

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS
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NICARAGUA/
FIGHTING

BOETTCHER: Injured soldiers from a demoralized CIA-supported rebel army retreat to Costa Rica from Nicaragua. One month ago, the anti-Nicaraguan rebels boasted they would capture most of southern Nicaragua and establish their own government. Now the rebels are running from an advancing Cuban-supported Nicaraguan army which has launched an offensive to drive the rebels from Nicaragua's river frontier with Costa Rica. The rebels said that when the Nicaraguans attacked they were short of supplies, ammunition and virtually leaderless after their commander Eden Pastora was injured last month by a bomb. He is recuperating in exile in Venezuela. This rebel said the Nicaraguan army was attacking the retreating rebels with helicopters and airplanes. He said he waited 15 days to be evacuated. Costa Rican authorities are considering a state of emergency Monday because so many rebels are fleeing into their country. Only three rural guardsmen protect Costa Rican territory nearest to the fighting. Costa Rica has no army, and these rural guardsmen are the country's first line of defense. The Nicaraguan army is attacking rebels only a short distance up the river. Lt. Manuel *Analoquez says day and night for the past week the bodies of dead rebels have been floating down the river. Peasants living along the border are packing their possessions in boats and leaving. A few weeks ago, the U.S.-supported rebels completely controlled Nicaragua's river border with Costa Rica, but their ammunition and food ran out. Some of the rebels believe the only way to save themselves is to join with other CIA-supported rebel groups fighting in northern and eastern Nicaragua, but they fear such an alliance might come too late to save them from the advancing Nicaraguan army. The Costa Rican rural guard is afraid that more fighting will spill into their territory, and they believe that more refugees and injured rebels will flee up this river into Costa Rica. Mike Boettcher, NBC News, on the River San Carlos in Costa Rica.