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INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY	Nicaragua	REPORT NO.	
SUBJECT	Events During and After the Clash Between Police and University Students on 23 July in Leon	DATE DISTR.	20 August 1959
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1. The leaders of the university student demonstration on 23 July 1959 in Leon, during which four students and two bystanders were killed and 34 students wounded by troops of the Guardia Nacional (GN) garrison in Leon, were: Jose Oswaldo MADRIZ, Denis MARTINEZ Cabezas, Fernando GORDILLO Cervantes, Ruben BUITRAGO, and Danilo MORAZAN, all students. Noel GUERRERO Santiago, Communist leader in Corinto, was identified as a spectator at the scene; just before the troops opened fire on the crowd he was observed talking to Major Anastasio ORTIZ, commander of the troops.<sup>2</sup>
  
2. The students parade was staged on 23 July in celebration of the traditional initiation of first-year students (palones). As the student procession approached an intersection one block from the GN Headquarters they were prevented from entering the square by a platoon of GN troops drawn up in three ranks across the full width of the street. Major ORTIZ warned the students to fall back and stay clear of the central square. The students, egged on by the voices of spectators who had gathered on the sidewalks to watch the procession, began to chant slogans in unison, some of which were insulting to the Nicaraguan Government and the SOMOZA family. The students leading the parade were carrying the national flag and the university colors. No other banners or placards were seen in the crowd, and none of the students or spectators were carrying sidearms or bombs. After the arrest of several students who appeared to be inciting the crowd, the body of students became more hostile and threatened not to yield until the GN commander released the student prisoners. While MADRIZ, acting as the student leader, was negotiating with GN officers for the release of those students who had been removed from the scene and put under guard inside GN Headquarters, the taunts and chanting of the crowd grew louder and angrier. At this moment the troops discharged a volley of tear gas to disperse them. As the demonstrators fell back to escape the cloud of tear gas some of the troops fell to a prone position in the street and opened fire on the confused and retreating mob without having received orders to do so. As soon as the first volley of shots sounded it prompted some of the other troops, who either were startled or confused, to open fire also.

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Before the order for a cease-fire could be given, about 200 rounds had been fired, some into the air, some into the crowd. At no time either before or during the shooting did Major ORTIZ or any other officer with the troops give an order to open fire.

1. The troops in Leon had become tense as a result of frequent harassment from the local population and the constant state of alert since 29 May 1959, when a limited state of siege was imposed on the country. One or two individual soldiers, resenting the demonstrators and hostile agitators who had kept them crowded up in barracks on 24-hour call during the emergency, caused the killings on 23 July that might have been avoided had the garrison been living a normal routine.
2. Since the shooting on 23 July in Leon several incidents have occurred to increase tensions in that city. On 27 July after an early evening mass for the deceased students, a group of people composed of workers, unidentified residents of Leon, and a few students set fire to the house of Major ORTIZ in retaliation for the "student massacre" on 23 July. Before the fire was extinguished two adjoining buildings were damaged, and there was malicious looting. After this incident the ON command in Leon received orders from ON Headquarters in Managua to arrest the following persons: Roberto ZAMORA Sisco,<sup>5</sup> Juan SANTOVAL,<sup>6</sup> Mateo ZAMORA,<sup>7</sup> Carlos BERRIOS,<sup>8</sup> and Uriel HERDOLIA. The officer charged with making these arrests made arrangements for transporting the prisoners to Managua without being informed of the charges made against them by the government. Also, several hundred mimeographed leaflets were printed in Leon in the name of the Centro Universitario (student governing body) which condemn the government in strong, provocative language and call on the people to rise up and kill the BOMUZAS and avenge the death of the martyrs. These leaflets were circulated from hand to hand and some left in parked vehicles or delivered by courier mail.<sup>9</sup>
3. After a preliminary investigation of the 23 July incident a three-man military commission<sup>10</sup> sent to Leon on 24 July to determine the cause of the shooting recommended that Juan Oscar PRADO, ON Commandant in Leon, be replaced, as well as all other officers of his command who were on duty at the scene of the shootings. On the next day the following officers were relieved of their duties in Leon and were ordered to Managua pending the final outcome of the investigation: Colonel Juan Oscar PRADO, Major Anastasio ORTIZ, Lt. Rene BARBARINA Arevalo, and Lt. Jose M. LACOS S. 12 The other seven officers of the Leon command are to remain at their posts. Also, since the 23 July incident the total strength of the Leon command has been increased to 290 troops, almost double the normal complement.
4. Following the eight-day mourning period proclaimed by the junta universitaria (university board of directors), during which all classes were suspended, the university failed to open, as originally announced. The government, fearing that another student demonstration may take place on 23 August, just one month after the shooting incident, is urging Mariano FIALLOS (11, Rector of the University, to postpone reopening the university until 25 August to avoid a concentration of students in Leon on 23 August. However, FIALLOS is insisting that he be allowed to call the students back to Leon by 18 August and has threatened to keep the university closed until next year unless the students are allowed to return by that date.<sup>13</sup>

Comments

1. MADRIZ, MARTINEZ, and GORDILLO are leftist student leaders who, in the past, have been used by the Communists. MADRIZ, who attended the Eighth International Conference of Students, during February 1950 in Lima, Peru, as an official representative of the National University in Leon, aligned himself with the leftist, pro-Communist, student blocs at the conference.
2. GUERRERO is a well-known Communist leader in Corinto who formerly was active in the Mexican Communist Party. A former journalist, GUERRERO currently owns a butchershop in Corinto and, together with Jose Antonio TELLES, also a Communist leader in Corinto, is actively engaged in organizing and indoctrinating the students in that port city. However, there is no indication that he has been exploiting student unrest or that he deliberately used the students to provoke the GN. In fact, he made a statement to the three-man investigating commission confirming the fact that Major ORTIZ, to whom he had spoken just before the students were fired upon, had not given any orders to his troops to open fire. GUERRERO was not arrested.
3. Earlier that same day the students had requested permission to hold the parade and, despite the state of siege, still in effect, had been granted permission to hold it, on condition that they not march within two blocks of the GN Headquarters, located on the northwest side of the square.
4. Two previous student demonstrations during July resulted in minor clashes with the GN. One was held on 2 July in Leon in protest against the "massacre" of Nicaraguan rebels at Chaparral, Honduras. Another similar demonstration took place on 11 July in Chinandega, during which the police forcibly broke up the procession and arrested several persons, all of whom were released shortly thereafter.
5. Communist labor leader in Leon.
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7. Sacristan of the Subtiava (Indian) Church in Leon, who is reported to be a Communist sympathizer.
8. Son of Jesus BERRIOS, president of the national governing board of the Independent Liberal Party and reported to be a Communist sympathizer.
9. Comment. It is believed that Jose MANTICA and Esteban DIXUE Estrada, two opposition businessmen in Leon, secretly are engaged in printing the leaflets attributed to the Centro Universitario that appeared immediately after the shooting incident on 23 July. As soon as positive evidence is obtained the police will arrest them.

Comments

10. This commission is composed of Colonel Jose Maria ESCOBAR, Major Francisco Buschting, and Major Julio GUTIERREZ.
11. PRADO was replaced by Major Jose Gustavo GUILLEN, formerly an infantry company commander in the crack SOMOZA battalion and a well-respected officer.

