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Pastora promises September drive

DOS BOCAS, Nicaragua (UPI) — Edén Pastora, the rebel leader known as Commander Zero, says his guerrilla army will launch an offensive next month against the leftist Nicaraguan government he helped put in power.

But he fiercely defended his isolation in southern Nicaragua from other anti-Sandinista rebels, whom he has shunned for their alleged links to the CIA and the former national guard of dictator Anastasio Somoza.

He said the Nicaraguan Democratic Front (FDN), linked to some \$17 million in covert CIA aid, has not accepted his conditions to form a unified front and therefore he would continue to operate single-handedly from the South.

Pastora, interviewed Saturday by journalists inside Nicaragua's remote jungle mountains, claims he has 3,200 armed men fighting some 2,500 to 3,000 Nicaraguan soldiers.

"September is going to be a month of hard combat because we are going to begin an offensive," Pastora said, promising "lots of news from south and central Nicaragua."

Pastora gained international fame as Commander Zero in the 1979 war that toppled the Somoza dictatorship but he turned against the Sandinista regime and left Nicaragua. In May, he opened his

jungle conflict against the regime.

The sparsely populated jungle is sliced by muddy rivers, including the San Juan River that separates Nicaragua from Costa Rica, and it is thick with dense vegetation where malaria is the biggest health risk.

The area has scant strategic value, since it is largely unpopulated and produces no economically significant products.

A fierce nationalist, Pastora, 46, calls his guerrillas the "true Sandinistas," a reference to Cesar Augusto Sandino, a guerrilla who fought the U.S. Marine occupation that installed the Somoza family dynasty in the 1930s.

He called the nine-member Sandinista directorate that runs the Managua government a "political oligarchy" made up of "university Marxists" out of touch with political reality.

Pastora would not say where his arms came from, except they were supplied by "private sources." He said weapons were bought in the United States and smuggled into Nicaragua, presumably along the San Juan River from Costa Rica.

The rebels displayed newly arrived supplies of jungle hammocks, ponchos, boots and other equipment to the journalists who trudged through the jungle and rowed in small boats on the river to meet Pastora in Dos Bocas.