

13. Embraces

The three states north of Nicaragua lagged far behind Costa Rica in their reactions to the Walker filibuster menace. Greater distances and geographical barriers allowed Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador a sense of security which lessened the urgency of the danger. Moreover, none of these northern states shared Costa Rican designs for the San Juan river canal route, and thus they lacked that powerful incentive for intervention.

Guatemala, under President-for-life General Rafael Carrera, was the Central American citadel of conservatism. Carrera had adequate resources and was well aware of the filibuster threat, but since Guatemala was shielded from Nicaragua by both Honduras and El Salvador, he was in no hurry to embark in a costly military adventure far away from his own borders.

The strongman of Honduras, Gen. Santos Guardiola, became President on February 17, 1856. Guardiola held indelible memories of his September 3d debacle at Virgin Bay, and it was said that he considered the Yankees invincible. Hence, he advocated non-intervention in Nicaragua. He even went to the extreme of forbidding his subordinates from writing anything against the filibusters.

In El Salvador, elections were held which led to the inauguration of President Rafael Campo on February 12, 1856. Campo was an honest and respected, but timorous and simple man who sympathized with the Nicaraguan legitimist camp. Carrera, Campo, Guardiola, and Mora held a solid conservative banner over their yet inchoate league against Walker, surrounding Nicaragua at the onset of the war with Costa Rica. Inside Nicaragua, conservative (Servile, Legitimist or Chamorrista) patriots fiercely resisted the filibuster. Walker recognized these facts and issued, March 10, 1856, a "Proclamation to the People of Central America," declaring eternal enmity against the Servile parties and Servile Governments of Central America. He then ordered the Troops of the Army of the Republic to wear the red ribbons.

This waving of the liberal (Democratic) colors and his subsequent permission to transfer the seat of government to León were calculated to strengthen Leonese support for Walker during the forthcoming war. The government moved to León on March 25th. On the 30th, President Patricio Rivas issued a Proclamation To the Nicaraguans, declaring that the purpose of his visit to the Occidental Department was to place himself in closer contact with the Governments of Honduras, Salvador, and Guatemala, with

whom Nicaragua desired only good relations and faithful and sincere friendship. To that end, he had already sent commissioners to celebrate treaties of alliance and amity.

Commissioners Don Gregorio Juárez and Don Jesús Baca departed from León for El Salvador on March 29; Don Rafael Jerez and Don Juan Aguilar left for Honduras on the 31st. The appointment of envoys to Guatemala was delayed, pending Carrera's decision to recognize them or not.

A month earlier, on February 29th, Costa Rica had appointed Dr. Nazario Toledo extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary to the governments of Guatemala, Salvador and Honduras, in order to form an offensive and defensive alliance to exterminate Walker. Toledo proceeded immediately on his mission, sailing from Puntarenas on the Emilia on March 4th.

Urged on by Toledo and by the news of Schlessinger's descent on Costa Rica, Carrera's government finally decided to act against Walker. An extraordinary session of the Council of State on April 4th-5th unanimously sanctioned the decision. Consequently, Carrera sent Col. José Víctor Zavala to El Salvador to obtain permission for the passage of Guatemalan troops against the filibusters in Nicaragua. On April 15th, El Salvador not only granted permission, but also expressed its readiness to join forces with Guatemala, and advised that Honduras also should send troops.

The vanguard of the Guatemalan army, 800 men under command of Gen. Mariano Paredes, left the capital on Monday, May 5, 1856. With the Guatemalan troops on the move, the Salvadoran army was ready to join them on their march to the Nicaraguan border. On May 7, the government of El Salvador, at Cojutepeque, sent an official communication to President Rivas in León. In short, it asked Rivas to break with Walker. Rivas refused.

The breach between León and Cojutepeque then seemed unsurmountable. Since early April, Commissioner Gregorio Juárez had futilely tried to obtain an audience with the Salvadoran authorities and was thus recalled by his government. Relations between León and Guatemala were of course no better. They deteriorated still further when Foreign Minister Sebastián Salinas, at León, on May 20th sent an ultimatum to the Guatemalan Foreign Office, demanding that Guatemala officially recognize the Rivas government.

This was the situation as it appeared in Granada at the end of May, when Walker departed to ascertain for himself the true state of affairs at León. The New Orleans Picayune correspondent, Charles Callahan, went along.

The Rifles battalion marched out of Granada early in the morning; Walker and staff, escorted by the Rangers, left town about noon, stopping at Masaya in the afternoon

when Gen. Goicouría was taken ill with a severe attack of cholera. Leaving Goicouría behind, Walker continued on to León and, according to Callahan, his march through various Nicaraguan towns was a perfect jubilee. Everywhere, his entrance was the signal for the firing of cannon and rockets, and assorted 'vivas' from the entire population.

Arriving at León at 1:30 p.m. on June 4th, Walker was welcomed by half the inhabitants. President Rivas and his Cabinet, and an immense concourse of the citizens, met him three miles from the city, and escorted him to his quarters. With the usual military fanfare, troops formed at the plaza; martial music and other signs of rejoicing solemnized the act, but all this was insignificant compared to the faces reflecting the happiness and enthusiasm which General Walker's presence excited.

Scarcely had he dismounted when his house was besieged by an army of women, of all ages, sizes and complexions, who were clamorous for a sight of General Walker, as they pronounced it. Callahan observed that Walker was proverbially a modest man and was undoubtedly dismayed when the women insisted on an abrazo (embrace), which they forthwith proceeded to bestow upon him. But there was no use remonstrating, and he was obliged to submit, with as good a grace as he could, until he had encircled the necks and been squeezed to the bosoms of all the women present.

In the evening the musicians came to sing songs praising American valor, and the local rhymesters poured forth the sonorous sounds of Castilian verse in honor of the stranger who had delivered Nicaragua from the oppressions of her enemies:

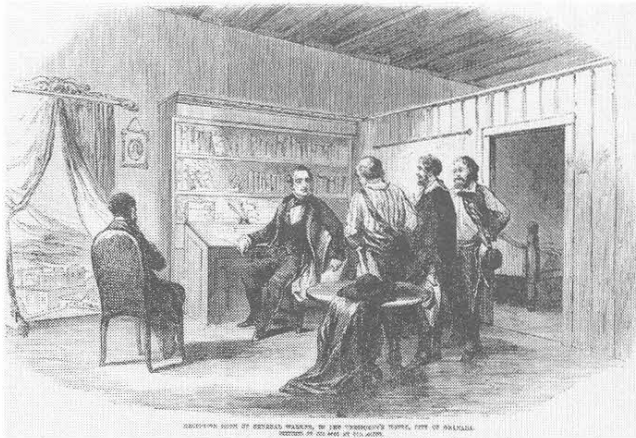
*O Patriots, sing
A thousand happy hymns
To the redeemer
Of our freedom.
The world amazed
Shall obey and respect
The intrepid son
Of the great Washington.
And Free Nicaragua
Shall forever proclaim,
Hail the conquering Walker!
Hail our Liberator!*

Such a hero's welcome for Walker is understandable as it was his first visit to León since the fall of Granada, coming at a time when the threat from the North sharply rekindled the need of a Leonese-filibuster alliance. President Patricio Rivas had made that point very clear in a proclamation he issued the day before Walker arrived at León:

“Nicaraguans! Guatemala is in the field against us . . . President Carrera seeks to appear generous, to protect us, with the seal of slavery on his forehead. . . . Soldiers, to arms! The country trusts in you for its safety and its life!”

Commander-in-Chief William Walker followed suit at once, and delivered an “Address to the People of Nicaragua,” in Spanish, in harmony with the mood he encountered in León. Callahan reported that Walker’s address was highly regarded by the natives, and that to those who knew the studious character of Gen. Walker in New Orleans, it would not be surprising to learn that he was then an accomplished Spanish scholar, speaking and writing the language in such a manner as to extort praise from the most prejudiced of his enemies.

On June 19th, two weeks after the feminine embraces in León, an anonymous New York Tribune’s special correspondent at Granada described Walker, drawing a “pen and ink sketch of him, taken from life”:



General William Walker at his office in Granada
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 15, 1856

“At first glance, Gen. Walker appears a small man, but when standing beside men of the average height he appears a trifle taller than they. He is very thin; not an ounce of superabundant flesh upon his bones. The frame work of his body is small, but he has a very tough and sinewy appearance. His soldiers say—those who have been with him since the beginning of his adventures—that he can endure more hardship than the strongest-looking man in the State.

“He is one of the most industrious of men, and supervises the entire affairs of the country. His ordinary dress consists of a pair of common blue pantaloons, a coarse blue linen over-shirt—upon the shoulders of which two small pieces of red flannel do the duty of epaulettes—and a straw hat. When he sits, he settles down in the most careless manner—his shoulders appearing to contract into a small compass.

“His ungraceful posture while sitting, with his unpretending style of dress, is apt to disappoint those who expect to find in him physical dimensions proportionate to the

spread of his fame. But, when in full uniform, and animated, his whole appearance changes, his shoulders expand to squareness, his height seems to increase at least a couple of inches, and the sparkle of his usually dreamy grey eyes indicates the fire and brilliancy of the man within.

"His head is more than usually high, somewhat large in proportion to his body, and expands as it rises upward. His hair is of a light color; his forehead is broad and smooth, and so developed in the reflective faculties that a phrenologist would be apt to pronounce him an idealist, and of a speculative turn of mind. His face is thin, his nose slightly aquiline, his mouth is well-formed, expressing great firmness, and his lips have that compression peculiar to those who are very fastidious and systematic.

"His eyes are rather small, and placed low down from his brow. He speaks with much deliberation, and is particular in his choice of words. When so interested in conversation, however, as to forget himself in the subject, his delivery is easy and even graceful. His face, without being particularly handsome, has an intellectual and pleasing expression, and a mustache which he is cultivating will shortly add its graces to the tout semble of his features.

"His ambition is, no doubt, great; yet he is in appearance as modest and retiring as a schoolboy. No person would suspect in his half bashful, half shrinking manner the desperate courage of which he is possessed, nor suppose that his small hands and delicately tapered fingers had so often fought their way with the butt end of a pistol, through a crowd of enemies."

The embryonic mustache that sprouted on William Walker's face in the wake of the warm embraces in León was short lived. A few days later he broke with the Leonese, and the mustache disappeared, without a trace, suddenly.

14. Hour of Destiny

Simultaneous with Walker's success at León, developments in America, also favorable to his cause, were set in motion on April 29th in New York upon the arrival of the Orizaba with passengers and news from Granada. The Herald's stirring account of thousands of Costa Ricans, armed by the British, striving to drive all Americans out of Nicaragua, and their war cry of "Death to all who may be taken!" naturally tapped patriotic fervor in favor of Walker's cause.

The passengers from Granada were Major and Mrs. John P. Heiss and Father Agustín Vijil. Heiss was a Major in the Tennessee Militia and also a journalist, editor of the Washington Union during the Polk administration and afterwards chief proprietor of the New Orleans Delta, where he became identified with Cuban filibusterism. It was alleged at the time that he had been sent to Nicaragua by President Pierce to bring to Washington an official representative of the Walker-Rivas government. Father Vijil was that representative, chosen by Walker after Heiss arrived in Granada.

When the news from Nicaragua hit the streets in New York, Heiss was already on his way to Washington to deliver Minister Wheeler's official dispatches to the State Department. He also delivered a letter from William Walker to Hon. John B. Weller, the California senator who had the backing of the Southern machine.

On May 1st, Weller spoke in the Senate, urging the recognition of the Walker-Rivas government, and then proceeded to read the letter from Walker before the full senate, whilst the utmost silence prevailed. In the long letter, written at Granada on April 15th, Walker rehashed his typical propaganda line, describing himself as an American patriot in his war against Costa Rica and England. Sen. Stephen Douglas, of Illinois, then rose and spoke forcefully in support of Walker. In the House, on the same day, John A. Quitman, of Mississippi, introduced a bill to repeal certain sections of the neutrality law. As more Walker supporters rallied in his favor, the New York Tribune's Washington correspondent commented that Walker was no lonely filibuster, but the agent and pioneer of the Slavery Expansion leaders.

Walker's Southern friends pressed vigorously for the recognition of Father Vijil. In the President's Cabinet, Davis, Dobbin, and Guthrie favored it, while Marcy and Cushing were strongly opposed. It was afterwards alleged, that with the help of Senator William Smith of Virginia, Heiss held a number of secret meetings with President Pierce in

which the recognition of Padre Vijil was arranged without the knowledge of Marcy or even of the President's private secretary.

Recognition of the Walker government was exceedingly popular in the South and West, and Democratic politicians immediately used the Nicaragua issue in the ensuing electoral campaign. In New York, a preliminary meeting was held on May 6, presided by John Clancy, Alderman of the Sixth Ward, to make arrangements for a public expression of sympathy for Walker.

The Grand Meeting was held on the 9th, at the National Hall, under the Nicaraguan flag and banners with the slogans: no british interference on the continent of america and enlarge the boundaries of freedom. There were telegraphic messages from Cass, Douglas, Quitman, and other Democratic bigwigs, and appropriate speeches by local figures. Finally, a committee was appointed to receive subscriptions and contributions for "Walker and his brave army in Nicaragua," while the enthusiastic crowd gave three cheers for Padre Vijil and three boos for Mr. Marcy. Cheers and boos were still echoing when the Orizaba sailed for San Juan the next afternoon, carrying filibuster recruits and displaying on its mainmast a small flag bearing the initial letter "W," which some said stood for Walker.

The Democratic National Convention was about to assemble in Cincinnati (on June 2d) to nominate the party's candidate for the November presidential election. Stephen Douglas and James Buchanan were the only contenders likely to thwart President Pierce's bid for a second term, and both publicly sympathized with Walker. At that point, with attention focused on Cincinnati, President Pierce recognized the Nicaraguan government of President Patricio Rivas and received its Minister, Padre Vijil.

Vijil was a liberal politician who had become a priest by accident. As parish priest of Granada when Walker captured the city, he looked upon Walker as the Maccabee of his People, the man sent by God to wipe away tears, to heal wounds, and to reconcile the Nicaraguan family. When asked at the State Department to present his credentials, he delivered a personal message expressing heartfelt sentiments about the tragic history of his homeland.

Vijil's diplomatic tenure was short and sad. The diplomatic corps shunned him socially and helped to call into question what was most important for him—his priesthood. A very cold reception by the Catholic clergy, pained him most. Many days elapsed before he obtained permission from the Archbishop of Baltimore to officiate as a priest.

Padre Vijil abandoned Washington for good on June 19. In New York, next day, Edmund Randolph (who had arrived from Nicaragua on June 1st) and Charles Morgan

agreed that John P. Heiss should replace him as Minister; on June 23d, Vijil sent a note to Marcy naming Heiss his successor. He departed from New York on the 25th, for San Juan del Norte, confident of better days for his country under the Walker-Rivas regime, since he had been recognized by the President.

The Democratic National Convention in Cincinnati had adopted a supportive platform on June 5. Approved by a 221 to 38 margin, Foreign Policy Resolution #4 stated that "the people of the United States cannot but sympathize with the efforts which are being made by the people of Central America to regenerate that portion of the continent which covers a passage across the oceanic isthmus."

But President Pierce, although too early for history, had been too late for Cincinnati: fellow "diplomatic filibuster" James Buchanan had won the nomination of the party and was bound to win the presidential election in November. Buchanan had earned the sobriquet on October 18, 1854, when he signed at Ostend, Belgium, a famous manifesto urging the United States to buy Cuba from Spain, and to take it by force should Spain refuse to sell. He was then Minister to Great Britain, and Minister to Spain Pierre Soulé co-signed the document.

Meanwhile, upon receiving the news of the declaration of war by Costa Rica against the filibusters, slavery propagandists agitated public opinion in New Orleans, in support of Walker. In a leading article in behalf of the policy of Southern expansion, the *New Orleans Delta*, long identified with Cuban filibusterism, explained to its readers that "the cause of Cuba depends upon the fate of Nicaragua, and the fate of the South depends upon that of Cuba. This is the hour of destiny. We must live now or have no life. We must do or die."

On April 28, a meeting was held in the bar room of the St. Louis Hotel, to adopt practical measures for providing material support to Walker. Ex-ambassador and ex-senator Pierre Soulé spoke at length, stating that Walker needed between \$200,000 and \$250,000 to terminate the war by the conquest of Costa Rica. The money was not asked as a gift, but as a loan, which would be faithfully repaid. After descanting upon the advantages for the United States, the South, and New Orleans—and of course Nicaragua and the world—the speaker concluded by calling for paper and ink, and opened a subscription list on the spot.

Numerous gentlemen then stepped forward and put down their names for various amounts; a Committee was named; a New Orleans merchant, Mason Pilcher, acted as treasurer and opened an account book which he labeled "Government of Nicaragua—In a/c with Mason Pilcher, Agent." Cash receipts from nineteen subscribers totalled \$1,348.00 on May 6, enabling the Committee to fit out and send a vessel, the schooner

Minnie Shiffer, from New Orleans on the night of the 8th with reinforcements and supplies for Walker. Its 215 passengers (eight women, seven children and 200 men) included three companies of recruits (ten officers and 134 privates) commanded by Col. John A. Jacques, who had earned his rank in the Louisiana National Guard. They carried with them 325 rifles and muskets, ninety kegs powder, with lead in proportion, and hundreds of revolvers and knives.

Another meeting of the "Friends of Nicaragua" drew 2,000 persons at the Bank Arcade building on May 20th. Speakers again explained to the enthusiastic crowd the "disastrous results to New Orleans" should Walker fail in Nicaragua. "Patriotic and commendable resolutions" were again passed and money collected. A procession with music then marched to the Crescent office to give a round rising of cheers to the newspaper that once belonged to Walker and that was "the first to take up the cause of the Rivas-Walker government in the Southwest, if not in the country."

The friends of the movement met again the next evening at the Louisiana Hotel and organized a force of three lieutenants, one sergeant, and thirty-six privates under Capt. Robert Ellis. They sailed from New Orleans on the 23d aboard the Daniel Webster, which dropped them off at San Juan del Norte before delivering its California passengers at Aspinwall.

President Pierce's recognition of Padre Vijil had given an impetus to the Walker "Nicaragua" fever. The South felt enlivened by it. "Nicaragua" meetings were simultaneously organized in various Southern cities. At Nashville, the citizens assembled May 17 in very large numbers. The meeting was attended by gentlemen of the highest character and respectability, without distinction of party, who passed a resolution eulogizing Walker. At the height of the fever, hundreds of adventurous young men started from Southern cities for Nicaragua by way of New Orleans. About 150 of them left Louisville aboard the steamboat Sultana on May 22d. They travelled under the command of Col. Jack Allen, a well-known Cuban filibuster. About seventy-five emigrants had preceded them on the days before, about 150 would join them at Owensboro, and a like number at Henderson, Ky., downriver.

The "stout-hearted and stout-limbed hunters of Kentucky," just the kind of men Walker wanted, arrived in New Orleans on May 29, and in the evening attended a rally at the United States Hotel. Speeches were again plentiful, but money was sadly deficient. Many would-be emigrants were flat broke and could not raise, in New Orleans, the necessary funds to continue their voyage. Consequently, large numbers went back home to Kentucky. Those who were able to pay their own way stayed in New Orleans with Col. Allen, planning to leave for Nicaragua at the first opportunity.

Agent Mason Pilcher paid \$1,800 for the passage of Captain A. W. Marsh and sixty-three men; others contributed the funds for the transportation of ten Tennesseans under Capt. Ben Jones, half a dozen Cuban exiles, and twenty-five Kentuckians. Together they formed a body of 105 soldiers under the command of Col. John Allen for Walker's army. They sailed on June 7 from New Orleans on the steamer Granada, which dropped them off at San Juan del Norte before delivering its California passengers at Aspinwall.

Twenty-seven Texans under Capt. Andrew J. Turley formed the bulk of thirty-six passengers for Nicaragua who sailed from New Orleans aboard the Daniel Webster on June 22d. In all, the Minnie Shiffer, Daniel Webster (two trips), and Granada transplanted some 400 "emigrants" to Nicaragua during May and June, 1856. Added to roughly 100 from New York by the Orizaba during that period, the May-June additions from the East to Walker's realm totalled about 500.

On June 2d, Col. Jacques' and Capt. Ellis' 200 fully armed and uniformed recruits disembarked at Granada. Their arrival, and the news of the reception of Padre Vijil, set the Americans in the city "in a fever of joy. A national salute was fired on the plaza, and the bells rang out their most joyous peals." The newcomers were "the strongest and best conditioned body of 'Liberators' that had arrived in the country since Walker's advent."

They entered into a war-stricken Granada—a portion of the town was already demolished by the bombardment during the civil war. The natives in town were mostly women and children. Walker was away at León, with the main body of the army and his staff, expecting and preparing for an incursion from the Northern armies that had been reported on the march against him with 4,000 men.

Col. Jacques started without delay, upon muleback, for headquarters in León, to proffer himself for immediate active service; his battalion, under Capt. Thomas Henry, stayed in Masaya, to await orders; there, Goicouría joined him, already convalescing, and together they proceeded towards León. Gen. Walker had barely reached the town Wednesday, June 4th at noon amid the ringing of bells, when Goicouría and Jacques overtook him with the news of the recognition of Padre Vijil by President Pierce and the arrival of substantial reinforcements from the South.

That fateful day for Walker, filled with feminine embraces, and the momentous news combined to convince him that the time was ripe to discard Don Patricio and to personally take over as President of Nicaragua. Next morning, Walker told President Rivas that he must step down from office. On Don Patricio's refusal, Walker told Goicouría to work on the Leonese leaders in order that he (Walker) could assume the presidency of the Republic.

Goicouría made the proposal to Jerez on June 6th; Jerez angrily rejected it. Don Domingo then summoned several prominent Leonese citizens to a meeting, in which he let them know that Walker would be President. In a candid talk with Minister Salinas on June 9th, Goicouría disclosed that the Walker for president proposal was not his own idea, but originated from Walker himself.

Simultaneously, Walker appeared before the Cabinet on June 6th, seeking approval for a loan of \$250,000 from American citizens, mortgaging the best lands of the republic at four dimes per acre. President Rivas and his Ministers rejected Walker's request. Walker again appeared before the Cabinet with the same request next day, with the same result. He then asked for unlimited powers to confiscate enemy property, in fact stating that he would bring American capitalists who would buy the confiscated real estate and would use the proceeds to pay what was owed to his mercenary soldiers. Rivas and his Ministers refused to grant such powers.

On the evening of June 9th, Walker visited Don Patricio at home and tried to persuade him to give up the presidency; otherwise, General Valle would lead a revolt against President Rivas under the pretext that he had failed to pay the salary of the American soldiers. When Rivas refused, Walker intimated, in the presence of Minister Jerez, that if Don Patricio didn't resign next day, Walker would take the presidency by force.

On June 10th, Don Domingo came before the Cabinet with two peremptory requests from Walker: that they grant Goicouría the powers for the loan, and that a national election be held for choosing a new president by direct popular vote. To relieve the pressures of the moment, the Cabinet then appeared to yield while in fact holding firm to its rejection of Walker's utterly inadmissible pretension.

An electoral decree was thus drawn up that day but in a manner that it made it impossible to hold elections. Moreover, there was a firm decision to revoke it before the elections could begin to take place; and it was in fact revoked four days later, before it had been published in the Departments of the country.

Then the powers of Goicouría relative to the loan were drawn up; but, in the final analysis, they were reduced to a simple authority for signing an agreement in virtue of which the government would in due time appoint a commission that would issue the bonds for the loan, so that nothing existed before the appointment of the commission; and in this step, too, there was a firm decision to revoke Goicouría's powers in due time, which was in fact done.

Walker left for Granada early next morning, taking with him an escort of Rangers and 200 native troops, and the León garrison reduced to the American Rifles battalion under the command of Col. Don Bruno von Natzmer and a few Leonese soldiers. When news

of Walker's pretensions and impositions on the Cabinet became public knowledge after his departure, a wave of excitement swept through the city.

Natzmer took possession of the army barracks at León on June 12; the native garrison withdrew and dispersed. He then called in the American squad from Chinandega. Before noon, President Rivas and his Ministers abandoned the government office upon being warned that Col. Natzmer intended to arrest them. They left the city and went into hiding, moving on to Chinandega on the 13th.

From June 14th onward, the government opened relations with the neighboring States and with their allied armies on the Nicaraguan border, declared Walker a traitor, revoked the powers given to Goicouría, annulled the electoral decree, and raised forces to defend itself from a possible Walker surprise attack and to expel Natzmer's Rifles from León.

The break between the Rivas government and Walker was then complete, and President Rivas put the entire blame on Walker. In his June 14 instructions to Commissioner Don Gregorio Juárez, who after being recalled by his government in May still lingered at San Miguel, in El Salvador, Don Patricio put it in a nutshell: "Walker came to León with pretensions so bold that they destroyed the good opinion which, by mistake, we had formed of him. He wanted to seize the supreme power; he made threats so that the existing government should be rendered up to him." Consequently, "we are sending dispatches to the other Central American governments, uniting our efforts with theirs to get rid of this rabble."

Shortly after Walker entered Granada, he received letters from Natzmer relating that Rivas and his Cabinet had fled to Chinandega. He immediately ordered Col. Jacques, then in Masaya with his command, to prepare for a march; and on June 14 Jacques with the Rangers travelled with Walker on the road to Managua.

Couriers met them every few hours on their way toward León. At Nagarote, letters from Natzmer informed Walker that Jerez, as Minister of War, had ordered him to withdraw from the towers of the cathedral, where he had placed his riflemen. Walker ordered Natzmer to obey the command of Jerez, and to withdraw the whole American force from León to Nagarote.

When Natzmer reached Nagarote, Walker's men marched toward Managua, leaving the entire Occidental Department (León and Chinandega) in the hands of President Rivas and his native forces. A few Leonese under Gen. José María Chelón Valle and Col. Mateo Pineda accompanied Natzmer and still remained loyal to Walker.

15. President

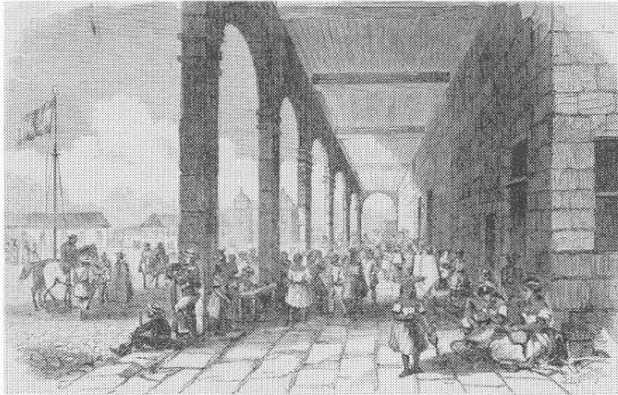
Flagrantly exceeding his authority as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, as soon as he entered Granada, on June 20th, Walker appointed Don Fermín Ferrer "Provisional President of the Republic," pending an election as called for in the June 10 decree that had been repealed by President Rivas on the 14th, but which Walker pronounced to be "in full force and virtue." Likewise, Walker declared null and void all acts and decrees issued by Rivas since June 12th. Finally, he warned "natives" and "foreigners" that any who rendered to Rivas "any kind of aid, by loans or mercantile contracts, shall be considered as traitors to the country, and punished according to martial law."

He also issued an "Address to the Army" and an "Address To the People of Nicaragua" stating that the Rivas Government was "no longer worthy of existence. In the name of the people I have, therefore, declared its dissolution, and have organized a Provisional Government until the nation exercises its natural right of electing its own rulers."

Walker implemented his illegal decisions immediately. Don Fermín took the oath of office within a few hours—on Saturday, June 21, 1856—and "the people" throughout the country magically "elected" Walker as his successor within the next three days: in the bogus election that he held on June 22-24, the votes from Segovia, Matagalpa, Chontales, and the Occidental Department were fabricated fictions, and the entire voting is a tissue of lies and a fraud. One of Walker's soldiers told how it was done: The Presidential election which has recently been announced, was carried by the California style of ballot box stuffing, and there is no question but Walker has been chosen by fraud. All the soldiers of the government were allowed to vote, which is contrary to the law there. They were not content with voting once, but a great many voted twenty times, and even oftener. After this double voting the returns were made up at Granada just to suit the fancy of those who controlled the election. More votes were returned from some localities than there were persons of all ages and sexes living in them. A most damning outrage was in this manner committed upon the rights of the Nicaraguans.

"Provisional President" Fermín Ferrer then declared William Walker elected President of the Republic and appointed Saturday, July 12, for his Inauguration. A platform was erected at the west end of the Plaza, covered with a canvas shade, carpeted, and decorated with flowers. In front were the flags of the United States, France, and Nicaragua; above them waved the Lone Star of Cuba.

On Saturday morning, at 11 o'clock, Walker's troops formed on the Plaza, the band playing appropriate music. Parading by platoons, they saluted the flags of the great nations presented there and then marched past the residence of Minister Wheeler, in front of whose door the Stripes and Stars waved jauntily in the breeze. At the residence of President Ferrer, he and Walker joined the procession. They walked side by side toward the staging on the Plaza, escorted by several hundred American soldiers who marched by rank and file, led by their officers.



Market Place on the Grand Plaza, Granada, Nicaragua
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, June 21, 1856

Two native Nicaraguans (puppet "President" Ferrer and a nonexistent "bishop") and eighteen foreigners (Walker, Wheeler, Callahan, staff and field officers) ascended the platform and seated themselves on comfortable chairs. Ferrer read the Valedictory in Spanish, and Charles Callahan put it in English. He told Walker that "the people of Nicaragua who have elected you, promise themselves abundant fruit from

your labors, and your fame will be transmitted to all posterity, illuminated by a never fading light."

Walker then knelt on a cushion while Ferrer administered the oath of office in Spanish. Next, Walker delivered his Inaugural Address in English, in a clear, firm, confident tone. When it was concluded, a Cuban, Lainé rendered it into Spanish. Following a twenty-one gun salute on the Plaza, a Te Deum in La Parroquia, and a parade through the streets of Granada, at two p.m. the troops escorted President Walker to his residence. Officers and friends entered and offered their congratulations; several bottles of champagne were uncorked, and some fifty invited guests stayed for dinner.

It was a dinner peculiarly fitting the occasion, and the times—a soldier's dinner. Walker banished spirituous liquors from his table; there were wines only at the Presidential dinner, but sparkling champagne flowed profusely after the cloth had been removed and toasts followed in succession. The initial toast was appropriately hyperbolic: "General William Walker, President of the Republic of Nicaragua—the Scholar, Gentleman, and Soldier, responding to the call of down-trodden and oppressed

humanity, entered Nicaragua at the head of his invincible Fifty-six, and established the nucleus of a great Republic.” Music by the band: “See the Conquering Hero Comes.” Walker responded with a toast to “the President of the United States.”

In reply, Minister Wheeler returned his thanks in the name of President Pierce. Upon referring to Walker, he said: “—as Aristo had recorded of his hero—that Nature broke the mold in which she cast him; for in vain could he look for his superior.” When Wheeler afterwards toasted “The Ballot Box,” a voice added “The Band Box,” and amid laughter and applause, the band played “Rock the Cradle, Lucy.”

Hornsby drank to “Uncle Billy,” encouraging more loud cheers and laughter, and a toast to “Uncle Sammy” followed. Two natives spoke next. Ferrer toasted “Our Brethren from the United States who come here to teach us the art of self-government, in connection with William Walker, our champion in war, our protector in peace”; then Col. Mateo Pineda’s offered a toast “To the Memory of Washington; may the administration of Walker be as successful.”

Toasts and speeches continued expanding. In Walker’s final toast, he contended that “The Ashes of Christopher Columbus—which rest in the Cathedral of Havana—they should belong to America, and not to Europe.” Lainé thanked him and drank to “Cuba.” Byron Cole closed the festivities with “The Star of William Walker—may it not shed its rays alone on Nicaragua.” Amid loud applause, “the President now arose to leave the table, and was followed by all present.”



El Nicaraguense, Granada, July 12, 1856

“The first act in the most startling of histories is thus consummated.” Thus ended what Walker’s newspaper, *El Nicaraguense*, called “the inauguration of the first American President of Nicaragua.” Walker’s mouthpiece inflated the number of unnamed “Municipal Authorities,” “Foreign Consuls” and “Officers of the Navy”; it converted La Parroquia into a Cathedral; and it invented a Bishop who ascended the platform with Walker on the Plaza and chanted the *Te Deum* in church.

The Election, Inaugural, and chronicle bear witness to the bogus “election.” The whole affair was a farce in Granada—the first act of a sham “Walker presidency” which from its very beginning was but a tissue of contradictory lies.

Intimate friend Edmund Randolph missed the inaugural, for at the time he was in New York, recuperating his health and also attending to Walker's business with Heiss and Morgan. Don Domingo de Goicouria was also absent at the inaugural. He had left Granada right after the "election" on his way to London, to serve Walker as envoy to England and France. In New Orleans, he transferred his powers for a loan to agents Mason Pilcher and Col. Slatter, leaving them in charge of raising a loan as early as possible.

With a contingent of York recruits, on July 5, a number of passengers landed in Granada: among them, Father Vijil, Appleton Oaksmith, Col. George Hall, Gen. L. De Shields, Gen. William Leslie Cazneau, and Mrs Cazneau.

Oaksmith had emerged in the Walker camp as organizer of the "Grand Sympathy Meeting" at the Park in New York in May. Hall was a colonel in the Brooklyn Militia who had served with distinction in the Mexican War and was reputed to be one of the most qualified soldiers in the United States. De Shields bore dispatches from the State Department for Minister Wheeler. Gen. Cazneau was a Yankee entrepreneur; his wife, better known by her pen name, Cora Montgomery, was the preeminent female filibuster.

Appleton Oaksmith was reputed to be a very wealthy man, with valuable connections in American political and business circles. He owned the ships *Victoria*, *Amelia*, and *Magnolia* that carried men and weapons for the Cuban and the Kinney filibusters in 1854-55. His brother, Sidney Oaksmith, was the U.S. Commercial Agent in Haiti. On July 16, Walker appointed him resident Minister in Washington in place of Vijil.

That appointment was one in a series of decrees for the complete American control and the radical transformation of Nicaragua—the destruction of Nicaraguan nationality to the point of beginning to supplant the language. In Walker's own words: At the onset of his "Administration," he sought the reorganization, not merely of the State, but of the family and of labor; not merely the secondary form of the crystal was to be modified, but the primary form was to be radically changed. To change the crystal, he issued decrees: July 14. Decree ordering that all decrees, resolutions and orders shall be published and circulated in the Spanish and English languages; that all documents connected with Public Affairs shall be of equal value and authority, whether written in the English or Spanish languages.

July 16. Decree confiscating all personal or real property of all persons who have assisted the enemies of the State or who are declared traitors by the government.

July 21. Decree ordering the appointment of Judges of the First Instance: whose duty it shall be to hear decide and finally determine all suits brought before him. They shall have

jurisdiction in all cases where one of the parties to the such may require it; in all cases where the title or possession of land is in question.

July 22. Decree ordering a loan of Two Million Dollars in order to reorganize the Republic. Appleton Oaksmith shall negotiate it by selling government bonds in the United States, secured by mortgaging a one square degree (2,304,000 acres) tract of land in the District of Matagalpa.

Walker explained it very clearly in *The War*: "The decree concerning the use of the two languages tended to make the ownership of the lands of the State fall into the hands of those speaking English." So did the other decrees. To enforce them, Walker appointed trusty American filibusters to key posts: Recorder and Interpreter of the Government: John Henry Felix; Sub-Secretary of Hacienda, with the full powers of Minister of Hacienda: William K. Rogers (dubbed *Confiscador General de la República* by the Nicaraguan people); Board of Commissioners in charge of confiscations: William K. Rogers, John H. Marshall and John L. Richmond; Marshal (to serve and execute the orders of the Board): John Myland; Judges of the First Instance: Thomas Baseye in the Oriental Department and James Jackson in the Southern Department (the entire extent of Walker's domain); Recorder for the Oriental Department: Angus Gillis; Recorder for the Southern Department: Augustus H. Wheeler.

Walker's nominal Minister of Hacienda, Manuel Carrascosa, resigned before the end of July, reducing the number of Nicaraguans in Walker's Cabinet to two: Fermín Ferrer and Mateo Pineda. In fact, Sub-Secretaries Rogers and Richmond and Adjutant General Ph. R. Thompson, three filibusters, were the "Cabinet." And so on down the line: the Solicitor of the Treasury (John M. Baldwin), the Administrator of the Custom House (Charles Callahan), the Prefect of the Oriental Department (Francisco Agüero Estrada, a Cuban), the Prefect of the Southern Department (Henry Kane), and the "Governor of the Police" at Ometepe (Charles Meyers), were foreigners.

American Minister John H. Wheeler openly abetted the plunder. On July 19, he officially recognized Walker's "Government of Nicaragua" in a ceremony attended by Gen. Cazneau, Cora Montgomery, "a brilliant staff of officers" and many other American ladies, citizens, and soldiers. The coterie of foreigners marched in procession from the American Legation to Walker's "Presidential mansion." As an appropriate symbol of the situation, even the flag of the country was in American hands: the filibuster escort formed in two platoons in front of the Legation with the American flag, carried by Dr. Allen, and the Nicaraguan flag, carried by Sergeant Simpson.

Confiscador General William Kissane Rogers carried no flag. His hands were full, looting the country for Walker, and his previous criminal record in the United States

eminently qualified him for the job. Rogers, better known as Kissane, had arrived in Nicaragua straight from Sing Sing on February 2, 1856. Walker immediately appointed him Assistant Commissary General, with the rank of Major, and put him in charge of the Commissariat of the Army.

At the head of the Commissary Rangers, Kissane scoured the country, foraging for corn, cattle, and provender and paying the natives in worthless scrip. As Chief Confiscator, it took him a couple of weeks to prepare an inventory of property subject to confiscation—fifty-six farms and twenty-one houses belonging to members of thirty-two Nicaraguan families. As the list grew, fifty-seven more families were also robbed.

Kissane set values ranging from \$200 for a plantain patch near Granada, belonging to Legitimist President José María Estrada, to \$50,000 for Las Mercedes farm near Nandaime, belonging to the Chamorro family. He ordered the sale of over 100 confiscated farms and houses at public auction to be held on the Plaza of the city of Granada January 1, 1857. Terms: Cash or Military Scrip. By receiving military scrip in payment, Walker intended to convert his filibusters into the new landowners.

When the first confiscations were announced in Granada, early in August, Yankee entrepreneur William Leslie Cazneau signed a colonization contract with Walker for the settlement, within a year, of a thousand able-bodied colonists in Nicaragua, and Walker on his part agreed to furnish each colonist with eighty acres of land. Cazneau also bought from Walker the island of Zapatera, the second largest on Lake Nicaragua.

Randolph's efforts, the Garrison agreement, Goicouría's mission, the Pilcher-Slatter loan, Kissane's confiscations, Cazneau's contract, the sale of Zapatera, Oaksmith's assignment, and the mortgage of Matagalpa, were some of "President" Walker's initial steps for the Americanization of Nicaragua. They were all part of his master plan for changing the crystal—for the radical transformation of Nicaragua into his Southern empire.

16. Conquest

After Walker's first month as "President" of Nicaragua, *El Nicaraguense* reported that it was surprising with what rapidity Granada was assuming the air and appearance of an American city. With the natives driven from their homes, the white men from the north were taking over the country. According to Walker's newspaper, the tide was unstoppable:

"... we shall look to see a new flood of emigration turned in this direction. Men who have fought the west into its present position, who have pioneered the advance of civilization north, east, south and west, who have driven the forest and the Indian back, these men will come to Nicaragua, and from her we shall see and hear that they have not forgotten their old mission, to extend the limits of the hardy American race."

Manifest Destiny in Nicaragua, racist to the core, had reverberated first in Texas and California. Conquest was the aim and victory was certain, because, in the eyes of Walker: "... Americans in this country know ... that the enterprise cannot fail. They feel that in physical force they can easily overcome all that are opposed to them, and that morally, they are almost irresistibly superior, as individuals and as a race, to the people against whom they contend. ... We might also say, with truth, that the most ignorant American has more natural intelligence, than education can possibly confer upon the inferiorly developed Indian, or half-breed of Central America."

American Minister John H. Wheeler gave weekly soirees at the U.S. Legation, in which the filibusters and a number of American ladies in Granada "enjoyed themselves in the old-fashioned hearty style peculiar to Americans." Nicaraguan girls were expected to attend the social reunions, but after several soirees, no native ladies had appeared in them.

President Walker held his first levee on August 9th. *El Nicaraguense* claimed that "Spanish señoritas" and "members of nearly all the Spanish families residing in the city" had attended the party; yet, it provided no names. "The President did not dance, much to the regret of many present, but confined himself to agreeable conversation with all who sought the honor of his company." At Walker's second levee, on August 30th, "the native ladies and gentlemen attended in greater numbers." However, the paper identified only two Nicaraguan gentlemen (Ferrer and Carrascosa) and one lady: "the dignified and venerable looking Madame Selva."

Doña Sabina Selva was a rare Nicaraguan lady, the only woman whom Walker

considered firm in her friendship for the Americans. On August 12, he had appointed her son Pedro Yginio, Secretary of the Legation in the United States. Pedro Yginio, Gen. Cazneau, and Cora Montgomery left Granada together on the steamer Virgin on August 20 and arrived in New York aboard the Cahawba on the 30th, to carry out their particular missions for Walker. Minister Oaksmith had left earlier by way of New Orleans.

On August 20th, Pierre Soulé arrived in Granada. During the next ten days he visited the various haciendas and towns in the vicinity and had several interviews with Walker. On the 30th it was announced that he had purchased the farm Las Mercedes (the most expensive piece of property in Kissane's list of Nicaraguan real estate for sale), for fifty thousand dollars, and that he planned to bring his family and settle in Nicaragua. He departed from Granada on September 2d, and went back to New Orleans accompanied by recruiting agents Col. Thomas Fisher and Col. Frank Moncosos.

Meanwhile, going into September, Walker's Rangers continued to scout, within a few miles of León, for enemy troops. Reports reaching Granada told that the cholera had spread in León, wiping out the Allied Guatemalan and Salvadoran Army. Walker was hence magalomanically upbeat, as can be seen in his September 6 *El Nicaraguense* editorial, accurately titled, "No Such Word As Fail":

"... The battle is not to the, numerically, strong, but to those who combine with the strength, wisdom. An army is but a powerful engine, and that which is conducted by the most intelligent engineer can be made to produce the greatest results. It was by generalship, and not fighting, that Washington vanquished the hosts of Cornwallis; it was to this that Gen. Scott is indebted for his triumph in Mexico; it is by this that Gen. Walker will ultimately succeed in this country; and as no general has yet accomplished so much by such small means, so, it is probable, when proper means are at his disposal, his career will outshine in brilliancy the most splendid triumphs which have ever proceeded from the womb of human genius.

"Lest it might be presumed that we desire to varnish the truth let us look at history. Let us look at how Leonidas, with three hundred men, slew in three days twenty thousand Persians, and kept in check millions of barbarians under Xerxes. Let us look at how Alexander, with scarcely enough men to garrison a respectable city, scattered the hosts of Darius, and in the short space of about five years, conquered all, the then known world; and how he cried when there were no more worlds to conquer with the same band. Let us look at how Caesar, with a legion or two of Gauls, brought the proud city of the Seven Hills—the arbitress of the destinies of the world—to his feet. Let us look at how a simple country girl—the maid of Orleans—snatched France from the very

verge of destruction, overcame the proud armies of England, and established her country's rightful monarch upon his throne. Let us look at the achievements of Cromwell, a Napoleon, and a Washington, and then reflect upon what Walker may not do.

"It is folly to talk of a failure, or an interruption or a suspension in the progress of a country, or the destinies of a race that has already accomplished so much as ours. All it wants is the occasion to act, and the man to direct; and then, it is impossible for it to fail in the great design for which it was created, as it is for the earth, of its own accord, to turn from the course into which it was originally hurled by the Great Architect of the Universe."

"President" Walker's highhanded actions alienated the last of the liberals who had supported him. Outside of Ferrer, Pineda, and some forty others who remained loyal till the end, by August, 1856, the entire country opposed Walker. Even Méndez had left to fight against him. Thereupon, thousands of Nicaraguans lost their lives in the struggle to expel the foreign tyrant.

Four Nicaraguans fell in Masaya on July 30th, summarily shot on the Plaza after they were caught helping a deserter escape. The would be "deserter" was in fact a Walker spy and the four natives' money was divided among the Americans who were instrumental in their capture.

Twenty American riflemen murdered the four Nicaraguans. The victims had committed the "crime" of helping an American flee from the kingdom of Walker. Although "President" Walker called his troops the "Army of Nicaragua," it was an American army of occupation. On August 1, 1856 it numbered between 1,000 and 1,200 men—Americans, led by 135 officers: one General (Walker), two brigadier-generals (Hornsby and Fry), ten colonels, five lieutenant-colonels, eleven majors, forty-two captains, and sixty-four lieutenants. All officers were foreigners: one was a German; four were Cuban; 130 were American.

The First Rifle and Second Infantry battalions were garrisoned at Masaya; two companies were in Managua. The remainder of the Army occupied Granada, Rivas, and the Transit route. The Rangers had advanced once to the outskirts of León, but on meeting a barrage of bullets from the houses and cross streets, had retreated to Granada in mid July.

On July 16th, an Infantry Company went from Virgin Bay to Ometepe, to quash an Indian insurrection. To keep the Indians in check, on July 19 Walker issued a decree appointing an American "Governor of the Police of the Island of Ometepe." To wage war on the Guatemalan and Salvadoran Allied Armies that began to arrive in León in

July, Walker issued a decree on August 4, declaring a blockade on the ports of Central America on the waters of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, with the exception of the interoceanic transit route via San Juan del Norte, and San Juan del Sur. To enforce that decree, he had a one-ship Navy on the Pacific.

Don Mariano Salazar had bought the Costa Rican schooner *San José*, on which the *Falange* had traveled from San Juan del Sur to Realejo a year earlier. He afterwards sold it to its American skipper. When the schooner arrived at San Juan del Sur in June, 1856 with \$6,000 worth of merchandise, Walker seized vessel and cargo, alleging that it belonged to Salazar and claiming it as a prize. The ship's documents, duly authenticated by the U.S. consuls at Realejo and San Juan del Sur, proved that the skipper owned the vessel; it made no difference, because Minister Wheeler sided with Walker.

Renamed *Granada* and fitted out for war, the schooner cruised up the Pacific coast, commanded by Lieut. Callender Irvine Fayssoux. In the Gulf of Fonseca, on July 28, the *Granada* captured a launch in which Don Mariano Salazar was a passenger. Don Mariano had on him one sword, also some letters and papers, and \$319 in cash.

Among the papers on Salazar, one was President Rivas' appointment of Don Antonio de Irisarri in place of Father Vijil as Minister in Washington; another was a letter from British Vice-Consul Manning to a friend in San Miguel, El Salvador, in which Manning recorded his antagonism to Walker. Fayssoux instantly set sail for San Juan del Sur, and delivered prisoner and papers in *Granada* on Sunday, August 3rd, at dawn. Walker visited Salazar in prison that morning; an eyewitness recorded the scene.

Salazar at first, and with good reason, apparently thought that his immediate liberation would follow the visit from one he had so often and so largely befriended; but as he stepped forward to embrace Walker, he stopped short as the latter met him with an ominous and chilling silence. Disappointed, but in no degree as yet alarmed, he stated that when captured he was on his way to San Salvador to visit his wife and children. And as he kept talking, the only response was still the same ominous silence—the same sullen and downcast look.

"You cannot mean to murder me?" he nervously inquired. "Remember our former relations—remember my wife and children whom I have stripped of fortune in order to promote your interests." Not a word was vouchsafed in reply: the bright sunlight passing in through the dungeon window, fell on the features of Walker as livid and motionless as if carved in discolored marble.

Alarmed, the prisoner begged and supplicated for an immediate answer. He offered to banish himself for life from Nicaragua—to give up every dollar that remained to him, if he might only be permitted to rejoin his family. He even shed tears and humiliated

himself before Walker, who seemed to gloat and take delight in his agonies.

"We'll see about it," said Walker, evading a direct answer, and turning moodily towards the door. "We'll see about it—we'll see."

Those were the last words he ever uttered to the gentleman upon whose fortunes, friendship, and assistance he had built his transitory power. Returning straight to his office, he wrote these words upon a slip of paper: "Prepare to die at 4 o'clock this day—W.W.," and sent them to Salazar by the officer who had charge of the execution. The same day at 5 p.m., on the Plaza, an American firing squad shot Salazar, by order of Walker.

By a decree dated June 25, President Rivas removed Walker from the army and declared him a traitor and an enemy of Nicaragua. The decree called on all Nicaraguans to take up arms against Walker, to defend the liberty, independence, and sovereignty of the Republic. In a decree dated June 28, President Rivas offered passports and safe-conduct to all members of the American force who would abandon Walker.

On July 26, El Nicaraguense offered rewards of thirty dollars each for the apprehension and delivery of four deserters from Company C, First Rifles. By August 16, the roster of rewards had increased to ten men, but many deserters failed to make the list. Towards the end of July, Captain Turley's Rangers had sallied forth from Managua on a reconnaissance mission in the neighborhood of Tipitapa and the company deserted en masse—all twenty-five of them. They went on to Chontales, plundering the people and haciendas along the route to the Atlantic coast. Two weeks later, they met their fate at Cunaguas, near Acoyapa, at the hands of a Nicaraguan column under Captain Dámaso Rivera.

Rivera's men were a Legitimist contingent, the Nicaraguan freedom fighters who had stood in Walker's way from the beginning—ever since Rivas, June 29, 1855. In August, 1856, they were rallying again to spark the War of Liberation, the only war in history in which the freedom fighters of the five Central American republics fought united, to expel foreign invaders.