El Salvador's political and military leaders call them "terrorists" and blame Communist subversion for the war here. United States officials agree with what those leaders say: that Cuba and Nicaragua are supplying weapons, training and men.

But the peasants and their leaders here in the province of Morazan, where the anti-Government movement is the strongest, contend that theirs is an indigenous revolution spawned by decades of political and social injustice. The revolution, they say, is being fought primarily by peasants who were born and raised in the areas where they are fighting.

For two weeks, this reporter walked and lived with the guerrillas in the northern part of Morazan, roughly an area stretching from midway between Perquin and San Francisco Gotera to the Honduran border, in an attempt to get answers to some of the questions about the movement.

In Memory of a Rebel Hero

All the guerrillas were from the Eastern Front of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Army, which was named for a Communist peasant leader killed with 30,000 other peasants in an uprising in 1932.

The Eastern Front, which is generally considered the strongest militarily of the four revolutionary fronts, operates in El Salvador's four easternmost provinces: Usulutan, San Miguel, Morazan and La Union. According to the 1976 Government census, about 1.5 million people, or roughly 30 percent of El Salvador's population, live in these four provinces, which make up about one-third of the country's area.

El Salvador's Minister of Defense, Col. Jose Guillermo Garcia, has repeatedly denied that the guerrillas control Morazan. But in this section of the province, the peasant fighters, their support forces and sympathetic civilians move through the mountains with considerable freedom.

Even in daylight, armed guerrillas walk along the paved road that connects Perquin and San Francisco Gotera, buses and trucks that travel the roads sometimes stop to offer them a lift or to give them oranges or other food.

Commander Jonas, the 28-year-old guerrilla commander for Morazan, says that about 60,000 peasants live in the zone, where the guerrillas have set up schools for children, health clinics and hospitals, military schools and a radio station. Peasants are cultivating corn, sugar cane, beans and other crops and grazing cattle.

The revolutionaries' control is sufficient to enable them to hold large ceremonies in open fields. At a ceremony that honored the graduates of the military school's fifth class, the shouting of such revolutionary slogans as "If Vietnam won, we will win!" reverberated in the hills. At another ceremony the next evening, two company commanders fired several bursts of their automatic weapons in a salute to comrades killed in battle last year. Again the echoes rang through the mountains.

The guerrillas seem to be a ragtag lot. Masking tape and string secured the stocks and butts of M-1 carbines of Korean War vintage and pre-World War II Czechoslovak-made bolt-action rifles.

Their shoes and boots were of the kind available in any store, and they do not wear well in the rugged mountain terrain. Soles were often split from uppers.

Profile of a Revolutionary

From conversations with scores of peasants - weathered old men who in the sweating heat of day and dark of night lugged supplies on their backs over treacherous mountain paths, adolescent boys who rushed scribbled messages between field commanders and women who slapped cornmeal into tortillas - emerged a rough profile of the peasant revolutionary in this zone: born and raised in Morazan; two years of school; at least one parent or sibling killed by Government soldiers; living brothers and sisters participating in the revolution.

"The immense majority" of the guerrillas in the zone are Christians, according to the Rev. Rogelio Ponseele, a 42-year-old Belgian-born Roman Catholic priest who has been in the mountains with the guerrillas and their families since Christmas Day 1980. He has baptized more than 200 of their children, he said.

"They are motivated by their Christian faith" to try to bring democracy to El Salvador, Father Ponseele said in an interview. Nearly all those encountered were asked whether they had seen or knew about any foreigners in the zone. The answers suggested that there were not very many: Father Ponseele, three Honduras who are planning to stay three months to acquire first-hand information about the revolution, and four doctors (two from Mexico, an Ecuadoran and a woman from Western Europe).
But the most popular and best-known foreigner in the zone is a 39-year-old North American who goes by the name of "Lucas." He said that he came last March with the intention of writing a history about the insurrection in the manner of John Reed and the Russian Revolution but that he has since also been involved in some combat missions.

'We Can Do It Ourselves'

None of those questioned said they knew of anyone, including the senior commanders, who had been to Cuba or Nicaragua for training. "It is an insult to say that Cubans and Nicaraguans are helping us," a 27-year-old soldier said. "We are campesinos, but we can do it ourselves."

"I would like to go to Cuba or Nicaragua some day," said Jonas. "And to New York," he added as he ate his breakfast of tortillas and beans.

"We want to write our own history," Jonas said. "We don't want others to write it. Not the United States. Not Cuba. Not Nicaragua." "It's simply propaganda that we're satellites of Nicaragua or Cuba," said a doctor. "Because the United States has long supported and supplied military governments and coups in Latin America, you cannot conceive of a popular revolution."

During two weeks, the only references to Cuba and Nicaragua were in questions asked of the people here. The guerrillas do, however, frequently compare their war with the one in Vietnam, presumably because of the United States involvement in supplying advisers to the Government and in training Government troops and officers in the United States.

U.S. Charges Arms Smuggling

According to a State Department white paper issued in the spring of 1981, nearly 200 tons of arms were sent to El Salvador, primarily from Cuba and Nicaragua. Many of the arms entered through Honduras, according to the State Department.

The Eastern Front is generally considered to be the strongest militarily, with the largest quantity and quality of weapons. Of the revolutionary military zones, it is the closest to Nicaragua and it has a long border with Honduras. Thus it would seem that many of the arms that the State Department says the Salvadorean guerrillas received would have come to Morazan.

Jonas said that, as far as he knew, the Salvadorean guerrillas had received no arms from Cuba or Nicaragua. He acknowledged that arms entered through Honduras and through Guatemala as well. At one time, they had also come by boat, he said, but such operations had been discontinued because they were too difficult and were easy to detect.

The major source of weapons, according to Jonas and other leaders here, has been the black market. Jonas said that leftist organizations had obtained about $25 million from kidnappings, bank robberies and "war taxes" imposed on businesses. In addition, they had received donations from groups around the world, including $1 million from West Germans as a result of a public campaign there a few months ago.

Arms Purchases Called Easy

With this money, Jonas said, it has been easy to buy arms, particularly in Colombia and Honduras and throughout Europe. Even the Salvadorean National Guard soldiers sell their German-made G-3 automatic rifles to the guerrillas, he said. The rifles are sold for $720 to $1,200, he said, and bullet pouches for about 80 cents.

But the biggest arms market is in the United States, Jonas said. Wherever there is the Mafia, there are arms for sale, he said, adding that "some Mafiosi are leftists, some rightists, but most are just businessmen." A senior guerrilla commander said he had been on an arms buying trip to Texas, where he had bought machine guns, rifles and pistols.

Arms taken from killed or captured Government soldiers has been another major source, Jonas said. Since Dec. 29, he said, the guerrillas in the Eastern Front alone have captured more than 50 G-3's, more than 100 older-model rifles, several M-16's, mortars, a 90-millimeter cannon, thousands of rounds of ammunition, boots, uniforms, military radios, canteens and other military equipment.

Still, Jonas said, there are not enough rifles in the Morazan area to supply all the peasants who want to be combatants. "But more important than not having enough rifles," he said, "is not having enough oil to clean them." The peasant fighters also lack adequate boots and soap to clean their soiled clothes, he said.

One Woman’s Road to Change

A 29-year-old woman, whose three small children are being cared for by relatives, said she had joined the guerrilla movement because she believed it was the only way to bring democracy and social change to El Salvador. "Others join because they fear if they don't organize, they will be killed by the army," she added.

Day had not yet dawned, but inside the windowless dirt-floor mud hut, which like hundreds throughout this region is "home" for a small military contingent, teenage girls were grinding corn on a rock slab in the manner of their Mayan ancestors and baking tortillas on flat pieces of metal over open fires. Two thick tortillas three times a day, with beans and a few bites of meat - cured by hanging in thin strips over a smoldering fire - is the unvarying diet. It is supplemented by oranges, bananas when available and sugar cane, which men cut and strip with their machetes.

Many of the guerrilla fighters were still sleeping on the ground or on wood benches, but a 15-year-old boy whose mother, father and three younger brothers and sisters had been killed by Government soldiers a few weeks earlier labored up the hill with a plastic gourd of water on his shoulder. A soldier, using a broom made of reeds, stooped as he swept the dirt in front of the hut.

On the outskirts of Mozote, a young girl at a communications post said, "We are fighting for a new society." She said that her parents had encouraged her and her two older brothers, who are combatants, to join the guerrillas, but that she had not seen her parents or her 7-year-old brother since they fled to a refugee camp in Honduras more than a year ago.

 Asked how she was going to celebrate her 15th birthday six days later, she said softly "With my radio," patting her black Japanese-made shortwave radio. She said she had learned how to operate the radio at a one-week course given in the mountains.

Repression Is His Reason

Asked why he was supporting the guerrillas, a 61-year-old man carrying a heavy burlap bag of medicines along a narrow mountain trail replied, "Because of the repression." (According to the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, a private organization that works with the Roman Catholic Church, 16,376 people were killed by Government security forces in 1981. Of that number, 8,053 were peasants.)

Two other men in their 60's, whose weathered faces and hands told of years of laboring in the sun, crept along with equally heavy bags of munitions and supplies. Before joining the guerrillas, they earned 80 cents a day as farm workers. One said that a son had been killed by Government troops and that another had been killed in combat as a guerrilla.

The men were unarmed, except for their machetes, as are many of the porters, primarily because there are not enough weapons for everyone. But they were accompanied by men with M-1 carbines and captured German-made G-3 automatic rifles. One of the guards was also a guitarist in the cultural brigade; another worked in a bomb factory.
On another day, in the soft waning hours, a funeral was held. A small wooden coffin was lowered into the earth on the edge of a slanting field under a single tree. It contained the body of 12-year-old Luis Hernandez Ramos. He had been killed while performing his duties as a "correo," or messenger, a job often done by boys too young to be combatants.

As a teacher from the school that has been named in honor of Luis shoveled dirt over the coffin, four files of his schoolmates, many barefoot, stood to one side. They held high a neatly hand-lettered banner that read, "The tomb was the Christmas gift that the genocidal junta gave the children of Morazan."

Children Called the Example

"In their morale, in their discipline, the children are the example," said a 31-year-old Mexican doctor who has been in the mountains here for a year. The doctor explained that during a search and destroy mission by the army in December, children carried most of the medicines and surgical instruments to safe places.

About 65 boys aged 8 to 15, most of whom have never been to school before, are also learning to read and write in the rubble of a house that was destroyed by the army. The director of the school, who is a graduate of the Pan American School of Agriculture in Honduras, abandoned his 80-acre ranch to join the revolutionaries. The senior instructor at the school has only a second-grade education.

This is the way Jonas explained the revolutionary movement to several hundred peasants gathered at the ceremony for Luis Hernandez. The electoral process has never worked in El Salvador, he began, explaining that a colonel or general had been president since 1932. Then, in 1972, when Jose Napoleon Duarte won the presidential election, the army threw him into exile. After that, Jonas said, peasants, students, workers and professionals began to organize and engage in marches and demonstrations to protest the absence of democracy and to demand better living conditions for the poor.

"We were met with the bullets from tanks and machine guns," Jonas told the peasants. "Now, we must fight with those same bullets." The revolutionaries here say they are confident they will be victorious but they do not boast about it. Victory will come, they say, like their harvest: because of their labor and the blessings of God. Even when asked, they decline to give a date or speculate about when they expect their government to occupy the presidential palace in San Salvador.

GRAPHIC: Illustrations: maps of El Salvador (page A4) photo of wounded guerrilla (page A4) photo of Jonas, a guerrilla commander

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