11, 1856*

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**Rivas, April 11, 1856**  
*"his men captured a Costa Rican brass gun" (p. 346)*



**Rivas, April 11, 1856**  
*"the filibusters rushed in and took the Plaza" (p. 346)*



**La Parroquia, Rivas**

*"Sharpshooters . . . Americans in La Parroquia . . . "* (p. 346)

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**San Francisco church, Rivas**  
" . . . Costa Ricans in the church of San Francisco" (p. 346)

ments began to arrive from San Juan del Sur and Virgin Bay, Mora went on the offensive.

During the afternoon the Costa Ricans set fire to some of the houses held by the filibusters on the west side of the Plaza. As the night approached, the fighting slackened. Under cover of darkness, soon after midnight, Walker mounted his injured and disabled on horses and silently withdrew from Rivas, leaving behind 15 to 20 mortally wounded at the foot of the altar in the Parochial church. When the Costa Ricans attacked next morning, their bayonets finished off what filibusters they could find. The pile of corpses at the foot of the altar closed the ranks of hundreds of victims slain on Rivas soil during the last twenty-four hours.

Costa Rican losses were so heavy, that on April 13th the Army General Headquarters at Rivas imposed total censorship and stopped all personal mail to San José, "in order to avoid the spreading of false or contradictory news."<sup>7</sup> Mora's report on the 15th told of 110 Costa Rican dead, including the mortally wounded that had not yet died. Neither the Barillier report nor the *Boletín Oficial* gave figures of their own casualties, and the roster of the Costa Rican heroes who died in Rivas on April 11, remains a secret even today.

The roster of the wounded: 270 names, plus twenty or thirty that did not require hospitalization, was recorded on April 15 by Dr. Carlos Hoffman, Chief Surgeon of the Costa Rican Army.<sup>8</sup> In *The War*, Walker estimated Costa Rican losses at 200 killed and 400 wounded, and remarked: "The loss of the enemy is difficult to determine: for the Central Americans never, even to their own officers, state their losses accurately."<sup>9</sup> Regarding Walker's casualties, Mora wrote:

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<sup>7</sup>"Ultimas Noticias," *Boletín Oficial*, April 19, 1856, p. 412, c.1.

<sup>8</sup>"Conocimiento de los heridos en la refriega del 11 de abril de 1856 en la ciudad de Rivas dado por el Cirujano Mayor del Ejército, Dr. Carlos Hoffman," Guerra No. 8848, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>9</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 203.

. . . That bandit's losses total at least 400 dead and injured . . . we counted 81 enemy bodies strewn on the plaza and streets, and some prisoners declared that they had thrown about 150 bodies inside of several wells in this city, which I ordered inspected and found full of corpses.<sup>10</sup>

Mora estimated that more than 200 filibusters had died, including 17 stragglers caught and shot by April 15. The official roster of filibuster casualties, published by *El Nicaraguense*, April 19, 1856, lists 123 names: 56 killed, 54 wounded, and 13 missing in action. Adding the names of casualties reported elsewhere, the total increases to 151: 64 killed, 68 wounded and 19 missing--3 colonels, 2 majors, 11 captains, 16 lieutenants, 14 sergeants, 4 corporals, 98 privates, and 3 persons without rank. In *The War*, Walker copied the April 13 report of his adjutant-general: 58 killed, 62 wounded and 13 missing. However, neither Walker nor *El Nicaraguense* counted a single native Nicaraguan casualty.

Although Nicaraguans fought and died on both sides, their Rivas dead remain unknown. One name only appeared in a letter by one of Walker's soldiers: "I came near forgetting to state that Gen. Bermudas [*sic*], commander of the enemy, was killed during the action."<sup>11</sup> Minister Wheeler registered the particulars in his diary two days after the battle:

Sunday, 13-- Don Bruno came in early. Battle lasted 17 hours--Walker victorious--Clinton, Houston and many brave fellows killed--56 in all. The enemy's loss severe. Genl. Walker fought hand to hand with Bermúdez--killed Bermúdez.

But no one else mentioned the incident, and it remains

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<sup>10</sup> Juan Rafael Mora to Manuel José Carazo, Rivas, April 15, 1856, Guerra No. 8827, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

<sup>11</sup> "Sketch of the Battle of Rivas," *NO Picayune*, 5/16/1856, p.1, c.6.

obscure. The person slain by Walker was probably Col. José Bermúdez, the Nicaraguan officer commanding at Rivas who took service under Mora.<sup>12</sup> Of Walker's behavior during the battle, *El Nicaraguense* said:

Gen. Walker was cool, firm and self-possessed throughout the entire engagement, and for several hours maintained steadily his position on horseback. He manifested no excitement--betrayed no uneasiness as to the result, but exhibited a calm and sublime consciousness of ultimate victory.<sup>13</sup>

Barilller stated in his report: "The violence of their attack proves that the filibuster leader himself entered the city at the head of his men." But regardless of whether Walker killed Bermúdez or not--or how many Walker may have killed with his own hand--hundreds of human beings were slaughtered because of him in Rivas on April 11, 1856. And after the return of the troops to Granada, Wheeler wrote a new summary of the battle in his diary:

Monday, 14--Troops returned about 10 o'clock in the morning--out of food and ammunition. Col. Fry reports to me that it was more the contest of a disorderly mob, than the fight of soldiers. Both parties left the place--a drawn battle . . . Spent evening with Col. Fry who has this day been promoted to a Genl. and Genl. Walker.

Wheeler's summary is in error, for the Costa Ricans held possession of Rivas. Yet, the punishment received kept them from pursuing Walker, who returned to Granada unmolested. First thing upon entering the capital, he issued General

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<sup>12</sup>But a Col. José Bermúdez was very much alive, member of the Costa Rican General Staff in January, 1857. Rafael Obregón Loria, *La Campaña del Tránsito* (San José, Costa Rica: Antonio Lehmann, 1956), p. 323.

<sup>13</sup>"Second Battle of Rivas!" *El Nicaraguense*, 4/14/1856, p.2, c.2-4.



Orders No. 78, reorganizing and consolidating the remnants of his army into two battalions, and equalizing the several companies by transfers from the stronger to the weaker. Promotions from the ranks replaced the many officers lost in battle. L. Norvell Walker--who had fallen "asleep" (drunk) in the church in Rivas and woke up just in time to flee ahead of the enemy rushing in--was reinstated Captain and appointed Aide-de-Camp to the General-in-Chief.

Walker detailed fifteen men for the organization of an Artillery Corps. *El Nicaraguense* explained: "The want of artillery was felt most seriously at Rivas, and very effectual service was rendered by a small four pounder captured from the enemy. We shall soon have a formidable park of artillery."<sup>14</sup> The Ordnance Department, reorganized under Captain Alfred Swingle, set to work at once, and its accomplishments were trumpeted to the world immediately:

ON A PAR WITH THE ENEMY.--At the battle of Rivas the principal damage done to the American soldiers was inflicted by a party of concealed foreign mercenaries, who, fortified behind walls and towers, out of danger, shot down our men with cowardly precision. The range of the Minnie [*sic*] musket enabled them to pick up our officers at a great distance; and the advantage was taken without compunction for the brave spirits that fell before these unseen foes. Many of these fatal guns were captured by our troops and brought home. Gen. Walker immediately had them examined to see if our muskets could be improved, and on trial it was found that a decided improvement on the Minnie could be made. Capt. Rawle immediately set the Ordnance Department at work, and he now reports on hand a large supply of the new material, which, on trial, has proved of greater force and accuracy than the arms of the Costa Ricans. The force is still at work, and in a few days the soldiers can

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<sup>14</sup>"Artillery," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.3, c.1.

be armed with muskets more desperate than any yet ever tried in Central America.<sup>15</sup>

To improve discipline, Walker had the troops drilled on the plaza every morning for one hour. *El Nicaraguense* allowed on April 19 that "the necessity for a stricter discipline is apparent to all, and the present course will soon remedy an evil much complained of by the officers at Rivas."<sup>16</sup> A week later, the paper patted itself on the back:

DRILL ON THE PLAZA. --It is a cheerful sight in the afternoon to see the efficiency with which the troops are acquiring the regular drill. The Light Infantry Battalion under Col. Piper, and the Rifle Battalion under Col. Sanders, are respectively drilled for one hour in the afternoon. In the morning the various companies drill under their respective company officers.<sup>17</sup>

Discipline was enforced by harsher measures, also. In General Orders No. 80, General Walker ordained: "Any soldier who sells rifle, pistol, or knife shall be publicly whipped on the Plaza, with no less than thirty lashes on the bare back. Also any soldier who sells clothing of any kind whatever, shall be whipped as above with not less than twenty lashes."<sup>18</sup>

A soldier named Campbell, who shot a soldier named Mooney at Headquarters on the day of the departure of the troops for Rivas, was tried by a court martial on April 15th and condemned to death. Both men had quarrelled about a horse and, being drunk, Campbell won the argument with his

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<sup>15</sup>"On a Par with the Enemy," *Ibid.*, p.2, c.1.

<sup>16</sup>"Discipline," *Ibid.*, April 19, 1856, p.1, c.4.

<sup>17</sup>"Drill on the Plaza," *Ibid.*, April 26, 1856, p.3, c.2.

<sup>18</sup>General Order Book, Nicaraguan Army.

revolver. The Court sentenced him to be shot. Walker changed the sentence to death by hanging. It was carried out on the Plaza at Granada, at sunrise on Thursday, April 17, 1856, in the presence of the whole army.

The sorry fate of the poor fellows caught in the service of the Gray Eyed Man of Destiny was recorded by Wheeler in his private diary: "Wednesday, April 16-- . . . The steamer is to start tomorrow but no one allowed to go by Genl. Walker." Yet, Wheeler did not even attempt to help his entrapped countrymen escape from Walker's grasp. Indeed, at that very moment, he wholeheartedly supported the filibuster chief.

On Tuesday, April 15, Wheeler entered in his diary: "Wrote a letter to John R. Mora, President of Costa Rica, protesting against the murder of American non combatants. . . . Genl. Walker called--Padre Vijil appointed Minister to U. S.--Fabens sent to León for his commission." And on Friday, 18th: "Published letter to Mora, which Walker thinks 'may cost me dear.'"

*El Nicaraguense* published the "Forcible letter of the American Minister to President Mora," protesting for the murder of American citizens at Virgin Bay by the Costa Ricans, alongside a Walker front-page editorial:

"He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." War is at all times and under all circumstances a terrible calamity, a fearful evil, a great national misfortune. A war of aggression, of invasion and destruction is ten times more disastrous to the invaders than to the invaded, unless the cause be a just one, and the act justifiable before God and the world . . .

. . . the star of destiny is on the ascendant and it leads forth a bright and glorious train pointing out a brilliant future for Central America. Costa Rica will be the first to join the procession, keeping step to a new and lively march. Thoughtlessly has she entered the ring, and her conquest will be as sure as the coming day. A momentary success has heated the imagination of

her soldiers and swelled her anticipation into unwonted proportions. The "man of destiny" is at the head of the Nicaragua troops, and ere the Costa Ricans are aware, he will be upon them with the avenging sword and the deadly rifle to wipe out all disasters and sweep away every foe. There is no such word as fail with Gen. Walker, and the brave troops under his command are all confident of the victory. From this time forward there will be no halting, no holding up, no rest for the enemy, until his country is overrun and his capital bows to the flag of Nicaragua. Costa Rica has taken the sword and the sword shall be her portion.<sup>19</sup>

Such blind confidence came at a time when Costa Rica held undisputed possession of the vital transit road; when Vanderbilt had severed steamer connections with the United States on both oceans; when Walker's coffers were empty, as usual, and his ill-equipped filibuster rabble, endlessly enervated by pestilence, had been whipped twice in succession by President Mora's superior forces.

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<sup>19</sup>"He that taketh the sword," *El Nicaraguense*, 4/19/1856, p.1, c.1.

## 30. Day of Sunshine

Costa Rican strategy called for the military occupation of the entire Nicaraguan Transit route. Its purpose was twofold: besides depriving the filibusters of their lifeline, Costa Rican troops would physically achieve that country's long-range goal--the possession of the coveted river and lake within its territory. The plan began to unfold on March 3, 1856, when the Expeditionary Army departed from San José for the Isthmus of Rivas and Minister of Foreign Relations Joaquín Bernardo Calvo sent a note to Joseph N. Scott, Accessory Transit Company agent at San Juan del Norte.

Calvo ordered Scott to stop all steamer traffic on the lake and river for the duration of the war, and warned him that if he disobeyed, the Costa Rican government would use all means at its disposal of enforcing it, and would be "in no way responsible for the consequences, however serious they may be, to the company or the passengers." <sup>1</sup>

Using the means at his disposal, President Mora marched at the head of his Expeditionary Army and occupied the Transit road from Virgin Bay to San Juan del Sur, and sent other columns to take possession of the San Juan river at the San Carlos and Sarapiquí junctions. The San Carlos forces would then be in a position to attack Castillo Viejo, while the Sarapiquí contingent would proceed to San Juan del Norte, where the ever present British men of war would render assistance.

On March 21st, Captain Francisco Martínez at the head of fifty men, with a four-pounder, marched to the landing at the

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<sup>1</sup>"Interesting from Costa Rica," *New York Herald*, 4/4/1856, p.8, c.2.

start of navigation on the San Carlos and reinforced the troops previously stationed there. Fifty soldiers under Lieut. Jacinto Pérez followed on March 30th. The commander of the expedition, Lieut. Col. Don Pío Alvarado, with one hundred additional soldiers joined them early in April. They bided their time, making elaborate preparations without advancing to the San Juan river, however, because they erroneously believed that Walker had posted a garrison at the San Carlos-San Juan junction.

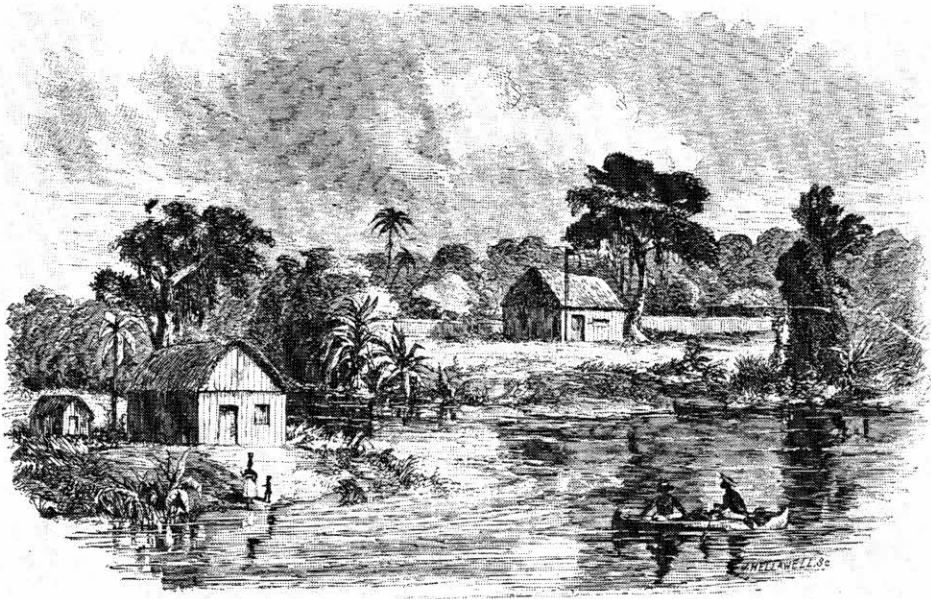
One hundred men under Gen. Florentino Alfaro left Alajuela towards the end of March to reinforce two garrisons previously posted along the Sarapiquí river. Three hundred more soldiers were on their way, when Captain John H. Baldwin, stationed by Walker at Hipp's Point with thirty men, attacked Alfaro on April 10. *El Nicaraguense* reported a resounding filibuster victory. *El Boletín Oficial* reported a glorious Costa Rican victory.

After intercepting the English mail to San José, on March 16, Baldwin had braced for a Costa Rican attack which never came. According to filibuster sources, Baldwin went on the offensive on the morning of April 8, ascending the Sarapiquí with twenty-one men (some say ten, or seventeen, or forty) in two canoes. On April 10 they approached the Costa Rican military post at El Sardinal, 20 miles upstream, (5 from the head of river navigation, 65 miles from San José.) The filibusters attacked and defeated 250 to 300 Costa Ricans, killing 24 of them (some say 30 or 40) and wounding many more. Baldwin suffered one dead and one wounded, both struck by the same Costa Rican bullet. Naturally, the *New York Herald* filibuster correspondent wrote that the affair was "without parallel in the annals of warfare."<sup>2</sup>

This account became doubly ironic when a derelict dozen of Baldwin's "gallant little party" deserted on April 20 and arrived at Greytown the following morning, ready to fight against any force that might be sent after them. "They are

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<sup>2</sup>"Our San Juan Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 5/1/1856, p.1, c.6.



**Hipp's Point**

*"Baldwin, stationed by Walker at Hipp's Point . . . " (p. 360)*

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most of them Californians, and were on their way to the States, when they were induced to join Walker, by large promises, which were never fulfilled."<sup>3</sup> The *New York Tribune's* San Juan del Norte correspondent added that the Americans had been routed on the Sarapiquí and that a Costa Rican attack on Castillo, "the key to the river," was hourly expected.

The Costa Rican official account of the April 10 skirmish at El Sardinal reported over one hundred filibusters, in six vessels and an overland column. "Many" were killed, but only one rifle was captured because the others "were thrown in the river."<sup>4</sup> Costa Rican losses: one dead (a corporal) and ten injured; among the latter, General Don Florentino Alfaro, with a severe bullet wound in his right arm. The wounded were promptly evacuated to San José.

Regardless of where the truth about combatants and casualties may lie, the Costa Ricans held their ground and Baldwin returned to Hipp's Point. In the long run, however, El Sardinal turned out to be a filibuster victory, for upon the loss of General Alfaro, the Costa Ricans stopped trying to wrest from Walker the Transit waterway. On April 27th, Minister of War Manuel José Carazo informed President Mora that "insurmountable difficulties" had disrupted the carefully laid plans of operations on the San Juan river war front.<sup>5</sup> For the time being, only the British frigate *Eurydice* at San Juan del Norte was in position to keep reinforcements from New York and New Orleans from reaching Granada.

Walker's New York agents shipped fifty filibusters on the *Orizaba* when Charles Morgan inaugurated his new line on April 8. The vessel carried five hundred passengers, 430 of them bound for California. The Deputy District Attorney and

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<sup>3</sup>"Movement of Troops," *New York Tribune*, May 1, 1856, p.6, c.3.

<sup>4</sup>"Señor Comandante General del Interior," *Boletín Oficial*, Alcance Al Boletín Número 183, April 13, 1856, p.1, c.2.

<sup>5</sup>Obregón Loria, *La Campaña del Tránsito*, p. 214.



the United States Marshals searched the vessel, at the request of Joseph L. White and Cornelius Vanderbilt. The search took more than one hour, but only three filibusters were found and arrested, and the *Orizaba* was allowed to depart for San Juan del Norte. Walker's recruits escaped detection because they were unarmed; they were so poor, that some didn't have even a jack-knife.

Filibuster agents enjoyed smoother sailing in New Orleans, where they recruited people of means who went well armed, without the authorities interfering. Twenty adventurers couldn't wait till Charles Morgan started his line, and sailed ahead on March 25 on the bark *Lowell*. The remainder followed on the steamship *Charles Morgan* which departed on April 10. Its 230 passengers included Walker's agents Hornsby and Moncosos, his brother James, *Picayune* correspondent Charles Callahan, 25 others in cabin, and 180 recruits in the steerage.

The *Lowell* and *Charles Morgan* contingents had already landed when the *Orizaba* arrived in San Juan on April 16 in the evening. A Vanderbilt agent on board, Mr. Hosea Birdsall, went to work immediately. His instructions, signed by Vice-President Thomas Lord and Secretary Isaac C. Lea., ordered him to take possession of the Transit Company property in Nicaragua and to ask for the assistance of Her Britannic Majesty's Navy, if needed.

When Joseph N. Scott refused to surrender the property, Birdsall appealed to Captain John W. Tarleton, commanding the British warship *Eurydice*. Tarleton complied, but upon examining the *Orizaba's* "way book," he found no reason for interfering and hence allowed the New York passengers to proceed up river. The New Orleans recruits had gone ahead beforehand.

When the New York travelers arrived at Castillo, Gen. Hornsby was reinforcing the river garrisons with the new arrivals from New Orleans, while Capt. Moncosos was going back to the States to expedite supplies and more recruits. As the westbound travellers stopped at Castillo, the steamer from Granada brought Major & Mrs. Heiss, Father Vijil, and a few others on their way to New York. They brought the startling

news of the battle of Rivas and that the Transit Road was in the hands of Costa Rican troops which had been ordered by President Mora "to spare neither age nor sex, but to cut down every American they encountered."<sup>6</sup>

The passengers were given a choice of returning to New York or of going on to Granada, to wait there for the route to open. The recruits stayed, as did most of the passengers. Of the 500 persons from New York, only one hundred retraced their steps and departed from San Juan del Norte on April 21st, on the same *Orizaba* that had brought them there.

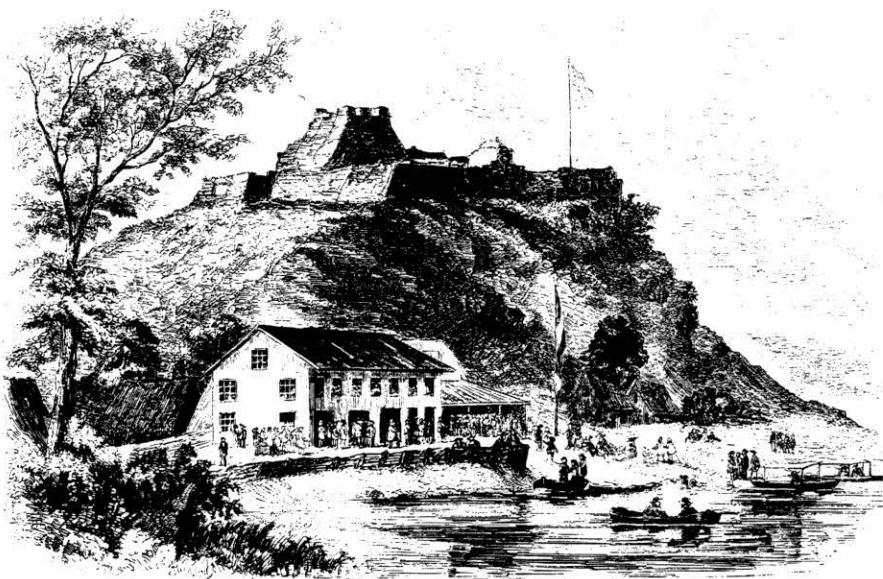
The rest arrived in Granada aboard the *San Carlos* on April 22nd near noon. In his dispatch to the *Picayune*, Charles Callahan recorded his admiration of Walker as soon as he landed and met him:

I was introduced to Gen. Walker a few minutes after my arrival. He is too well known in New Orleans to need description, and so little has he altered since he left there, that any of his old friends would recognize him at once. He appears to be perfectly idolized by his soldiers, who familiarly call him "Uncle Billy," and the confidence of both officers and men in him is so great that when he gives an order, the intention of which may not be at once apparent, it appears to be an understood thing that even curiosity is not allowable, and the order is at once obeyed, and no questions asked.

His taciturnity, a quality for which he was always remarkable, is as great as ever, and whatever scheme or combination he may form, is never communicated, even to his principal officers, but the necessary orders are given, and not until the moment of their execution is any one aware of the exact nature of the expedition in which he is engaged. His pale, thoughtful countenance, light gray eye, slow manner of speaking, and general quiet,

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<sup>6</sup>"Report of the Returned Passengers by the *Orizaba*," *New-York Daily Times*, April 30, 1856, p.1, c.5.



**Orizaba passengers  
detained at Castillo**

*"The passengers were given a choice . . . " (p. 364)*

undemonstrative appearance, when contrasted with his well known energy and astonishing achievements, excite feelings of surprise in all who see him for the first time.

He appeared to be in excellent spirits, as, indeed, all his troops were, caused, I presume, by the knowledge that the States of San Salvador and Guatemala had expressed their determination to remain on terms of amity with Nicaragua, while Honduras is sufficiently engaged in her own domestic affairs to prevent her from becoming troublesome.

The natives of the country view Gen. Walker, as he walks through the streets, unattended by a single guard, with a mixture of surprise and awe. Accustomed to the pompous pride of their previous military rulers, they can hardly believe that the little man in a single breasted military coat, with a brown slouched hat, turned up with a red cockade, can be the one who, with fifty-six men, overpowered the rich and powerful oligarchy who were ruling them with a rod of iron, and who were backed by a large army and the entire resources of a nation . . .<sup>7</sup>

230 passengers by the *Charles Morgan*, 20 by the *Lowell*, and 400 by the *Orizaba* added 650 residents to Walker's domain on Tuesday, April 22, 1856. Roughly half of them were stranded travellers on their way to California. Most of the remainder were recruits for the army, 200 of whom formed a new infantry battalion under Major Leonidas McIntosh, with James Walker appointed captain of Company A. Capt. Charles Davenport's Mounted Company from New Orleans enlisted for four months, and "the men will be mounted as soon as possible," that is--as soon as the new masters' foraging parties stole enough horses from the natives.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Later from Central America," *NO Picayune*, 6/9/1856, eve., p1, c6.

<sup>8</sup>"Mounted Company," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.2, c.4.

The new arrivals, and the news they brought from the river, bolstered Uncle Billy and his followers. Hence, on the following Saturday, *El Nicaraguense* rightly christened Tuesday, April 22, a "Day of Sunshine":

#### DAY OF SUNSHINE

Monday was gloomy--the rain and clouds threw a lonesome shadow on us, damp and chilling. Tuesday came, all sunshine . . . Taken all in all, the day was bright as the night was dark behind it. All was contentment again, and every face wore a new smile, if we except the mysterious man whose mind impels this revolution, and whose all-confident soul looks into the complications that surround us and evolves from the apparent chaos a routine of symmetry and order.<sup>9</sup>

Although the mysterious man, William Walker, wore no smile on his face, his "all-confident soul" looked into the complications that surrounded him, and magically dismissed them with a Byronic stanza in an editorial in the same issue:

#### THE PROSPECT

There always will be croakers. Goldsmith's picture in the "Good Natured Man" is not overdrawn. Therefore we are not surprised that there are some at present in Granada, who stand lugubriously on the street-corners and predict terrible things. They are an admirable squad of ravens, these fellows! They tell us that a foreign enemy is on our soil--that communication with our friends abroad is cut off--that the army is illy provided with the necessaries of life--and that nothing awaits us but defeat and death! Job's comforters that they are! What would these respectable gentlemen have? Is the achieve-

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<sup>9</sup>"Day of Sunshine," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.1, c.3.

ment of a nation's independence, think they, the pastime of an idle hour? Have they ever read of the old republics, and how their sons fought and bled for liberty? Have they even read the history of the great republic of the North? . . . Are they aware of how the immortal hero, who had left the peaceful and enchanting shades of his own Mount Vernon . . .?

. . . A foreign enemy is indeed upon our soil . . . Mora--the President and commander-in-chief of the forces of Costa Rica, is undeniably within our limits. . . Perhaps to-day he sits, like the haughty Persian upon the hill side, and as his eye roams over the tented plain, peopled with the many thousand soldiers and phalanxes of foreign mercenaries, he imagines that he has but to come to conquer. Has Mora read the stirring lines of Byron upon the sequel of that proud campaign?

*"A king sat on the rocky brow  
That looks o'er sea-born Salamis,  
And ships by thousands lay below,  
And men in nations all were his--  
He counted them at break of day,  
And when the sun set where were they?"<sup>10</sup>*

Walker's confident assertion, on April 26, that Mora's forces were about to disappear, turned out to be correct. It was based on facts known to him since April 11, when he had filled the wells with corpses during the battle at Rivas.

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<sup>10</sup>"The Prospect," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.2, c.2.

## 31. Monster in Human Shape

On April 26, 1856, *El Nicaraguense* analyzed Walker's strategy in retrospect, placing him "among the ablest Generals of the age." Walker's masterful series of movements had deceived Mora into believing that his foe had abandoned Nicaragua, upon which the Man of Destiny caught him off guard and in two hours six hundred Costa Ricans fell before the Americans' fierce attack. "The movement across the Lake, the return to Granada unseen by the enemy, the rapid march upon Rivas, the surprise and battle in the streets, the route [s/c] and terrible slaughter of the Costa Ricans, altogether, when fully considered and carefully weighed, form one of the most brilliant campaigns and sparkling chapters in military operations upon record."<sup>1</sup>

But *El Nicaraguense* failed to mention Walker's decisive Machiavellian maneuver of filling the wells with corpses. And on the front page, that same morning, Walker discovered himself through projection when he called Mora "a monster in human shape":

As comets periodically flash athwart the skies startling and terrifying mankind for a moment, so in the moral world humanity is at times affrightened at the appearance and acts of some monster in human shape, who unsatisfied with the regular but toilsome road to fame, leaps at one bound into the scorching gaze of the civilized world, and fills up the measure of his notoriety by the deeds of a single day. To the long list of bloody

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<sup>1</sup>"Gen. Walker's Strategy," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.4, c.3.

and inhumane monsters that have at various times appeared upon the stage of action, and filled the ear of nations with the noise of their deeds of cruelty and blood must be added the name of John Rafael Mora, President of Costa Rica and General-in-Chief of her armies in the present war with Nicaragua. . . . Is he so lost to common sense that he cannot see the effects of his cruel and bloody deeds . . .? . . . has he no feelings of humanity left to identify his race, and link him with all mankind in their responsibility to God? . . . Her [Costa Rica's] present chief has branded himself Cain like, and wherever he may wander in future, or whatever may be his fortune, the voice of execration will ring in his ears and pursue him to the grave.<sup>2</sup>

With Walker--the real monster in human shape--holding sway over Granada and large parts of the country, Nicaraguans could not yet unite against him. Factional hatred prevented it. Probably more than one hundred Nicaraguans fought alongside the filibusters in Rivas on April 11. After the battle, President Patricio Rivas transmitted from León the *thanks of the Republic* to Walker for his men's "gallantry and good conduct during the protracted contest."<sup>3</sup> Upon receipt of the President's message, Walker ordered it read to the Army on General Parade in the Plaza of Granada, Thursday evening the 24th of April.

Inspired by the Costa Rican Santa Rosa victory and subsequent advances, Nicaraguan patriots gathered strength in Chontales, across the lake from Granada. On the evening of April 22nd, the steamer *La Virgen* sailed from Granada with General Goicouría and one hundred men, landing them at San Ubaldo next morning. Upon their return overland to Granada on April 30th, the *New York Tribune's* correspondent reported

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<sup>2</sup>"As comets periodically flash," Ibid., p.1, c.1.

<sup>3</sup>General Orders No. 85, April 24, 1856, General Order Book, Nicaraguan Army, Item 111, Fayssoux Collection.



what they had done in Chontales:

. . . And as an illustration of cold-blooded cruelty, I will mention an affair that came off under the command of Gen. Goicuiria [*sic*], a Cuban . . . He was sent out with a detachment of about one hundred natives and American troops to Chontales, where they had news that the Chimrostas [Chamorristas] were organizing. Upon the taking of the town of Juigalpa they encountered some armed men, charged them and killed about a dozen, and entered the town and sacked it. They then proceeded to Acayapa [Acoyapa], where they made several arrests, and placed two of the prisoners against the church wall and shot them, for the purpose of intimidating the remainder. Many incidents of this kind might be mentioned. Residing in Acayapa were the widow and two daughters of Chimora [Chamorro], the former President. They had fled from the town to the plains. The Americans broke open the house, and the officer who related the circumstance to me said that there were about fifty trunks filled with finery, which were all pillaged, articles that could not be taken away being strewed about. They brought horses, watches, jewelry, etc., on their return to Granada. It was, in fact, nothing else than a robbing expedition.<sup>4</sup>

The Nicaraguans who attempted a rising in the neighborhood of León were promptly suppressed by President Rivas' native troops; in Matagalpa, by Commissioner Mariano Salazar; and in Segovia, by *Chelón* Valle. The patriots, under Fernando Chamorro, were said to number four hundred, one hundred of whom were armed with muskets and the rest with bows and arrows. After a short, but desperate conflict, Valle defeated and dispersed them. "This ended the revolt in that direction, and for the present, at least, peace reigns

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<sup>4</sup>"Nicaragua," *New York Tribune*, June 17, 1856, p.6, c.1.

throughout Nicaragua."<sup>5</sup> In Walker's own words: "Thus, in a few weeks, order and quiet were restored to the whole Republic, and the commands of the provisional government were respected in all parts of the State."<sup>6</sup>

When Schlessinger fled from Walker's grasp in mid April, word got around that he was hiding at the hacienda of Don Gabriel Lacayo, six miles from Granada. Walker sent a squad to arrest him. The squad returned without Schlessinger and brought Don Gabriel instead. Walker charged Lacayo with treason. He had him tried by a military court composed of foreigners headed by Gen. Hornsby, accusing him of organizing a band to join the Costa Ricans and attack Granada. In addition, other members of his family, captured by Goicouría in Chontales, as well as Don Hilario Selva, Don Antonio Falla, and several other Nicaraguan patriots whom Walker managed to catch, also were jailed.

The Costa Ricans were not about to attack Granada. They were busy taking care of three hundred wounded, and chose to fortify Rivas against any future filibuster assault. They made it a "city of barricades," as described by an *El Nicaraguense* correspondent when the filibusters regained possession early in May:

Rivas is emphatically a "city of barricades" now, for it is so strongly walled in and walled out that one can hardly pass from one street to another without climbing over half a dozen barricades of one kind or another. The plaza is walled in first; that is, across every street leading from the plaza, the Costa Ricans have thrown up a wall or breastwork, about four feet high, and then fortified the adjacent buildings, so as to prevent the advance of any force upon this outer wall. The houses around the plaza are full of holes through which they

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<sup>5</sup>"Later from Central America," *NO Picayune*, 6/9/1856, eve., pl, c6.

<sup>6</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 212.

were to poke their muskets and fire, in case Gen. Walker should return and attack them in their stronghold. They buried their dead of the 11th ult. in the wells; and when they left the city there were no corpses left to taint the air, as has been reported.<sup>7</sup>

The news that the Costa Ricans had "filled all the wells with dead bodies" after the battle, had been reported by *El Nicaraguense* a week earlier.<sup>8</sup> In *The War*, Walker states that "the Costa Ricans were encumbered with so many dead that instead of regularly burying the bodies they threw them into the wells of the town."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Mora's official reports to the Minister of War, on April 15, make clear that the Costa Ricans buried their dead and that the filibusters had filled the wells with corpses during the battle:

. . . We counted 260 wounded, among them several distinguished officers.

[Immediately after the battle] I first directed my attention to prepare the hospital, to bury our dead, and to reorganize the Army.<sup>10</sup>

. . . We counted 81 enemy bodies strewn on the plaza and streets, and about 150 that the prisoners declared they had thrown into several wells of this city, which I ordered inspected and found filled with corpses.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Letter from Cyrus," *El Nicaraguense*, May 10, 1856, p.3, c.1.

<sup>8</sup>"Rivas," *El Nicaraguense*, May 3, 1856, p.3, c.3.

<sup>9</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup>"Informe del Presidente Don Juan Rafael Mora sobre la Batalla de Rivas del 11 de abril de 1856," Archivos Nacionales S. A. Serie XII, No. 4747, Angelita García Peña, *Documentos para la historia de la Guerra Nacional contra los filibusteros en Nicaragua* (San Salvador: Editorial Ahora, 1958), p. 44.

<sup>11</sup>"Comunicación del Presidente Don Juan Rafael Mora a su Ministro de la Guerra Don Manuel José Carazo," Archivos Nacionales, S.A. Serie XII, No. 8527, *Ibid.*, p. 46.

It thus appears that Walker filled the Rivas wells with corpses, and then falsely accused the Costa Ricans of having done it. But whether the bodies were American, or Costa Rican, or both, the putrescent water supply nurtured the pestilence that swept through Mora's camp a few days after the battle. *El Nicaraguense* announced on April 26:

POSITION OF THE ENEMY. --From the most reliable advices we can gather, the Costa Rican army still occupies Rivas, Virgin Bay and San Juan del Sur. . . . An alarming fatality prevails among the troops at Rivas, and great numbers are dying off from its effects. The disease is in the shape of dysentery, and soon kills those that it afflicts.<sup>12</sup>

On the 29th, Charles Callahan reported from Granada that the whole town was alive with excitement upon receipt that morning of important intelligence: the mortality among the Costa Ricans had been very great in Rivas from cholera, and when Mora received news from San José that a revolt "led by Gen. Castro, a well known Democratic leader, and former President of the Republic," was brewing, he decided to return home at once. Mora immediately withdrew his troops from Rivas, Virgin Bay, and San Juan del Sur, "thus leaving the Transit route once more open."<sup>13</sup>

Walker instantly issued orders for the battalions of Colonels Sanders and Piper to prepare for a march, and at midnight 362 men were on board the steamer *La Virgen*, bound for Virgin Bay. Gen. Walker was in command of the Brigade, assisted by Gen. Hornsby and Col. Natzmer. Some of the troops had been armed with Mississippi rifles, which had been altered by Captain Rawle, of the Ordnance Department, to shoot the Minie ball. Brig. Gen. Fry was left in command of

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<sup>12</sup>"Position of the Enemy," *El Nicaraguense*, April 26, 1856, p.2, c.4.

<sup>13</sup>"Later from Central America," *NO Picayune*, 6/9/1856, eve., pl, c6.

250 men in Granada, garrisoned by Major McIntosh's battalion and Capt. Davenport's Mounted Company (still on foot, pending Golcouría's return with horses from Chontales).

When Walker landed at Virgin Bay at sunrise on April 30th, the retreating Costa Rican army had evacuated the Transit route and the American flag greeted the filibusters, waving from the flagstaff in front of the Transit Company building. Advancing towards San Juan del Sur, about three miles from Virgin Bay, Walker met a courier with a letter from General José María Cañas, Mora's brother-in-law and General-in-Chief of the Costa Rican Army during Mora's absence. The courier informed Walker that the Costa Ricans had left San Juan the day before, "and that the whole country was clear of them."<sup>14</sup> Walker sent two companies to occupy San Juan, and returned to Virgin Bay with the balance of his army.

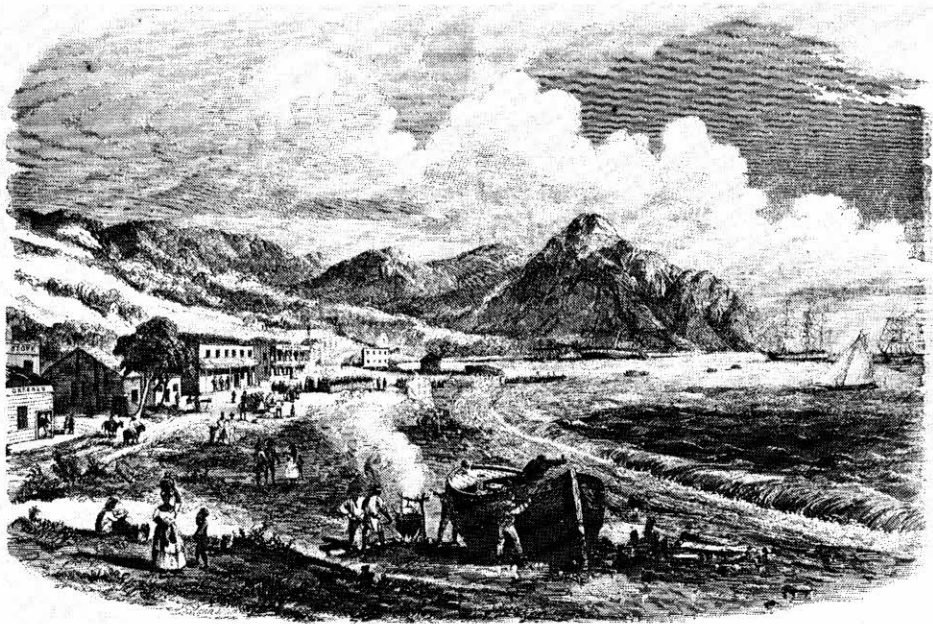
In the letter, Cañas explained that he was forced to leave in Rivas some of the sick that he could not carry without endangering their lives, and that he expected Walker would treat them generously with all the attention and care their situation required. As told by Walker, "it is needless to add, that the surgeons immediately received orders to take charge of the sick of the enemy wherever found."<sup>15</sup> Walker's show of clemency, however, was confined to a few harmless Costa Ricans on the critical list, and he promptly compensated for it by concurrently killing others. Two of his victims were natives of the island of Ometepe.

When the Costa Ricans occupied Virgin Bay in April, the Indians in Ometepe revolted against Walker and burnt about \$500 worth of wood that had been cut on the island for the use of the lake steamers. They also killed a filibuster who had been left behind at Rivas and had made his way over to the island after the battle. Early in May, Walker sent Lieut. Charles Tyler with twenty-five men to Moyogaipa, to capture

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<sup>14</sup>"Letter from Cyrus," *El Nicaraguense*, May 10, 1856, p.3, c.1.

<sup>15</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 210.



**Costa Ricans retreat  
from San Juan del Sur**  
*"the Costa Ricans had left San Juan . . . " (p. 375)*

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**Costa Ricans return to San José**  
*"the cholera had wiped out Mora's army" (p. 390)*

the killer or killers of the filibuster and to press the Indians to cut wood for the steamers. Tyler accomplished both missions and on May 7 returned to Virgin Bay with three prisoners, one of them an old priest from Moyogalpa, who was said to have incited the rebellion.

Neither the name nor the ultimate fate of the priest were given, but Charles Callahan recorded the hanging of the "murderers" that afternoon at Virgin Bay:

The two murderers were hung this afternoon in presence of all the troops. They died with firmness, and were attended to the last moment by the priest, who was arrested with them, and who is accused of inciting them to the deed. Among the spectators was Gabriel Lacayo, who was taken from prison to view the sight, and whose fate is undecided, the verdict of the military court in his case not having been made public.<sup>16</sup>

William Walker presided over the hangings at Virgin Bay on Wednesday, May 7, 1856, on the eve of his 32nd birthday. Next morning, privates Handwick and Davis, Company D, First Rifle Battalion, were arraigned before a General Court Martial on the charge of "Desertion." The Court found the accused "GUILTY" and sentenced them to be shot. The proceedings were laid on his birthday before the Commander-in-Chief, who instantly approved them and directed the sentence to be carried into effect within twenty-four hours after arrival of the order at Granada.

To insure observance, the General and his Staff, with an escort of ten Rangers, personally conveyed the order from Virgin Bay to Granada. They arrived in the capital quite unexpectedly about 9 o'clock p.m., Friday, May 9th. Next day, *El Nicaraguense* reported:

**DESERTERS EXECUTED.** --This morning, at half-past

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<sup>16</sup>"Later from Central America," *NO PICAYUNE*, 6/9/1856, eve., pl, c6.



6 o'clock, two deserters were shot on the plaza in the same spot where the traitor Corral was shot. These men deserted immediately after the battle of Rivas, and were subsequently captured by the soldiers of Col. Méndez, on the road to León. They were making for Realejo, with the intention of embarking at that port for California, or else going into Honduras. They were brought back and tried by a regular court-martial and sentenced to be shot. The execution was fulfilled this morning.

Both of these men died bravely, and it is unaccountable that they should have fled from so imaginary a danger as that apprehended from Costa Rica. They were both Catholics, and last evening the solemn rites of confession were administered by the father [torn] All the Americans in the city were present at the execution, and the plaza was pretty well filled with the people of the city.

They both advised the soldiers to remain faithful to the service and never desert, for it was almost certain their crime would overtake them.<sup>17</sup>

Having expressed himself "well satisfied with the management of affairs" in Granada, Walker and Staff left the city on Monday morning, May 12, for Virgin Bay, by way of Rivas. Meanwhile, the logbook of the steamer *La Virgin* recorded round trips between Virgin Bay and Ometepe on May 9-11 and May 11-13, which an *El Nicaraguense* dispatch from Virgin Bay explained on May 14:

. . . The steamer *Virgin* has been plying for several days between this port and Ometepe, from whence we have received provisions, horses and cattle, and a few subjects for "tight-rope performance," unless they can prove themselves innocent of the charges preferred against them. The Servile party will find out by and by

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<sup>17</sup>"Deserters Executed," *El Nicaraguense*, May 10, 1856, p.6, c.1.

that treason, conspiracy of murder and rebellion will not pay; and that it will be better to be quiet, at least, if not patriotic, when their native soil is invaded by a foreign foe.

The General having wisely concluded that the enemies of peace and their own country shall furnish their full quota of support to those who are endeavoring to establish the prosperity and peace of the State upon a solid basis, there has been lately no want of wholesome food for our men, and consequently no murmuring is heard on account of empty stomachs and hard fare.<sup>18</sup>

A Costa Rican straggler was caught and shot at San Jorge on May 6. Nobody recorded how many Nicaraguans were killed in Ometepe or how many were hung at Virgin Bay, but Walker taught them in no time that it was better to be quiet when their native soil was in the hands of a foreign foe. He also taught them to furnish their full quota of support to their new masters, in a form that *El Nicaraguense* called,

"Paying the Fiddler."--The Department of Rivas probably furnished more aid and encouragement to the Costa Ricans than any other in the State, and had less reason for its treasonable practice. On the same principle that "the dancer pays the fiddler," Rivas will, probably, have to foot the bill of expenses incurred in the war. The amount of property liable to confiscation in that department alone is quite sufficient to pay all the military expenses of the Government up to the 1st of June. Rather a profitable riddance of the traitors!<sup>19</sup>

In pursuance of that line of policy, Walker imposed heavy fines on Don Gabriel Lacayo and Don Hilario Selva before releasing them from prison at Virgin Bay. The pair arrived in

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<sup>18</sup>"Letter from Cyrus," *El Nicaraguense*, May 17, 1856, p.3, c.1.

<sup>19</sup>"Paying the Fiddler," *El Nicaraguense*, May 24, 1856, p.4, c.4.

Granada aboard the steamer *La Virgin* at dawn on May 14, in the company of another released "traitor," Don Antonio Falla, and those who had managed to survive—eight in number—of the fifteen or twenty infirm Costa Ricans left behind by General Cañas. All were lucky to escape from Walker's grasp in a nick of time, as will be seen from the sequence that follows.

After the battle of Rivas, "the fever" and other ailments had continued to decimate Walker's army in Granada. The deaths of Lieut. John S. Jones, Capt. James M. Cook, Lieut. Nathaniel Parker Potter, Lieut. Col. A. S. Brewster, Capt. N. C. Breckenridge, Capt. Alden, and Lieut. Higgins, were reported by *El Nicaraguense* towards the end of April. Captain James Walker, the youngest brother of General Walker, died at Masaya of "inflammatory rheumatism" on May 15 and was buried in Granada next day:

Before his death, Capt. Walker confessed himself and received the holy sacrament administered by the Catholic Church; and his last wish was to be buried as a true believer in that religion. . . . A brave man, an accomplished gentleman and a general favorite has thus passed away, and is to-day exalted among the "spirits that inhabit eternity."<sup>20</sup>

The steamer *La Virgin* sailed from Granada shortly after midnight and arrived at Virgin Bay at 6:30 a.m., Friday, May 16, 1856, conveying to General Headquarters the tidings of Capt. James Walker's death. Walker still had a prominent Nicaraguan in prison at Virgin Bay, and he hung him that day.<sup>21</sup> The episode was vividly remembered by Captain James C. Jamison, an eyewitness, who afterwards recorded it in his *Reminiscences*:

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<sup>20</sup>"Funeral of Capt. Walker," *El Nicaraguense*, May 17, 1856, p.2, c.2.

<sup>21</sup>"On Friday last, Don Rico Ugarte was hung . . .," "Letter from Cyrus," Headquarters, Virgin, May 18, *El Nicaraguense*, 5/24/1856, p4, c2.

Upon the departure of the Costa Rican army, several arrests and executions took place, among them being Francisco Ugarte, with whose family I lodged when stationed at Rivas. His two nieces, beautiful and attractive women, lived with his family. Ugarte was tried for ferreting out wounded Americans after the battle, and turning them over to the enemy to be shot. His guilt was clearly established by a court of inquiry, and he was sentenced to be hanged.

After his execution his two nieces begged me to take his body to Obraje, where his family then resided. Obtaining permission to do so, I procured an ox-cart and, detailing a squad to accompany me, carried the corpse to Obraje and placed it at midnight in the parish church, where I left it surrounded by the weeping family.

I have long felt confidence that Ugarte, who was wealthy, tried to buy his freedom of General Walker. This opinion arose over my being by accident near the guard house in which Ugarte was confined, as General Walker passed one day on his way to dinner. Ugarte called General Walker by name, and upon the latter's halting, the two entered into a brief conversation. I was unable to hear all their words, but caught enough to know that Ugarte offered Walker a large sum of money, common report afterwards making it \$20,000 in gold. I could not clearly distinguish what Walker said in reply, though it was plain that his words to Ugarte were spoken in scorn. I did hear him say, however, "Don't want your money, but your life, for you have forfeited it."<sup>22</sup>

The hanging of Don Francisco Ugarte also made a lasting impression on Walker, who recorded it in *The War*:

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<sup>22</sup>James C. Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua*, p. 89.

... the execution of Ugarte made a strong impression on the people, and infused a salutary dread of American justice among the plotting Legitimists. As there had been some questions concerning the guardianship of Ugarte's children, and the administration of their mother's estate between him and his connections, the natives generally attributed the arrest of the criminal to information derived from his wife's brother-in-law, Dr. Cole; and the prevalence of the suspicion indicates that the people were not unaccustomed to see adherence to a party, or proposed devotion to the public interests, made the stalking-horse for the gratification of family feuds and personal passions.<sup>23</sup>

Don Francisco Ugarte's name was thus added to the list of the Costa Rican straggler shot at San Jorge on May 6th; the two Nicaraguan patriots hung at Virgin Bay on May 7th; their unsung and unnamed fellow Ometepeans slain on the island or hung at Virgin; the pair of American deserters shot at Granada on May 10th; the "proper examples" made by Gen. Goicouría at Acoyapa, Juigalpa, and Comalapa, by Commissioner Salazar in Matagalpa and by *Chelón* Valle in Segovia. Indeed, when Jamison carried Ugarte's corpse to Obraje and placed it at midnight in the parish church, the surrounding weeping family bore witness that under Commander-in-Chief William Walker, the commands of the government were respected in all parts of the State and peace reigned throughout Nicaragua.

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<sup>23</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 212.

## 32. Peace Drapes the Horizon

The peace that reigned in Nicaragua in May, 1856, at least to Walker's men, was crystallized by "Rambler," an American correspondent writing from Headquarters, at Virgin Bay: "All is quiet now in the departments, and the Legitimists are completely crushed out, with none so poor as to pity them."<sup>1</sup> Rambler to the contrary, everyone was to be pitied in Nicaragua, natives and foreigners, without excluding the *Orizaba* passengers stranded in Granada since April 22nd. Upon their departure for California a month later, the survivors of the ordeal recorded their painful experience in letters published by the *New York Tribune* and other papers:

. . . we arrived at Granada . . . The place had not, I believe, ever been healthy for Northerners, and now, the fatigue, the wounds, the excitement, and the drinking of aquadiente [*sic*]-the worst kind of alcoholic poison--brought on the yellow fever among the soldiers, which shortly spread among those who had but lately arrived . . . Through the kindness of Gen. Fry and Capt. Carpenter--the agent of the port at Granada--I was permitted to sail on one of the government steamers for a week upon the lake; when I returned to Granada nearly every person with whom I had formed an acquaintance, while coming here, was dead. The few who escaped (of my acquaintances) were recovering from the fever, and looked as I cannot describe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Letter from Nicaragua," *NO Picayune*, June 12, 1856, eve., p.1, c.5.

<sup>2</sup>"Later from Nicaragua," *New York Tribune*, June 2, 1856, p.5, c.6.

When on May 19 the *Sierra Nevada* arrived at San Juan del Sur from San Francisco, more than seventy travellers had died in Granada; two more died on the steamer between Granada and Virgin Bay; and thirty-three additional passengers died of "fever and diarrhea" aboard the *Sierra Nevada* during the voyage to San Francisco in the last week of May, raising the total to over 105 deaths among the 330 westbound travellers stranded in Granada a month earlier.

Horace Greeley's *Tribune* then published a full eyewitness account of conditions in Nicaragua, "from a source in which all confidence may be placed, and ought a thousand times to outweigh the statements sent to this country from Nicaragua by correspondents who do not dare and would not be permitted to tell the truth."<sup>3</sup> The following is an extract of the article (omitting several lengthy, detailed examples illustrating the narrative):

#### NICARAGUA --ITS CONDITION DESCRIBED BY AN EYEWITNESS

. . . Walker has now about eight hundred men. They are living almost wholly upon rice and tortilla (a kind of corn bread of the country), with no supply of clothing --living in the houses of Virgin Bay, driving the people out and taking possession as they require them. His men receive no pay . . . Even the original men have never received anything--that is, anything of any amount. I heard one man say he had received \$7; and there was a time when 75 cents a week were drawn for washing; and the officers drew a small amount for their high liquor bills . . .

If any kind of property is wanted by the troops, it is at once taken. This system extends down to small things. A man bringing his produce to market will be asked by an officer its price, which he will dispute, saying it is too high, and, if Government paper is

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<sup>3</sup>"We give in another column," *New York Tribune*, 6/17/1856, p.4, c.5.

refused, at once makes a seizure, and there is no redress.

Whatever property is required is taken without hesitation, whether it be that of an American citizen or a native of the country. There is no law in the country except the will of Walker. It is difficult for one who has not been a witness to the condition of things in these distracted States to form an idea of the absolutism that prevails there.

Correspondents of papers in the States dare not write the truth. A correspondent of one of the leading journals of New Orleans told me it would not be safe for him to do so. The impression is so general that letters are not allowed uninterrupted transit, that I brought many from officers to mail in New York.

The scheme of colonization is a complete subterfuge. As matters stand, there is no opportunity for a man to obtain a living by following any industrial occupation. There is no recourse but to join the army. . . .

The single newspaper published is entirely under the control of Walker, and everything that appears in it has first to receive his sanction. Among the deaths that occur very few appear in the printed list. One day in the last week of April fifteen deaths occurred, none of which were reported. . . .

. . . There is general dissatisfaction in the army, not only among the men, but I have the best reasons for believing that some of its highest officers are concerting measures with other parties to supersede Walker; but it seems a matter of policy with him not to allow any man to hold office that would probably become more popular than himself . . . It is not probable that any person now under the command of Walker will supplant him . . .

It is well known that the Government of Nicaragua is one man, and that man is Gen. Walker. Rivas is a mere tool, and in fact is not informed at all as to the purposes of Walker . . .

There are two ways of issue from the country, both



of which are guarded, so that persons dissatisfied or deserters cannot get out of the country without the permission of Walker . . .

It matters not for what length of time one has agreed to join the army; after he is once in he is obliged to remain, the expiration of his time making no difference whatever. Officers who resign their commissions are forced into the ranks.

. . . under existing circumstances, no other than a military rule can be established--although the present seems to be nothing more or less than piracy--for a deadly enmity exists between the two old parties, the "Democratic" and the "Servile"--both without any organization, to be sure--for the only organization in Nicaragua is Walker's army.

There is no money in the country, no security for property, and no commerce. . . .

Honduras, San Salvador and Guatemala, by uniting, could easily reduce Walker. Indeed, did he receive no recruits disease would soon destroy his army. A great portion of his arms are unfit for use, being old English tower muskets and American flint lock muskets, and there is also a deficiency of ammunition . . . There is no military character about his army whatever; it is simply an armed mob, that is all.

Sickness has prevailed a great deal in Walker's army; at the lowest calculation five hundred must have died during the year that he has occupied the country. Gen. Walker is aware that there are many disaffected against him, and so much was he alarmed after his return from Rivas that he appointed a body guard. He was afraid of his own safety, while he had none to fear but his own men. As to colonization, there is none of it, except those--and they are not a few--who take two by six feet in the ground.

. . . Wheeler is nothing but a tool of Walker's, and it is of no use whatever for Americans to ask of him redress for any wrongs they suffer.

From the time Gen. Walker took the government into his hands, and after the treaty with the Estrada Government, he commenced levying heavy contributions upon the Chamorista [*sic*] party . . . Instead of carrying out the provisions of the treaty, he instituted a system of pillage of the inhabitants. He has inspired such feelings of distrust among the people that agricultural and other pursuits will be neglected the present season, as cultivators have little disposition to raise crops with the prospect of having them taken away by force. A deadly hostility has sprung up between the natives and Americans, that did not exist at all prior to the advent of Walker.

A Government could hardly be more unpopular than is Walker's throughout the entire country. When I went to Granada last September, there were at least 8,000 people in the place, and there are not now left 500. They have all fled . . .<sup>4</sup>

On the editorial page of the same day, Horace Greeley remarked : "It is difficult to say whose situation is most miserable, that of the unfortunate Nicaraguans, or that of the American adventurers at present in military possession of the country."<sup>5</sup> But in the midst of such wretched circumstances, Walker never lost confidence and his contagious messianic megalomania continued to infect the culturally sensitized clique of filibuster followers. A California traveller, detained in Granada, expressed this succinctly:

. . . There is probably not a man in the army who has not made it a part of his creed that Walker is destined to be yet at the head of a confederation of Central American States. Full of this idea, they look up to him

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<sup>4</sup>"Nicaragua --Its Condition Described by An Eyewitness," *Ibid.* p6 cl.

<sup>5</sup>"we give in another column," *Ibid.*, p.4, c.5.

with a respect that amounts almost to reverence.<sup>6</sup>

Through propaganda in *El Nicaraguense*, Walker did his best to keep the flame alive among his followers. In articles that bear the characteristic strokes of his pen: "Universal Democracy" on May 3 and a cluster of four on May 10—"The Issue," "Time Executes Justice," "The Glory of War," and "Poetry of Nicaragua"—Walker recorded events in his usual fashion, when he arrived at one of the turns in his life: his 32nd birthday.<sup>7</sup>

Writing in the third person (as he always did, as in *The War in Nicaragua*),<sup>8</sup> he depicted himself as a paladin of Democracy—a statesman and a warrior—intent on his mission, and warned that until he accomplished it, Walker would have no biography:

. . . Fortunately the present revolution in Nicaragua is guided by a statesman and a warrior; . . . the mind that impels and directs it cannot be bent by force nor swerved by calumny; but anxiously and ardently it will move on to accomplish the mission of its creation. And in the time to come, when Cromwell is read aright—when Joan of Arc is recognized by the world as a pure and holy prophetess—then can Gen. Walker stand on the threshold of history and feel proud to hear the award of posterity. Until then he has no biography.<sup>9</sup>

. . . and when the iron pencil shall write on the

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<sup>6</sup> "Later from Nicaragua, *New York Tribune*, June 2, 1856, p.5, c.6.

<sup>7</sup> "Such is the nature of our reflections when arriving at one of the turns in life we cast a backward look on the road over which we have passed . . . and we look forward . . . The future! The future! Something always coming but never here." Walker to Lindsley, Venice, Nov. 19, 1844, Book One, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> See Book One: *The Crescent City*, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> "Time Executes Justice," *El Nicaraguense*, May 10, 1856, p.4, c.1.

carved columns of the future—when the children are taught the holiday that gave birth to the deliverers of the State—the names of many Democrats will sound sweetly in the patriot songs, and time will make merry at the anniversary. Of the nation, its glory must continue to increase until we can fix no bounds to its race. The struggle has lasted through a long night, but the white curtain of peace drapes the horizon, and when we are dead the land will be smiling under the magic influence of that regeneration which sprung from a deadly strife.<sup>10</sup>

. . . we have set our light upon the hill, and it is for the world to see. Darkness no longer enshrouds the future!<sup>11</sup>

Walker's struggle for accomplishing his mission lasted through a long night, but in May, 1856, the white curtain of peace draped the horizon. The forever elusive future was at hand, no longer enshrouded in darkness. Afterwards, in *The War*, he remembered that in May, 1856, "To the casual observer the political elements appeared at rest, and all seemed more tranquil than at any time since the treaty of the 23d of October. The common people, with their strong religious instinct, thought that Providence had sent the cholera to drive the Costa Ricans from the soil."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the cholera had wiped out Mora's army:

. . . It tracked them to San José, and so well was its work of destruction done, that not more than five hundred of the brave array which had gone forth to exterminate the "filibusters," returned to the capital of the Republic. Then the pestilence turning from the army

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<sup>10</sup>"The Glory of War," *Ibid.*, p.4, c.2.

<sup>11</sup>"Poetry of Nicaragua," *Ibid.*, p.4, c.4.

<sup>12</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 213.

it had almost wholly devoured, sought its prey among the peaceful families of the land. Young and old, women and children, succumbed to the disease, and some estimate that as many as fourteen thousand died from its effects. Probably, however, the more moderate estimate of ten thousand might cover all the loss to the population of the State.<sup>13</sup>

With Mora gone, there were no rivals in sight for Walker's possession of Nicaragua. In his own words: "The Americans with that faith in themselves which has carried them in a wonderfully short period from one ocean to another, regarded their establishment in Nicaragua as fixed beyond the control of casualties."<sup>14</sup> On the surface, everything seemed tranquil, but "at that time there was one man at least in Nicaragua who saw that the path of the Americans was even then beset with thorns. Edmund Randolph . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Randolph had been in León since the beginning of April. He had far advanced pulmonary tuberculosis, and right under the obituary of James Walker, on May 17, *El Nicaraguense* noted that Randolph was gravely ill in León. He improved quickly, though, and on May 22nd he was in Granada, "thoroughly convalescent."<sup>16</sup> He was immediately conveyed on board the steamer and carried to Walker's headquarters at Virgin Bay. Randolph told Walker that "there was something wrong at León; but that confined as he was to his bed he had not the means of ascertaining precisely what was the nature of the evil."<sup>17</sup>

Walker was already aware that President Patricio Rivas

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>16</sup>"Edmund Randolph," *El Nicaraguense*, May 24, 1856, p.4, c.4.

<sup>17</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 214.

had written to President Mora shortly after the battle of Rivas, sounding proposals for peace behind Walker's back, "and the fact that he had sent such letters to Mora without advising with the general-in-chief was suspicious."<sup>18</sup>

Precisely when peace seemed likely, events began initiating a new phase of Walker's war in Nicaragua, which would at the end expel him from the country. On May 22nd, Randolph departed for New York "on business connected with the Government."<sup>19</sup> Walker returned from Virgin Bay to Granada on May 29th, and two days later he marched with his staff to León. As he explained when closing Chapter Six in *The War*:

It became, therefore, highly important for the Americans to ascertain the state of affairs at León. Hence as soon as the mails for California and the Atlantic States had been despatched, Walker determined to repair to the Occidental Department. The events which transpired at León in consequence of that visit present another and a new phase of the war in Nicaragua.<sup>20</sup>

That new phase was the War of Liberation, called in Central America: *La Guerra Nacional*.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>19</sup>"Edmund Randolph, *El Nicaraguense*, May 24, 1856, p.4, c.4.

<sup>20</sup>Walker, *The War*, p. 215.