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at the time. A doctor [redacted] who performed an autopsy stated that Linder, having been immobilized by his wounds, was killed by a shot to the head at close range. Contrary to initial press reports, the doctor did not say Linder had been tortured. [redacted]

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The insurgents' version of events differs substantially [redacted]

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-- A reliable source of the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa individually interviewed the members of the rebel unit that conducted the raid. Each soldier told basically the same story. They claimed that Linder was third in the 10-man patrol, was uniformed and carrying an AK-47 assault rifle, and may have returned fire. Linder was shot in the head from over 10 meters away during the ambush, and the insurgents believed he died instantly. They took documents and other personal effects from his body but claim they did not know he was an American until local civilians told them later that day of rumors that a US citizen had been killed. All surviving members of the ambush team were illiterate.

-- According to the US Embassy, two militiamen wounded in the attack later told US journalists that four of the six Nicaraguans in the group were uniformed and that Linder, who was not in uniform, was wearing a cartridge belt and carrying a Soviet-made assault rifle. US journalists reported that military uniforms were found among Linder's belongings. At least one insurgent died in the clash, indicating that some of Linder's party returned fire. [redacted]

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[redacted] Linder had volunteered for military conscription as an act of solidarity with his Nicaraguan co-workers and served as a political propagandist for the regime. We have no evidence to substantiate his enlistment in the Army, but the government has confirmed some of his political activities. Following his death, the official newspaper Barricada published two photographs of an individual it identified as Linder participating in an anti-US skit. [redacted]

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Attitudes Toward Internationalists

Linder's presence in a combat zone reflects the regime's practice of sending foreign volunteers into dangerous areas, which, in our opinion, is intended to attract international attention to the insurgency. In early 1986, a recently returned US volunteer stated in a public forum that government officials had told him and the other members of his group that they were needed in the northwest--where fighting has been intense for years--rather than in the more populated and safer Pacific coast region. He also said he and his colleagues had been assured that

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there had been no insurgent activity near Jalapa, where they were assigned, since 1984, even though this area has continued to see heavy fighting. Press and US Embassy reporting indicates that internationalists frequently are sent to agricultural cooperatives, many of which garrison armed militia units and are targets of insurgent attacks. In addition, volunteers often are transported in military trucks and as a consequence sometimes are caught in rebel ambushes. [REDACTED]

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In mid-1986, when the deaths of three internationalists in a guerrilla ambush stimulated strong pressure from West European governments for better protection, Managua announced that foreign volunteers would not be permitted to travel or work in war zones. Nonetheless, press and Embassy reporting indicates that internationalists continue to travel in combat areas that US Embassy personnel are not allowed to visit, suggesting that the ban is not enforced. Indeed, following Linder's death, other volunteers were quoted in the press as saying they would be even more active in contested areas in defiance of the rebel threat. [REDACTED]

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Although the Sandinistas frequently claim that the insurgents intentionally target foreign workers, we believe the rebels are unlikely to hand the regime a propaganda windfall. Indeed, on several occasions the guerrillas have taken care to avoid injuring volunteers. In May of last year, for example, a rebel unit in southern Zelaya Department took great pains to arrange the release of eight captured West German internationalists, indicating a keen awareness of the potential for negative international reaction. Subsequently, a group of insurgents held a Belgian volunteer serving as a teacher for one night and released him, unharmed, the following morning. [REDACTED]

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Prospects for More Incidents

The danger to US citizens--and other foreigners--remains high in contested areas. The State Department estimates that about 1,500 US citizens, including dual-nationals, live in Nicaragua, and at least another 1,000 travel there each year. Few register with the Embassy, which advises against travel to war zones but has no control over the movement of private citizens. [REDACTED]

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We believe the regime will continue sending foreign volunteers into combat areas because their presence serves to draw attention to the insurgency. Managua's propaganda apparatus will exploit any casualties suffered by the internationalists to discredit the rebels and to strengthen West European opposition to US support for the guerrillas. [REDACTED]

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Appendix: Additional Details

An officer from the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa individually interviewed the combatants who staged the ambush that killed Linder and subsequently were recalled to Honduras for the ensuing investigation. The following account was compiled from these debriefings.


- The FDN unit included 12 men, 10 of whom participated in the ambush; the other two provided security and did not witness the event.
- A local informant had told the rebels, who had been operating in the same general area for over three months, that about 10 Sandinistas travelled a trail enroute to a hydroelectric power project daily at about the same time. The civilian claimed two foreigners accompanied the patrol; he identified one as Cuban but was unsure of the second foreigner's nationality. He showed them the route, and an ambush site was selected.
- A U-shaped ambush was set on high ground overlooking the stream-side trail used by the Sandinistas.
- At about 8:30 on the morning of 24 April, a Sandinista patrol entered the ambush site. The patrol was moving in file with about 18 feet between each member. All 10 Sandinistas carried AK-47 rifles, were dressed in olive drab clothing, and wore pistol belts with additional magazine pouches. Some wore baseball caps; others, floppy hats.
- When the lead Sandinista reached the far side of the ambush site, almost at their destination, the rebels called for them to surrender. The patrol dove for cover and opened fire. The rebels returned fire, using some 30 rounds per man, and then threw five hand grenades.
- All the FDN troops involved reported they believed the lead five Sandinistas were killed by the opening volley of rifle fire. They claimed not to know which one was Linder but thought he was probably third in line. The next four Sandinistas were wounded, while the last man escaped injury; these five fled the field.

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-- Two of the bodies and three rifles fell into the stream. The insurgents recovered two rifles, still hot from being fired. Documents were taken from the two bodies searched, one of which evidently was Linder's. The troops were illiterate and were not sure they had killed a US citizen until they turned the papers over to their commander the next day.

-- The rebels fled the scene quickly--the entire ambush probably lasted only 10 to 12 minutes--because they expected reinforcements to arrive from a Sandinista outpost about a mile down stream. 

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Recent Internationalist Incidents



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