

## AUGUSTO SANDINO 1927–1932 'A Marine Never Surrenders'

**T**he manhunt that arguably most resembles the pursuit of Osama bin Laden is the nearly six-year campaign to catch Augusto Sandino, a Nicaraguan rebel who promised to “drink Yankee blood” and kept the Marines at bay by holing up in a mysterious, Tora Bora–like mountain stronghold.

Sandino emerged as a threat to the United States after a brutal civil war in his country between Liberal and Conservative factions—the Conservatives having long enjoyed military backing from American officials. Signed May 12, 1927, the U.S.-brokered Tipitapa Agreement committed U.S. Marines to an unprecedented peacekeeping operation in which they would guarantee the ceasefire, supervise elections, and train a new, nonpartisan Guardia Nacional. Sandino, however, refused to

disarm. Although offered a governorship, he claimed he was “the one called to defend the ideals of [his] country,” and withdrew his men into the rugged mountains of Nueva Segovia, near the Honduran frontier.

U.S. officials initially did not see Sandino as a threat. He had not opposed American intervention, and since the Tipitapa accord, desertions had left him with fewer than 30 men under arms. Yet within a month of the treaty, Sandino began kidnapping Europeans and plundering mines—both of which attracted volunteers and cash to his cause. On July 2, Brigadier General Logan Feland, the Marine commander, dispatched 80 Marines and 74 Nicaraguan volunteers to disarm the rebel. But Sandino struck first. After midnight July 16, he attacked the remote Marine outpost at Ocotal with about 560 men, promis-



Opposed to American intervention in Nicaragua in the 1920s, guerrilla fighter Augusto Sandino (center) promised to “drink Yankee blood.”



ing his troops they could loot freely. The Sandinistas besieged the Marines in Ocotol's city hall, and at dawn requested their surrender. Captain Gilbert Hatfield replied, "Go to hell. A Marine never surrenders. We remain here until we die or are captured."

The battle continued under a tropical downpour. At about 10:15 a.m., the skies cleared and two Marine patrol planes on a recon flight saw the village under siege. Four hours later, five Curtiss biplanes appeared and began history's first dive-bombing attack. By their second pass, the battle was over, with roughly 300 Sandinistas killed against two Marine casualties and three Guardia wounded.

After this debacle and other setbacks, Sandino retreated into the jungle and adopted guerrilla tactics. In October his men downed a Marine plane in the hills west of the Jícaro River, in north-central Nicaragua. Its two airmen were captured and executed, and Sandino then ambushed the rescue columns, killing seven.

Marine commanders hoped to regain the initiative by attacking Sandino's mountain fortress, El Chipote, whose location was secret. On November 23, aircraft discovered it about five miles northeast of the ridge where the Sandinistas had mauled the Marine rescue columns. A Marine officer described El Chipote as "a well-fortified mountain with a great many trenches." The U.S. air squadron attacked it almost daily, but the heavily wooded terrain sheltered Sandino's troops.

When it became clear that Sandino could not be bombed off El Chipote, two patrols totaling nearly 200 men made a two-pronged assault. The guerrillas ambushed both columns, which retreated into the abandoned hamlet of Quilalí. In a situation that would recur for American troops in Mogadishu 65 years later, the battered Marines were besieged by an insurgent force more than twice their size. An airfield was hastily constructed on Quilalí's main street, and for three days, First Lieutenant Christian Schilt made 10 landings and takeoffs under heavy enemy fire to deliver medicine and ammunition and evacuate the wounded. Although Schilt was awarded the Medal of Honor, the offensive was a failure, and the columns were withdrawn.

Once again, the Marines changed tactics, opting for a combined air-infantry assault. While U.S. aircraft pounded El Chipote, more than 300 Marines massed at San Albino for the final assault on Sandino's stronghold. This detachment advanced cautiously, directing mortar and grenade fire on every suspected ambush site. It took six days to move the three miles from El Chipote's base to the summit. When a patrol reached the crest, it found the earthworks occupied by straw-filled dum-dums. The rebels had fled.

The Marines pursued Sandino for four more years. Although they captured or killed many of his lieutenants, the people of the frontier provinces loved the rebel and guarded his whereabouts. Whenever the Americans drew close, Sandino slipped into the mountainous jungle and across the border into Honduras, which the Marines didn't have the jurisdiction to enter.

On December 31, 1930, eight Marines repairing a telegraph wire were ambushed and killed. With the American public reel-

## Kill or Capture: Other U.S. Military Manhunts

**Emilio Aguinaldo, 1899–1901** The leader of Filipino insurgents after the Spanish-American War, Aguinaldo harassed U.S. forces in newly occupied Manila and eluded capture until a daring raid led by Brigadier General Frederick Funston 100 miles behind enemy lines. Working with a force of American-allied Filipinos, Funston and four other officers arrived at the rebel's headquarters posing as prisoners, then surprised and captured him.

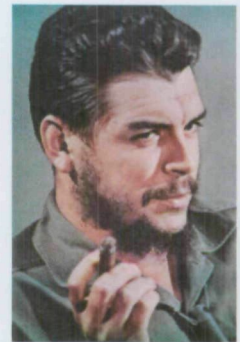
**Che Guevara, 1967** Arriving in Bolivia to lead a communist insurgency, the doctor turned Marxist revolutionary was targeted by an indigenous Ranger battalion trained by U.S. Special Forces and assisted by CIA operatives. On October 8, the Bolivian army trapped Guevara's forces in a canyon, decimated the guerrillas, and captured Guevara. He was executed the next day.

**Pablo Escobar, 1989–1993** Delta Force elements entered Colombia in 1992 at the government's invitation to help police hunt down Escobar, the vicious kingpin of the Medellín drug cartel. This followed years of high-tech sleuthing conducted by a top-secret U.S. military intelligence unit known as Centra Spike. Escobar was finally killed on December 2, 1993, when, after a failed raid in Medellín, the drug lord was spotted through the window of a nearby row house.

**Muhammad Farah Aideded, 1993** The Clinton administration launched a manhunt for Aideded, a Somali leader whose forces had ambushed and killed 24 Pakistani peacekeepers participating in a United Nations mission in the famine-ravaged country.

Delta Force troops and a Ranger company searched for two months before the operation was closed down following the costly October 3–4 battle in Mogadishu (immortalized in the film *Black Hawk Down*), where 18 American soldiers were killed. Aideded died after being wounded in a 1996 internecine battle.

**Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, 2004–2006** Following the capture of Saddam Hussein, a task force of Delta Force, Navy SEAL Team 6, and special army and air force units began hunting al-Zarqawi, head of al-Qaeda's Iraqi affiliate. After years of near misses, the military pinpointed his location after mid-level Zarqawi operatives were captured and revealed the identity of his spiritual adviser. On June 7, 2006, the terrorist was killed in a U.S. air strike.



U.S. forces helped in the hunt for Guevara.





The Marines took to the air and water in the hunt for Sandino, with little success.

ing from the Great Depression, the Hoover administration brought the hunt to an end. The morning after the inauguration of a new Nicaraguan president in January 1933, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines sailed for home. One hundred thirty-six Marines had died during the campaign. Though technically a failure, it achieved the strategic goals that had prompted the United States to intervene. The pursuit of Sandino kept his op-

erations confined to remote areas where he could not seriously disrupt the 1928 and 1932 Nicaraguan elections. And although far from morally ideal, the U.S.-created Guardia maintained Nicaragua as an American ally for nearly 50 years in the face of first Nazi and then communist infiltration of Central America. Ultimately, Sandino could not escape a brutal ending. Though he signed a truce with the government after the Marine withdrawal, the Guardia and Sandino's followers continued to wrangle. On February 21, 1934, Sandino, his brother, and two former Sandinista generals were arrested and executed on orders from the head of the Guardia, Anastasio Somoza García, the future president and dictator of the country. Sandino's legacy proved a problem for the United States: The Sandinista socialist political party created by his followers would overthrow the Somoza family in 1979 and rule until 1990, despite the best efforts of President Ronald Reagan and arms middleman Oliver North, a Marine lieutenant colonel.

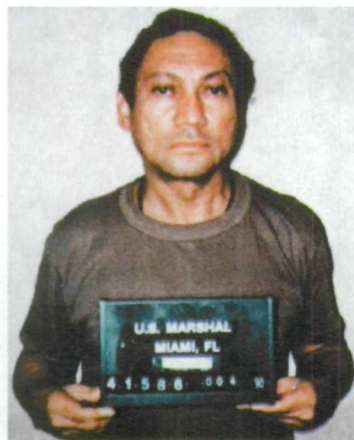
## MANUEL NORIEGA 1989–1990 Chasing Pure Evil

**H**istorical revisionism has been kind to many who've been targeted by U.S. manhunts. Hollywood romanticized Geronimo and Pancho Villa, while Sandino became an icon to anti-American leftists. But it is difficult to find anything redeemable in General Manuel Noriega. Of his first meeting with the Panamanian dictator, in 1983, Colin Powell said, "I immediately had the crawling sense that I was in the presence of evil."

Although U.S. intelligence agencies relied on Noriega, he was no friend to the United States. He counted terrorists as allies, armed Marxist rebels in El Salvador, and passed classified information to Warsaw Pact states. Thanks to Noriega's ties to Colombia's Medellín cartel, two U.S. grand juries indicted him on February 4, 1988, on drug trafficking and racketeering charges. Noriega responded with a campaign to harass U.S. military personnel and dependents stationed in Panama. Nearly two years later, Noriega stood wielding a machete before his puppet National Assembly and declared

Panama at war with the United States. The next night Panamanian troops opened fire on four off-duty American officers—killing a Marine lieutenant—and detained and abused a navy lieutenant and his wife.

President George H. W. Bush convened a war council on December 17, 1989, in his office beneath the large oil painting *The Peacemakers*, depicting Abraham Lincoln with his top military leaders near the end of the Civil War. His primary objective: Get Noriega. Within 56 hours, 11,000 airborne troops were en route to join the 13,000 soldiers and Marines already in Panama. H-hour was set for 1 a.m. on December 20.



After he was captured in 1990, Noriega was imprisoned in Miami.

Invasion commander General Maxwell Thurman first wanted to cut off the strongman's means of escape from Panama City. Two two-man Navy SEAL teams swam under Balboa Harbor and planted explosives in the propeller shaft of Noriega's fast patrol boat. At almost exactly H-hour, the explosion ripped a hole in the boat, sinking it. Meanwhile, SEAL Team 4 came ashore in

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