

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-APHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
17 May 1986

FILE ONLY

Rebel leader gives up

Ends fight against Sandinistas

From Inquirer Wire Services

LA CURENA, Costa Rica — Eden Pastora, a Sandinista hero who broke with his comrades and became a rebel leader, crossed into Costa Rica yesterday and gave up his three-year struggle to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

Accompanied by a band of about 60 followers, the bearded guerrilla leader walked across the dry bed of the San Juan River and turned himself in to the Costa Rican government in hopes of winning political asylum.

Pastora, 49, who was known as "Commander Zero" when he helped the Sandinistas take power in Nicaragua in 1979, handed over a typewritten letter asking for asylum and blaming his decision to surrender on a lack of support from the United States.

Pastora — abandoned by most of his men, battered by Sandinista troops and left short of cash — had become increasingly isolated in his fight against the Marxist Sandinistas.

He had resisted Reagan administration efforts to unite his contingent with a larger, rival group that receives U.S. funding, because he said it contained members of the deposed Nicaraguan national guard.

On May 10, he was stripped of his command when other leaders in his contingent decided to join that rival group, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force.

After he entered Costa Rica yesterday, Pas-

tora said, "There is no possibility for a military victory [against the Sandinistas] because of the incapacity imposed on us by sectors of the U.S. government.

"We do not want to be soldiers for the United States in a war of pressure, but rather Nicaraguan soldiers in a national civil war to overthrow the communist government of Nicaragua."

He blamed the Central Intelligence Agency for causing the desertion of most of his troops, saying CIA agents "tricked" his field commanders into believing that they never would receive U.S. aid as long as Pastora was in command.

His entry into Costa Rica took place near the remote outpost of La Curena, 150 miles north of San Jose, the capital.

Several dozen Costa Rican civil guardsmen lined the banks of the river and the fringes of the thickly forested jungle. The security was tight because of concerns about an attempt on Pastora's life. In May 1984, a bomb went off during a news conference given by Pastora just inside Nicaragua, wounding him and killing four people. The bomber was never found.

Last night, civil guardsmen were to escort Pastora and his men to San Jose, where they were to be kept in the custody of immigration officials while the government of President Oscar Arias Sanchez studies the asylum petition.

Karol Prado, a spokesman for Pastora, said 450 rebels loyal to Pastora began surrendering their weapons at five points along the border with Nicaragua just after dawn. All plan to ask for political asylum in Costa Rica, he said.

Pastora's former group, the Revolutionary Democratic Alliance, was one of the smallest of several bands of rebels fighting the Nicaraguan government. He used southern Nicaragua as a base for skirmishes that prompted hundreds of complaints of

border violations by both Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

In the late 1970s, Pastora was a national hero, and his actions against the government helped inspire Nicaraguans to throw out the corrupt dictatorship of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

On Aug. 22, 1978, Pastora led a small group of guerrillas in storming Nicaragua's capital. The attack electrified the Nicaraguan people, long chafing under Somoza's heavy-handed rule.

Within a year, with overwhelming public support and with Pastora as commander of the guerrillas' southern front, the Sandinistas drove Somoza into exile.

In the Sandinistas' early days of power, Pastora drew crowds wherever he went and served as the deputy defense minister. But in July 1981, he dropped from sight and reappeared a year later in Costa Rica, bitterly renouncing the "traitors and assassins" of the Managua leadership.

He accused the Sandinistas of reneging on promises of political pluralism and a mixed economy. But he seemed to most resent the role Cuban advisers were playing in shaping the new Nicaragua.

In April 1983, he led 300 men across the San Juan into southern Nicaragua to begin his new war. But the larger, U.S.-aided anti-Sandinista force, which was built on remnants of Somoza's defeated national guard, was already in the field on the Honduras-Nicaragua border.