



The final scene of the American seizure of  
Nicaraguan Army property -

Sir

All that portion of the property of the Nicaraguan Army and Government that was seized and held by the United States at Punta Arenas de Nicaragua, through the action of Commodore Hiram Paulding and taken to the United States Naval Depot at Norfolk in the sloop of War "Saratoga" some two years since has been disposed of finally in the following manner, to wit:

I called on the Commandant (Com. Ch. H. Bell) of the Gosport Navy Yard Va and made a formal demand of him, of the property seized & taken away from the Nicaraguan Army, <sup>while</sup> under your command -

The Commandant in accordance with the decisions of the Secretary of the Navy readily assented, and immediately issued orders to Purser Johnson of the Clothing and Provision Department for a return to me of all and every the commissary stores in or under his charge or possession belonging to the said Army

and Government - and to take my receipt for  
the same - he (the said Commandant) at the  
same time gave like orders to Commander Henderson  
of the Ordnance Department for a return to me of all  
the munitions of War &c, &c. in his possession belonging  
to said Army -

I could not possibly permit this  
occasion to pass without tendering my sincere  
thanks to the Commandant of the said Navy Yard,  
and especially to Passes Johnson, many thanks  
are due also to Com. Henderson for the very  
prompt, efficient and gentlemanly attention  
which he as well as Lieutenant Pogram exhibited  
towards me, during my business connection with  
them. The latter Gentleman being unceasing in his  
attention, his politeness & kindness, rendering me  
great assistance by procuring hands and convey-  
ances for the removal of the property from the  
Store House to the Wharf &c.

With the continued hopes of  
your future in the Good Cause Believe me

Very Truly Yours &c

General Wm Walker signed J James Kellum

& President of Nicaragua Late Surgeon U.S.A.

## Filibuster Letter

The attached undated letter from James Kellum, "late surgeon, Nicaraguan Army," to General William Walker, ex-president of Nicaragua, was picked up along with other records on California in an e-Bay auction. The letter concerns the return of equipment "seized" from the Nicaraguan Army in 1857 by U.S. Marines under the command of Commodore H. Paulding and stored at the Gosport Naval Yard in Virginia.

William Walker was a filibuster with ties to California history. Filibustering was a private expression of our national policy of manifest destiny. After the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War many individuals expressed not just the desire to continue territorial expansion but saw it as their duty and right to carry on the process. Private citizens raised armed expeditions on United States soil, particularly California and the South, to invade other sovereign nations. Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and Honduras were repeated targets of such plots.

William Walker was born on May 8, 1824 in Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated from the University of Nashville at the age of fourteen and then studied in Europe for two years where he was greatly influenced by Garibaldi, Marx and other revolutionaries. He next graduated with a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania before moving to study law in New Orleans. In 1849 Walker moved to San Francisco as a journalist and expressed the desire to create new slave states in Latin America.

Walker's first expedition was to Mexico where he intended to establish the Republic of Sonora which was to later take its place in the Union as a slave state. In October of 1853 Walker's "army" of forty-five men captured La Paz in Baja California and declared himself president of the Republic of Lower California (to be part of the Republic of Sonora with further conquests). The federal government in Mexico did not cooperate and due to stiff resistance forced Walker and his army to quickly retreat back into California. Walker was placed on trial for a violation of the Neutrality Act of 1794 but a California jury acquitted him after just eight minutes of deliberation. Walker quickly began planning for a new expedition.

In 1854 a civil war began in Nicaragua along liberal-conservative lines that threatened two American institutions. Due to the unhealthy nature of the route to California across Panama (then a Colombian province) an alternate route was pioneered across Nicaragua. Although seldom listed today the route brought thousands of new immigrants to California and if that were not enough the route was leased by the Accessory Transit Company controlled by Wall Street tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt. The civil war threatened not just his profits from the route but also disrupted Vanderbilt's passenger and freight fleet outside of Nicaragua. As such Vanderbilt was not overly worried when Walker was invited by the liberal party to raise a force of mercenaries "in service to the government." Walker sailed from San Francisco in May 1855 with sixty volunteers and was joined in Nicaragua by an additional force of two hundred and seventy locals, Americans and European volunteers. Walker quickly defeated the conservative forces of the Legitimist Party and virtually ruled Nicaragua through the figure-head Patricio Rivas. President Pierce of the United States recognized the regime in May of 1856 but things quickly turned sour for Vanderbilt.

Walker with the help of some of the Accessory Transit Company employees seized the company without compensation and went so far as to threaten the seizure of Vanderbilt's ships. Walker next alienated other American and European nations by launching a failed invasion of Costa Rica. In July 1856 after a fraudulent election Walker had himself elected president and quickly reintroduced slavery which had been illegal since 1824. Cornelius Vanderbilt operated the "tycoon war" behind the scenes pushing the US President to withdraw recognition, cutting off supply lines to Nicaragua, pushing the US Navy to vigorously enforce the neutrality laws, and financing opposition to Walker in and around Nicaragua. In at least one case Vanderbilt hired his own raiders to attack Nicaragua. By December 1856

a coalition army from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica invaded Nicaragua and quickly routed Walker who opted to surrender to the US Navy in May 1857. Walker was transported to New York where he was received as a hero rather than being tried for his violations of the law.

Within six months Walker had again raised a pro-Southern force and was set to again violate the neutrality laws. On November 24, 1857 Walker landed a detachment of volunteers in Nicaragua that quickly advanced to Lake Nicaragua. When Walker and the main force landed afterwards they were discovered by the US Navy Sloop Saratoga (20 guns) which immediately sent for assistance. On December 6, 1857 Commodore Hiram Paulding arrived with the USS Frigate Wabash (40 guns) and ordered the Marines into Nicaragua to arrest Walker and confiscate his supplies.

The incident caused a real dilemma for President Buchanan who was practicing a balancing act on the slavery issue. Walker was hindering the conduct of foreign affairs in Central America but Walker had powerful influence with pro-slavery groups in both the South and North. The unfair resolution was to retire Commodore Paulding for "illegally" seizing American nationals in a foreign, neutral country and quietly releasing the supplies that were the focus of this letter.

It would have been better for Walker to have been bound over for trial and refused his supplies but once again he slipped away from justice. Early in 1860 Walker was invited by one of the Bay Islands off the Central American coast to "assist" them in opposition to a planned change of control from Great Britain to Honduras. When Walker arrived in the Bay Islands they were still under British occupation. After a few weeks waiting aboard ship, Walker decided to invade mainland Honduras. A demand was made for Walker to withdraw but he was soon surrounded by Honduran forces. Walker surrendered to the British on the understanding that he would be repatriated to the U.S. but to protect British interests in British Honduras (now Belize) and the Mosquito Coast (now part of Nicaragua) he was turned over to Honduras. On September 12, 1860 Walker was executed by firing squad. Walker was 36 years old at the time of his death.

Walker's dream of a slave holding empire in tropical Latin America continued after death. Senator J. C. Crittendon on the eve of the Civil War proposed legislation to make any state in Latin America or South America slave territories should they join the United States. The Republican Party saw the legislation as the gateway to perpetual warfare from Mexico to Terra del Fuego. The dream in the United States ended with the close of the Civil War but many diehard Confederates moved to Maximilian's Empire in Mexico or to the Empire of Brazil to keep the dream alive a little longer.

Cornelius Vanderbilt lost his advantage in Nicaragua and never saw a canal built across his Nicaraguan route but at his death in 1877 he was still one of America's richest men. Commodore Paulding was reinstated in 1861 by President Lincoln and died in 1878 as a Rear Admiral with 59 years of U.S. Navy service. Charles Bell shortly after "assisting" in returning the supplies held at Gosport took command of the Mediterranean Squadron. In 1861 Bell was transferred to the Pacific Squadron and spent the next four years guarding the California Coast. Bell retired as a Rear Admiral in 1868 with fifty-six years of U.S. Navy service.

Anyone interested in reading more about Walker and his California connections are encouraged to read either the Tycoon's War by Stephen D. Collins or Latin America's Wars, The Age of the Caudillo 1791-1899 by Robert L. Scheina.