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Nicaragua Holding American as Spy

Prisoner Said to Be Congressman's Brother

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Dec. 14—The Nicaraguan government has arrested as a suspected spy an American who is believed to be an Ohio congressman's brother.

The American, whose U.S. passport identified him as Sam Nesley Hall, 49, was arrested Friday morning near the Punta Huete military airfield, about 12 miles north of Managua, Sandinista officials announced Saturday night.

A spokesman for Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) said today he believes the captive is Hall's brother, a self-styled counterterrorism expert who the aide said has been a mercenary in Angola and Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

Hall, who has yet to be charged formally, joined Eugene Hasenfus as a prisoner of the Sandinistas, accused of illegal activities in Nicaragua in support of Reagan administration policy against the Managua government. Hasenfus, from Marinette, Wis., was sentenced Nov. 15 to a 30-year prison term for his acknowledged role in delivering arms to U.S.-financed anti-Sandinista forces.

The Reagan administration denies any connection to the rebel supply operation.

State Department spokesman Bruce Ammerman, said it is impossible to identify the detainee or his job because the Sandinista government has refused to permit the U.S. consul general in Managua to visit him. Ammerman said he had no information on whether a Sam Hall worked for any part of the U.S. government.

Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto told reporters Saturday night that Hall admitted spying on Sandinista targets for a previously unheard-of private U.S. group called the Phoenix Battalion. There was no description of this group or its leadership, nor whether Hall's claim about it was being taken se-

riously by Sandinista authorities.

D'Escoto said Hall was captured with sketches and maps hidden in his socks. Hall first claimed to be a writer, the minister related, but later admitted that he was gathering intelligence for the private group.

According to d'Escoto, Hall said the Phoenix Battalion specializes in military espionage in consonance with U.S. policy.

The Punta Huete airfield was constructed during the past two

years as Nicaragua's main military air base. U.S. officials have said it was prepared to handle MiG fighters and also could service the largest aircraft in the Soviet fleet. But the Sandinista government is not known to have acquired any Soviet-built MiG jets, and no large Soviet military planes are known to be using the facility.

D'Escoto said Hall's objectives demonstrated the truth of frequent Sandinista assertions that the Reagan administration is planning an attack on Nicaragua. "The type of information that was being registered by this man, like bridges and airports . . . only helped confirm the seriousness" of the Nicaraguan predictions, he told Mutual Broadcasting System.

Sam Hall, a former Ohio state legislator and Olympic diving star, told an interviewer last year that he has helped train Miskito Indians, fighting the Sandinista government as part of a U.S.-backed insurrection. Sandinista authorities said Hall's passport showed he came to Managua on Wednesday from Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras and headquarters for the main rebel group. D'Escoto was quoted as saying he came on a commercial flight and took a taxi to the air base.

The passport also carried visas from Israel, El Salvador and South Africa, officials said.

"I do not share the same views on U.S. policy in Central America as

my brother, but I love him and pray for his safety," said a statement by Rep. Hall, who has strongly opposed U.S. aid to the rebels. In an interview last year with The Associated Press, Sam Hall said he was working with Civilian Military Assistance.

The U.S.-based private group, headed by an Alabama veteran named Tom Posey, has organized aid for the Nicaraguan rebel organizations and coordinated travel to Central America by volunteers eager to work with the guerrillas.

Officials of private American groups known to support the Nicaraguan contras said in interviews that they had never heard of Sam Hall or the Phoenix Battalion.

Joyce Downey, executive director of the U.S. Council for World Freedom, in Phoenix, Ariz., which provides food and medical supplies to the rebels, denied any connection between her organization and the group named by Nicaraguan officials.

Spokesman Jim Kent of Civilian Material Assistance, a Memphis-based group that claims to have provided the contras with \$4 million in nonlethal supplies and equipment last year, said no one named Sam Hall is a member. In his 1985 interview, Hall told The Associated Press he was working with the group, then named Civilian Military Assistance.

Staff writer Michael Weisskopf, in Washington, contributed to this report.

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