Tales of suffering and sorrow

(Editor's Note: Jeff McMahon recently spent a week in Nicaragua. This is the first in a series of stories on that country.)

By JEFF McMAHON
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SONOTO, Nicaragua — They care little for philosophy and ideology, for words like democracy and Marxism, for the spread of communism or the balance of power.

They are the campesinos of Nicaragua, the ones who till the soil, labor in the factories and carry guns for the presidents.

They live in wood and mud shacks in the barrios of Managua and the thousand tiny villages of the Nicaraguan countryside. Their babies sit naked on the dirt floors of their homes, their running, crying for food and comfort.

Older children chafe each other through the streets, their brown feet coated with gray dust. The children gather and pose without smiles in front of the cameras of visiting North Americans.

It seems every campesino has a story to tell of the father, mother, brother, sister or child lost to the war. Many carry scars of bullet holes, some bear one less arm or leg.

“The contra have no pity. They caused us a lot of suffering,” Sanchez says. “They couldn’t sleep in our houses, fearing the attack. We slept in the fields. We were dirty, we suffered spider bites — we had an epidemic of discomfort.”

“We felt like people who were seen as less, but we feel we are much better off here. All we had before in our villages was human suffering. Since we’ve come here, we haven’t been attacked any more,” she says.

Some people in the camp want to return to their villages, but Sanchez won’t consider returning as long as the war continues.

“Because the counterculture has no compassion for us, we can’t be there. We’re too scared. We’re not a people that can fight them. We’re defenseless,” she says.

Jose Lopez Lagos lifts his pant leg to show the scar where a bullet pierced his shin.

On July 20, 1984, the contras attacked Lopez Lagos’ village of El Cairo and sprayed the front of his home with machine gun fire.

Lopez Lagos was hit in the shin and hip, his son of 24 was killed, his daughter of 6 was hit in the back, and his son of 6 was shot in the knee. The child’s arm now ends at the elbow.

“Everything I’ve told you is not something I read in the government newspapers (See NICARAGUA, Page 4).”

Lozandro Polanco, the Sandinista guard of the Hermanos Martinez resettlement camp in Northern Nicaragua, stands with his daughter and granddaughter in the yard of their home.

Photo by Jeff McMahon
US and Nicaragua — a history of confrontation

In Nicaragua, where battles fight against brothers and the brotherhood is being plunged by an army of its own people, the enemy is not perceived as Nicaraguan.

The Nicaraguan people have a clear understanding of where the conflict came from, where it is going, and who gives them orders. As a result, President Ronald Reagan is a frequent subject of conversations and graffiti. The people want to be heard, but they do not seem to be surprised by it.

As Nicaragua gains independence from Spain in 1821, the new nation begins the arduous process of breaking away from the Spanish Empire. The United States and Great Britain aid Nicaragua in this endeavor, but the country struggles to maintain its independence.

The struggle between the superpowers led to the intervention of the United States in Nicaragua in 1909. The United States intervened to prevent Nicaragua from becoming a base for rebels against Colombia. The U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua, and a treaty was signed that established a protectorate over Nicaragua.

In 1933, the United States forced Nicaragua to agree to a series of measures that would weaken its military and political institutions. These measures included the creation of a puppet government, the elimination of opposition leaders, and the suppression of political dissent.

As the crisis in Nicaragua deepened, the United States increased its military presence in the country. By 1935, the U.S. had established a large military base in Nicaragua, and the U.S. Marines were conducting frequent military exercises in the country.

The United States continued to intervene in Nicaragua throughout the 1930s and 1940s, using a variety of tactics to weaken the country and maintain its control. In 1942, the United States established a military base in Nicaragua, and the country became a key ally in the U.S. effort to defeat Nazi Germany.

The United States continued to intervene in Nicaragua throughout the 1940s and 1950s, using a variety of tactics to weaken the country and maintain its control. In 1954, the United States supported a coup in Nicaragua that overthrew the government of the dictator Anastasio Somoza. The coup was led by the anti-communist rebel leader, Enrique Bolaños, who was later killed by the Sandinista rebels.

The United States continued to intervene in Nicaragua throughout the 1950s and 1960s, using a variety of tactics to weaken the country and maintain its control. In 1966, the United States established a military base in Nicaragua, and the country became a key ally in the U.S. effort to defeat Communistism in Central America.

The United States continued to intervene in Nicaragua throughout the 1970s and 1980s, using a variety of tactics to weaken the country and maintain its control. In 1979, the Sandinista rebels overthrew the government of the dictator Somoza, and the United States supported the Contra rebels in their fight against the Sandinistas.

The United States continued to intervene in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s and 1990s, using a variety of tactics to weaken the country and maintain its control. In 1990, the United States signed a peace agreement with the Sandinistas, and the country became a key ally in the U.S. effort to defeat Communistism in Central America.