



# Tycoon's War: How Cornelius Vanderbilt Invaded a Country to Overthrow America's Most Famous Military Adventurer

By Stephen Dando-Collins

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When he died in 1877, Cornelius Vanderbilt, founder of the Vanderbilt dynasty, was wealthier than the U.S. Treasury. But he had nearly lost his fortune in 1856, when William Walker, a young Nashville genius, set out to conquer Central America and, in the process, take away Vanderbilt's most profitable shipping business. To win back his empire, Vanderbilt had to win a bloody war involving seven countries.

*Tycoon's War* tells the story of an epic imperialist duel—a violent battle of capitalist versus idealist, money versus ambition—and a monumental clash of egos that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Americans.

Written by a master storyteller, this incredible true story, impeccably researched and never before told in full, is packed with greed, intrigue, and some of the most hair-raising battle scenes ever written.

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Dando-Collins (*Caesar's Legion*) recounts the conflict between tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt and adventurer William Walker over the control of Nicaragua from 1855 to 1857. Walker, with mercenary support, entered Nicaragua's civil war in 1855 on the side of the Democratico forces against the Legitimistas. Historians have seen the Tennessee native as wishing to reintroduce slavery to Nicaragua and encourage settlement by American Southerners. Dando-Collins claims that Walker initially acted out of personal ambition, seeking to emulate Sam Houston of Texas. Only after he was elected president of Nicaragua in 1856 did he turn to slaving-holding interests to support colonization and to bring in African labor. Dando-Collins's basis for his defense of Walker? That he came from a family hostile to slavery and there is no record that he supported the practice of slavery himself. Even if the paper trail is not there, Walker's willingness to reintroduce and thus expand slavery demonstrates tolerance for the institution and/or unscrupulous desire for power. His actions put him into conflict with Vanderbilt, who controlled a major portion of shipping routes that used Nicaragua as overland transit between the Atlantic and Pacific. After the Democratico government seized his company's assets, Vanderbilt, with the tacit encouragement of the U.S. government, supplied Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador with money for arms to depose Walker in 1857. While Dando-Collins presents the story readably, his questionable historical interpretation limits his book's value. Only for academic collections seeking comprehensive coverage.—Stephen Hupp. West Virginia Univ. Lib., Parkersburg  
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Review

#### *Dallas Morning News*

“Stephen Dando-Collins did his homework in this tale of guns-trump-butter capitalism.”

#### *Augusta Metro Spirit*

“An in-depth look at one of the more fascinating periods of Vanderbilt’s life with a crisp narrative built upon impeccable archival research. *Tycoon’s War* is a story of the celebration of greed during the expansion of these United States, which highlights the blood, cruelty and power struggle at the heart of American capitalism throughout the ages...*Tycoon’s War* is a classic story of conflict, desire, and the strive for success at all costs...Packed from cover to cover with greed and suspense, this book resonates with a contemporary America buried in a struggling economy where the rich buy yachts while the rest struggle to fill gas tanks...Built upon a fascinating display of historical events, this story strikes at the heart of the capitalist machine while raising questions about the nature of today’s wars and tomorrow’s tycoons. A smooth read that blends conflict and concern into a healthy mixture of greedy suspense, Dando-Collins has once again spun a gem of a tale by crafting a narrative that allows us to view the past while seeking our own futures in a world often far beyond the control of the average person.”

#### *Wall Street Journal*, 8/30/08

“A fascinating window into an era when the rules of industrial capitalism were in their infancy and gunboat diplomacy was standard operating procedure...Dando-Collins tells this tale well, bringing the events and the personalities to vivid life. The book reads almost as a densely detailed screenplay treatment for a hell of a movie...A terrific read.”

**Curled Up with a Good Book, 9/1/08**

“Dando-Collins does an excellent job of turning his dedicated research into an easy-to-read narrative of the corruption, greed and murder that Vanderbilt epitomized...A frightening glimpse behind the façade of Cornelius Vanderbilt.”

***Dallas Morning News*, 9/7/08**

“Stephen Dando-Collins did his homework in this tale of guns-trump-butter capitalism.”

***Providence Journal*, 11/2/08**

“The sheer drama of the story, ably conveyed by Dando-Collins’ efficient prose, sweeps the reader along through the misadventure...[His] version of the tale reminds a 21st-century audience that nation-building by Americans on foreign soil is no new phenomenon.”

***Charleston Post and Courier*, 10/19/08**

“This is one incredible story of adventurism gone wild...A story of blind ambition, the clash of wills, money and conquest—all the elements of a good story.”

***Milwaukee Shepard Express*, 11/6/08**

“A page-turning history lesson in greed and folly...A sordid, fascinating and true tale.”

***Southwest Journal of Cultures*, November 2008**

“A well-written and compelling story about an oft-overlooked chapter in U.S. history...A creative work, well worth the attention of those interested in the nineteenth century...The combination of industrial capitalism, mercenaries, greed, excess, and genius—combined with Dando-Collins’ storytelling capabilities—make this a very absorbing story, and one worth retelling.”

***Military Heritage*, 4/09**

“An insightful look at American history...[An] absorbing story of greed and power in 19th-century America.”

***Kirkus Reviews*, 08/01/08**

“[An] absorbing tale of a conflict in 19th-century Central America sparked by two men with rather different ideas about Manifest Destiny...A dual biography of William Walker and Cornelius Vanderbilt...Dando-Collins juggles disparate elements to maintain cohesion in a convoluted history of military campaigns, changes in governments, complicated business transactions and bizarre backdoor diplomatic dealings.”

**John Steele Gordon, *Wall Street Journal***

“A fascinating window into an era when the rules of industrial capitalism were in their infancy and gunboat diplomacy was standard operating procedure...Dando-Collins tells this tale well, bringing the events and the personalities to vivid life. The book reads almost as a densely detailed screenplay treatment for a hell of a movie...A terrific read.”

***Shelf Awareness*, 10/08**

“A richly detailed recounting of the careers of William Walker and Cornelius Vanderbilt before 1855 and the epic battle of wills that raged between them during 1856 and 1857...A rip-roaring adventure that is also an object lesson in political and commercial exploitation of Central America at the hands of William Walker and Cornelius Vanderbilt, two larger-than-life 19th century American originals.”

***Library Journal***

“Dando-Collins presents the story readably.”

***Curled Up with a Good Book***

“Dando-Collins does an excellent job of turning his dedicated research into an easy-to-read narrative of the corruption, greed and murder that Vanderbilt epitomized...A frightening glimpse behind the façade of Cornelius Vanderbilt.”

***Augusta Metro Spirit*, 8/27/08**

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About the Author

**Stephen Dando-Collins** is an Australian-born historian who has written a number of fiction and non-fiction books, including *Caesar's Legion* and *Standing Bear Is a Person*. He lives in Tasmania.

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