

1-1-1994

## Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA and the Contras by Glenn Garvin

Kathleen Waters

Follow this and additional works at: <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/twlj>

 Part of the [Military, War and Peace Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kathleen Waters, *Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA and the Contras* by Glenn Garvin, 14 B.C. Third World L.J. 178 (1994), <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/twlj/vol14/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ Boston College Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Boston College Third World Law Journal by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Boston College Law School. For more information, please contact [nick.szydowski@bc.edu](mailto:nick.szydowski@bc.edu).

KATHLEEN WATERS\*

EVERYBODY HAD HIS OWN GRINGO: THE CIA AND THE CONTRAS. By GLENN GARVIN. Riverside, N.J.: Brassey's. 1992. Pp. 288.

News of the Nicaraguan war of the late 1980s filtered back to the United States in bits and pieces through assorted AP press reports and magazine articles. Having been released according to the political winds in the United States, the coverage was erratic and lacking in depth. If asked about the Nicaraguan war today, most people likely will remember only the infamous Iran-Contra scandal, and few know many details of even that except for Oliver North's name. Critical focus has always centered on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. government's involvement in the war. Lost in the usual analysis is the heart and soul of the Nicaraguan revolution: the Contras.

Although the United States may have provided funds whenever the CIA or State Department could squeeze them out of Congress, it was the people of Nicaragua who fought the war: *campesinos*, bankers, merchants, ranchers, and anyone else who believed the Sandinistas would ruin Nicaragua took up arms and fled to the jungles of Nicaragua and Honduras to fight for their country. It was these people, the Contras, who fought the war. Before Oliver North knew there was a problem in Nicaragua, the Contras were fighting. And when the United States was no longer providing funds, the Contras were still fighting.

The United States and its people are not alone in ignoring the Contras. Violeta Chamorro, elected the leader of Nicaragua in 1990, offered no thanks or praise to the Contras, despite the fact that they were responsible for forcing Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega into holding an election.

In *Everybody Had His Own Gringo: The CIA and the Contras*,<sup>1</sup> author Glenn Garvin changes the typical focus adopted with respect to the Nicaraguan war by telling the story of the war from the perspective of the Contras. Filled with anecdotes about the war that the Contras fought—not necessarily the war we saw—Garvin's book not only

---

\* Solicitations Editor, BOSTON COLLEGE THIRD WORLD LAW JOURNAL.

<sup>1</sup> GLENN GARVIN, *EVERYBODY HAD HIS OWN GRINGO: THE CIA AND THE CONTRAS* (1992). Glenn Garvin covered the war in Nicaragua for *The Washington Times* from 1983 to 1989. He was the first foreign journalist arrested and expelled by the Sandinistas. His reporting on the Contras won an award from the National Press Club and was twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

displays a deep respect for those who fought for their country, but also exhibits an understanding of the culture and people that is so often missing from reports of the war. Garvin recounts the entire war, from the overthrow of the Somoza family, which placed the Sandinistas in power, to the election of Violeta Chamorro, which supposedly removed the Sandinistas from power. The book focuses on a variety of Contras, including commanders, fighters, and spies. The author also includes an account of actions by the CIA and the United States. Instead of discussing events in Washington, D.C., however, Garvin emphasizes what the CIA was doing in Nicaragua, and what response the CIA received in Nicaragua from the Contras. The title of the book symbolizes the importance of specific CIA individuals to specific Contras, thus illustrating how the Contras needed, and ultimately used, the CIA to fight the war.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of Garvin's account is somewhat atypical. Each character is introduced as his or her story falls in the chronology of events. Garvin then breaks from chronology to give an in-depth background of each individual. The result confuses the timing of events for the reader, but provides a better understanding of the individuals involved. Certainly, confusion is unavoidable in telling the story of over 100 actors in the Nicaraguan war, but in the end Garvin ensures that his story is clear.

*Everybody Had His Own Gringo* begins with a brief history lesson of Nicaraguan politics dating back to the 1800s.<sup>3</sup> The involvement of foreign governments in Nicaraguan politics began in 1845. Formal United States involvement in Nicaragua did not occur until 1933, when the United States supervised the election of Juan Scala.<sup>4</sup> Nicaraguan politics were always turbulent, and the seeds of Somoza's future rule were ensconced with the election of Scala, who was an uncle by marriage to Somoza.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 83, 246. Each Contra politician used personal support from a CIA member as political clout with one another. *Id.* at 83. Whoever was more closely connected to an official with power in the U.S. government inevitably had more power among the Contras: "everybody has his own gringo." *Id.* Even in the end, when divisiveness marred the Contra directorate, if one member got tickets to the inaugural ball, for example, the others had to call in their U.S. connections to do the same. *Id.* at 246.

<sup>3</sup> The history lesson is prefaced by an anecdote about Augusto Sandino, the guerrilla commander, and a young journalist, Jose Roman, who was going to write a novel about the leader. *Id.* at 7. Sandino asked Roman, who spoke English, the meaning of a phrase the Marines often used: "goddamned country." When Roman replied in Spanish that it meant *maldito pais*, Sandino roared with laughter and insisted that this be the title of the book. *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 8. U.S.-born soldier of fortune William Walker took control of Nicaragua in 1855, but was assassinated shortly thereafter. *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 9.

The author introduces Somoza as a failure in every job he tried, until he settled upon political tyranny.<sup>6</sup> Educated in the United States, the Somoza family had a pointed affinity for the more verbose features of U.S. culture, and occasionally even talked like gangsters.<sup>7</sup> Garvin explains Somoza's tyranny, highlighting the narrative with the execution of Augusto Sandino, the guerrilla fighter, as a symbol of Somoza's ruthlessness.<sup>8</sup> The fall of the Somoza dynasty began in 1972 when an earthquake killed 18,000 people and left the country in a shattered economic condition. The downfall of the dynasty continued in 1978 with the assassination of the popular *La Prensa* editor, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro.<sup>9</sup> Realizing that the climate was perfect for a change in government, Daniel Ortega began to plan a coup. Despite his Communist ideology, Ortega formed an alliance with the business community and middle class, and eventually forced Somoza to flee the country on July 17, 1979.<sup>10</sup> By September 21, 1989, the Ortega-inspired Sandinista plan to cripple the economy led many people to realize that they merely had traded one tyrant for another.<sup>11</sup>

Although the anti-Sandinista movement had broad-based support in its early stages, the movement lacked supplies and funds. The revolution against the Sandinistas had planted seeds in many different places—from Honduras,<sup>12</sup> to Miami,<sup>13</sup> to the same mountain fortress of Sandino where defecting Sandinista commander Pedro Joaquin Gonzalez was stationed.<sup>14</sup> Gonzalez was among the first to turn and take up arms against the Sandinistas in May 1980. Yet, when he was killed that year, the revolution did not die.<sup>15</sup> The early stages of revolution had the support of Nicaraguan people of all echelons. It lacked only money. Thinking the United States would not support any movement to overthrow the Sandinistas—because the Carter Administration had “pulled the rug” from under Somoza and thereby aided the Sandinistas—the anti-Sandinistas looked to other governments and to Somoza himself for funds. Money, however, was scarce.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 10.

<sup>7</sup> When Tacho Somoza was shot by an assassin, he said, “I’m done for.” *Id.* at 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Cattle broker Tirzo Moreno fled to Honduras when the Sandinistas were bankrupting his industry. *Id.* at 19. He was eager to return to fight for his country. *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 20.

The early movement not only was hindered by financial hurdles, but it was also plagued with animosity among the different groups, with each faction blaming the other for the tyranny of Somoza.<sup>16</sup> Many different groups united, including the ex-National Guard, which formed the Fifteenth of September Legion,<sup>17</sup> the anti-Guard of the Nicaraguan Democratic Union (UDN),<sup>18</sup> the Chamorro brothers,<sup>19</sup> and other prominent citizens.<sup>20</sup> Having such a broad base, however, the movement often lacked unity and leadership. Eventually, Enrique Bermudez, a key figure in the revolution and in *Everybody Had His Own Gringo*, assumed the leadership of the Legion and ultimately of the entire Contra movement. As a Guardsman, Bermudez's record was spotless. This enabled him to take command of the revolution without alienating those who previously had experienced difficulty with the National Guard in Nicaragua.<sup>21</sup>

While funds were simply nonexistent and the "troops" were still trying to organize, members of the movement decided to follow the path of the Sandinista guerrillas, and began to steal and kidnap for money.<sup>22</sup> When Bermudez, still in Miami, learned of the thievery, he tried unsuccessfully to stop it. Unfortunately, criminal means seemed the only route to ameliorating hunger and homelessness. Luckily for the Contras, the movement was stopped by the Honduran police before news of this operation was made public. Otherwise, foreign support for the anti-Sandinista movement may have been stifled before it began. The different factions eventually decided to unite with the UDN and the Legion, signing a pact on August 11, 1981, and calling themselves the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN).<sup>23</sup>

With the financial support of the Argentinean and United States governments, Bermudez started to recruit an army. As Garvin explains, a civil war was now inevitable.<sup>24</sup> The first plan was to blow up two bridges on Nicaragua's major highways. Although the plan did not go as smoothly as planned—the bridges were only damaged rather than destroyed—it opened the Contras up to publicity. Nicaragua was at war.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> Octavio and Marta Scasa, for example. *Id.* at 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 44.

After Garvin thrusts the reader into the war, he proceeds to describe assorted personalities and figures in the war. One focus of the book is Commander Zero, Eden Pastora, the military hero of the Sandinista revolution.<sup>25</sup> The CIA spent a considerable amount of money trying to convince Pastora to unseat the same regime he had put into place.<sup>26</sup> Garvin highlights some of the memorable episodes of the three-year relationship between the CIA and Pastora. These anecdotes shed light on the war, as well as entertain the reader. Provided with a history of Pastora before and during his involvement with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN),<sup>27</sup> the reader acquires a clear mental image of the man who inspired a considerable amount of publicity for and criticism of the Contras. Fearing the ability of Pastora to cause an uprising, the Sandinistas banished him to Cuba under house arrest. A friend obtained his release, and Pastora soon became associated with the CIA.<sup>28</sup> The connection was easier than expected as Pastora instantly fell for the slightly bizarre CIA agent Duane Clarridge, who wore a monocle and dressed in pastel-colored Italian silk safari outfits.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship ultimately failed.

Although Pastora obtained millions of dollars and arms from the United States, there was very little military progress to show for it. Plagued by fears of conspiracy, Pastora did not allow his commanders to prepare together for combat, but instead used officers separately for logistics, intelligence, and so on.<sup>30</sup> On one occasion when his officers thought that they should divide the responsibilities of command, Pastora pulled out his gun and threatened suicide.<sup>31</sup> His suicide attempts were frequent and highlighted his instability.<sup>32</sup> That Pastora's own commanders often cut off communication with him before conducting an attack out of fear that he would call it off at the last minute is further proof of his insecurity.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, Pastora's weakness for women often impeded his ability to detect spies. One such incident involved Angelica Lug, whom Pas-

---

<sup>25</sup> Pastora seized the Presidential Palace with only two dozen troops by dressing the men in National Guard uniforms and acting with sufficient bravado to pull it off. *Id.* at 50-51. Garvin makes clear that this maneuver was not a military operation, but a terrorist one. *Id.* at 51.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 47.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 48-49.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 58, 99.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 99.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 101-02.

tora made chief of personnel despite her marriage to the head of the Sandinista marines.<sup>34</sup> After six months, she left and flew straight to Managua. Another incident involved a woman named Marielos Serrano, whom Pastora fell in love with while they were working for the Sandinistas.<sup>35</sup> When Pastora began to work against the Sandinistas, Serrano became his mistress.<sup>36</sup> She listened and learned everything: safe houses, radio codes, amounts of CIA cash, and the name of every opposition leader that had visited Pastora during the preceding two years.<sup>37</sup> One day she disappeared, only to reappear as a star witness at a series of spy trials.<sup>38</sup>

The single moment of military glory for Pastora's troops was the capture of San Juan del Norte. In recounting the "last hurrah of Commander Zero," Garvin describes how before Pastora appeared before the press, his older brother pulled him aside and begged, "Eden, at least please rub some mud on your boots!" His brother was alluding to the fact that Pastora had had nothing to do with the military victory.<sup>39</sup> This celebration did not last for long. When the Sandinistas later counterattacked with heavy artillery and forced a retreat from the city, Pastora's ugly side surfaced and he ordered the execution of civilians whom he believed to be FSLN sympathizers. Not so coincidentally, they also happened to own horses or cattle that Pastora then confiscated.<sup>40</sup>

Soon afterward, a man named Per Anker Hansen, who was posing as a journalist, attempted to assassinate Pastora. Although speculation abounds that the CIA was behind this murder attempt, the agency was essentially cleared due to circumstantial evidence.<sup>41</sup>

A further strain on Pastora's relationship with the CIA involved the kidnapping of a boatload of American leftists from the anti-Contra group, Witness for Peace.<sup>42</sup> Despite their eventual release, Pastora became a marked man in the eyes of his opponents. Joe Fernandez, known to the contras as Tomas Castillo, closed the book on Commander Zero by initiating and cementing an agreement among Pas-

---

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 102.

<sup>35</sup> See *id.* at 182–83.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 183.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 136.

<sup>41</sup> If CIA officials actually had ordered the assassination, they could have done so quickly, and would have had other options besides stalking him for weeks. *Id.* at 138.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 142.

tora's eight commanders to unite with the Contras from the north.<sup>43</sup> The Costa Rican government granted Pastor political asylum, thereby removing him from the war.

Garvin's tales from the early years of the war, as related through the stories of actual Contra fighters, provide insight into the weaknesses of the forces and reveal the loyalty that they displayed during the war. From the story of 240 newly recruited *campesinos* who, in their first battle, barely defeated six Sandinista soldiers in a jeep,<sup>44</sup> to tales of victorious ambushes on Sandinista forces,<sup>45</sup> to accounts of how the lack of logistical planning left an entire battalion without any food or medicine for malaria,<sup>46</sup> the reader is provided with a sufficient number of patchwork stories to piece together a "living" war from the Contra perspective. Garvin relates that the Contras experienced serious supply problems when they infiltrated Nicaragua. They soon learned, however, that the local *campesinos* were tremendously supportive, providing the soldiers with food and medicine.<sup>47</sup> In addition, one peasant, Tigrillo, easily recruited others to fight for the cause.<sup>48</sup>

The *campesinos* were eager and willing to fight for their country.<sup>49</sup> Garvin tells how on one commander's first infiltration, he returned with 180 new recruits, and that the numbers only grew as word spread.<sup>50</sup> Although the *campesinos* were numerous, the former national guardsmen did not consider them to be true soldiers, and referred to them as *comemonos*—monkey eaters. Despite their lack of expertise in the field, however, it was the *campesinos* who were most successful in recruiting additional forces—numbers were essential in this jungle war.

Garvin relates the tale of one city, Matagalpa, where the *campesinos* were indifferent to the recruiting efforts of the Contras.<sup>51</sup> Initially, the Contras were confused by the lack of response to a discussion by their leader, Tono, of issues over which the *campesinos* were known to be angry. The Contras eventually learned that the Sandinistas had arrived in Matagalpa earlier in the month, posing as Contras, and had arrested anyone who demonstrated sympathy. Upon realizing what had happened, Tono proved that he and his troops were the true FDN by

---

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 143.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 61.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at 64.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* at 73.



setting an ambush and burning government vehicles.<sup>52</sup> The local *campesinos* were thrilled, and followed Tono en masse.<sup>53</sup>

Garvin's best tales involve mishaps, or perceived mishaps, by the CIA. Referred to as the "Gar *cia* family" in *Contraspeak*, so that the term could be shouted in drunken anger without producing a panic, the CIA enjoyed the most intimate relationship with the Contras of any branch of the U.S. government.<sup>54</sup> Although Garvin describes some of the Washington politics involved, he concentrates on the direct interaction between the CIA and the Contras. The resources expended by the CIA were explained to Congress as money that was needed to halt the flow of arms from the Soviet Sandinistas to El Salvador, but ground personnel knew that their objective was to overthrow the Sandinista government.<sup>55</sup> Given the erratic funding from the United States, the Contras generally did not trust CIA officials, but learned to work with them when the same benefit could be gained through cooperation. Garvin considers the CIA's involvement to have been beneficial on an intelligence level: for example, when agency personnel undertook to teach the Contras strategy. He criticizes the CIA for its ignorance in less successful operations, however, such as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors.<sup>56</sup>

Assorted airdrop mishaps, although a source of anguish to Contras in the field, provide a humorous view of the mistakes and lack of forethought by CIA officials. On one occasion, a CIA airdrop contained only boots—left-footed boots.<sup>57</sup> Another time, a Contra unit deep inside Nicaragua opened air-dropped crates only to find tens of thousands of sanitary napkins. In a more dangerous snafu, Tono waited for days for a military supply drop so that some of his 1100 new recruits would be armed if the Sandinistas found them.<sup>58</sup> When the drop finally arrived, Tono opened the crates to find dinner plates. Thousands of metal dinner plates were dropped, "enough for the biggest dinner party in the history of Nicaragua."<sup>59</sup> "Maybe when the Sandinistas get

---

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 74.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 111.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 114–15.

<sup>56</sup> Referring to Clarridge's boast that he got the idea for the mining from his Columbia graduate studies of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, Garvin lambastes the attack by noting that "if his studies had touched on the second half of the century, Clarridge might have learned of the congressional furor that resulted when the Nixon administration mined North Vietnamese ports during an undeclared war in 1972." *Id.* at 126.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 140.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 149.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

here," Tono mused, "I'm supposed to invite them to dinner and reason with them."<sup>60</sup> In a different set of air drops, one plane carried four cartons of Redeye antiaircraft missiles and sixty cartons of foot powder.<sup>61</sup> Another contained 100 machine guns and 800,000 tubes of toothpaste.<sup>62</sup>

Garvin relates that in 1987, with official and substantial financial and technical support from the United States, the Contras began to gain enormous ground in the war against the Sandinistas.<sup>63</sup> The tough, lean years of 1985–87 had led the Sandinistas to believe, mistakenly, that the war had basically ended. They considered the energy of the Contras to be gone. The Contras proved, however, that they still had the necessary energy, lacking only the resources to continue the battle. When funds finally arrived, the Contras again posed a formidable threat to the Sandinistas. They infiltrated Nicaragua, and were able to maintain between 10,000–12,000 troops in the country.<sup>64</sup>

In Florida, the United States trained the Contras in specialties such as demolitions, communications, paramedical skills, psychological operations, and human rights. These skills proved highly beneficial in the field.<sup>65</sup> The Contras progressed from an ambush army with numbers as their only advantage to a talented and well-supplied force able to engage in a full-scale war. They were able to attack economic targets strategically, leading city residents to question seriously the Sandinistas' credibility. The Contras were winning the war, and the Sandinistas knew it. Sandinista officials admitted to losing 2039 troops in 1987.<sup>66</sup> Daniel Ortega's eventual willingness to negotiate with the Contras legitimized the Contra forces and their mission.

Unfortunately, as Garvin describes, the Contras were unable to enjoy their victory due to the "sociopolitical fault lines" throughout the ranks at the time of the negotiations.<sup>67</sup> Various stories of divisiveness and criticism mark the final year and final chapters. In the final hours of a three-day summit at Sapoá, a cease-fire was negotiated. As Garvin tells us, the fear and awe going through Tono's mind during the

---

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 198.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* Garvin explains that these planes were originally filled with the necessary arms, but Honduras would not allow the planes to land because it wanted to force the Contras to buy from its own arms supermarket. *Id.* at 199.

<sup>63</sup> *See id.* at 196–220.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* at 197.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.* at 210.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.* at 220.

<sup>67</sup> *Id.* at 221–23.

negotiations made him "feel like a ghost in a play."<sup>68</sup> In the end, the agreement resulted from informal discussions and from a political working group, neither of which involved the participation of Contra commanders. Although the commanders were able to change a definitive Contra disarmament clause that was to be negotiated at a later date, they felt compelled to sign the rest of the agreement due to politics and the deadline.<sup>69</sup> The Sandinistas were forced to make numerous concessions, but the Contra commanders were the ones to shed tears when the agreement was finally signed.<sup>70</sup>

After the signing, opposition to the Sapoa agreement among the Contra leadership was vocal and adamant. Each commander blamed the other for giving in to Sandinista demands, and some schemed to wreck the upcoming disarmament negotiations, so that the Sapoa agreement would fail. In the end, they succeeded in sabotaging the Sapoa agreement.

The final chapter, "You Won, But Nobody Knows It," describes the joy of the Contras and *campesinos* after Violeta Chamorro's victory in an election the Contras forced from Ortega. It also describes their sadness at the news that Chamorro was allowing Ortega to retain his military post. The Contras had sacrificed so much, and now the politicians failed to show their most ardent supporters any thanks or loyalty.<sup>71</sup> In the end, Chamorro was able to settle a disarmament negotiation between the Contras and Ortega with the aid of liquor and political maneuvering. She invited both parties over for an alcohol-laden dinner, and an agreement was reached by the end of the evening. Although the Contras turned in many of their weapons, they held back thousands of rifles and hundreds of machine guns.<sup>72</sup> Garvin speculates that the Contras are still around, and likely would be willing to stop further tyranny. Recent accounts of armed Nicaraguan fighters causing strikes and creating political waves proves that Garvin was correct in his analysis. The Contras cannot be suppressed for long, because they are willing to fight for what they believe.

Glenn Garvin offers fresh insight into the real force behind the Nicaraguan war. His accounts and anecdotes display a keen awareness of the people and specifics of the war, making *Everybody Had His Own Gringo* an extremely interesting work. The reader is left wondering not

---

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 232.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* at 234–35.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.* at 235.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.* at 258.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.* at 261.

what Ronald Reagan knew during the Contras' movement, but what these individual Contras are doing today. Garvin personalizes a war that seemed so far away to those who watched the Iran-Contra hearings on television.

The reader is left with a sense that Garvin knows much more than the book describes. Many sections of *Everybody Had His Own Gringo* seem to relate only the tip of a very large story. Rather than detailing the lives of only one or two of the major players, however, Garvin chooses to pique the reader's interest in an entire group of individuals who were involved in the war. As a result, the book is an honest attempt to provide insight into the real war in Nicaragua, without focusing too closely on any specific aspect of the conflict.