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Contra Supply Mission Casual

American Held in Managua Does Not Resemble Professional Agent

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Washington Post Foreign Service

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Oct. 11—The Reagan administration, encouraging private U.S. citizens to support the guerrilla war against the leftist Sandinista government during the past two years, was running the risk that a low-level contract worker would fall into Managua's hands.

What emerged this week from the brief public appearances of American prisoner Eugene Hasenfus was how few precautions were taken to avoid that danger during the secret resupply missions in which he participated.

Reporters have not yet been allowed to question Hasenfus, nor are the full details of his treatment in captivity known. But from his statements since his capture Monday by Sandinista infantrymen in sweltering southern Nicaraguan jungles, Hasenfus did not seem to be the professional undercover operative popularly portrayed as willing to sacrifice everything for a political cause.

Two Americans, pilot William J. Cooper and copilot Wallace Blaine Sawyer, and an unidentified Latin American were killed when their C123K cargo plane was shot down Sunday. Hasenfus, 45, of Marinette, Wis., the lone survivor, will face trial in Nicaragua.

In statements at a press conference Thursday, Hasenfus named two alleged CIA employes who he said ran a rebel resupply network based in El Salvador nearly identical to CIA-financed cargo drops by Air America in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s. The Reagan administration has denied any direct involvement, but the original source

of funds for the operation remains unclear.

The ill-fated flight, despite having to pass over eager Sandinista troops armed with Soviet Bloc heat-seeking rockets at the border with Costa Rica, apparently was conducted almost casually.

Hasenfus was the only crewman to wear a parachute in flight, and he reportedly told Sandinista interrogators that the other two Americans teased him about his caution. Numerous documents, including flight logs, identification cards, business cards and personal papers, were on board.

Nicaraguan Army officers said troops found Hasenfus less than one day after the crash, waiting in a hammock he had fashioned from his parachute in a jungle hut less than three miles from the plane's wreckage.

American journalists who spoke briefly with the broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced American prisoner in southern Nicaragua Tuesday said he did not seem reluctant to talk about his situation. But he speaks no Spanish, and seemed to know little of the country where he "dropped from the sky," as he put it.

Instead of throwing him immediately behind bars, Sandinista officials said they took a kid-glove approach with Hasenfus, taking him to a private dinner Tuesday night in Managua. Reportedly his Sandinista captors stressed the Reagan administration's disavowal of the air-drop operation to heighten his sense of being abandoned.

President Daniel Ortega, in his first comments about the case, asked today: "If the prisoner and the men who died are heroes to the United States, why doesn't the U.S. government answer for them?"

On Wednesday Hasenfus passed into custody of Commander Lenin Cerna, chief of the Sandinista state security police, reputed to be a brutal interrogator.

So far Hasenfus' comments apparently have given the government grounds to prosecute him for national security violations, but also possibly reason to release him in some kind of amnesty after he has served some time in jail.

Nicaraguan officials said they will go forward with the trial mainly to boost the government's popularity at home. Ortega said today Hasenfus will "probably" be judged in a special

court, called the Popular Anti-Somocista Tribunal, beginning as early as next week. He faces a maximum 30-year term and will probably be convicted, Ortega said.

The incident handed a propaganda victory to the leftist Sandinista government as its fortunes were sagging at home because of a col-

lapsing economy. Some Nicaraguans, though deeply frustrated with the government, were alarmed by such plain proof that U.S. citizens have joined the war against Nicaragua directly.

The government also has used the incident to bolster the public image of its military preparedness. Three young soldiers who downed the plane and caught Hasenfus received medals from Defense Minister Humberto Ortega.

"I couldn't believe it. The plane just kept falling," said Jose Fernando Canales, 19, the somewhat green soldier who fired the ground-to-air missile that struck the aircraft. "I thought I was dreaming."

The crash appeared to verify many of Managua's often shrill charges about the involvement of El Salvador, Honduras and, to a lesser degree, Costa Rica in the contra war. Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte suffered public embarrassment after declaring Wednesday that his Army general staff had assured him the Ilopango Air Force base had not been used, while Hasenfus' statements and the documents found on the plane appeared to indicate otherwise.

Meanwhile, relations between the government and the U.S. Embassy have been tense. Both sides competed for the attention of the press, with Nicaragua coming out ahead.

U.S. officials were appalled by Nicaragua's move to parade the coffins of the two American crash victims down the road in front of the embassy before returning them. They called a late night press conference Thursday to protest and also to attempt to counteract some effects of Hasenfus' appearance hours earlier.

U.S. officials attempted to bar Nicaraguan and Eastern Bloc reporters from the conference, provoking a brief boycott by American journalists who feared the Nicaraguan government might retaliate. Eventually all reporters were allowed in, but tempers on all sides were frayed.