

NICARAGUA/U.S. BROKAW: In Nicaragua tonight, the identity of the three men killed in the crash of a U.S.-built helicopter remains a mystery. The chopper was shot down during an attack on a Nicaraguan training base, and according to Nicaraguan rebels, two of the three men were American mercenaries who were not working for the CIA. Meanwhile, the rebels remain on the attack. And as Mike Betcher reports tonight, the casualty list keeps growing.

BETCHER: The newest casualty of Nicaragua's three-year war with American-backed rebels is mourned by his widow. A small casket containing the body of a child is carried across a rain-swollen river in Nicaragua's contested northern frontier. The young man and the child died in a raid against a Nicaraguan military school, carried out by CIA-supported anti-Nicaraguan rebels. Rebel leaders say two Americans fighting with them were killed in the attack when their helicopter was shot down. The CIA has funded and advised the rebels in their war against the Cuban-supported Nicaraguan government, but rebel leaders say the two Americans killed in the crash were mercenaries, not CIA agents. Villagers killed in the attack were hailed as martyrs. When the rebels kill civilians, they leave behind a strong anti-American feeling in the towns of northern Nicaragua. This time the villagers say the rebels lost more than a helicopter and two American crewmen. They say they turned the entire town against them. The persistent rebel attacks have only quickened the pace of Nicaragua's military buildup. This weekend, in ceremonies marking the fifth anniversary of Nicaragua's Cuban- and Soviet-supplied army, an impressive parade of Nicaragua's new military might was displayed. The Nicaraguans have matched U.S.-funded military buildups in Honduras and El Salvador with an array of tanks, anti-aircraft guns, heavy artillery pieces and amphibious vehicles, at a time when continued funding for anti-Nicaraguan rebels is in doubt. Mike Betcher, NBC News, Managua, Nicaragua.