

COMBAT REPORTS OF OPERATIONS IN NICARAGUA.

DIVISION OF OPERATIONS AND TRAINING, HEADQUARTERS,
U. S. MARINE CORPS

FOREWORD:

THE history of the Marine Corps is replete with operations of its expeditionary forces in tropical countries. Usually these operations are reported in general terms only with the intimate details absent from the picture. This type of combat, which might well be called "bush warfare" is the one which has been most frequently encountered by marine personnel in the past, and yet is still unknown to many officers, either through a failure to be a participant with some expeditionary force, or through a lack of any available reports which might be studied. Many of the contact reports of the expeditionary forces in Haiti and San Domingo have disappeared in the dead files at these Headquarters and thus the lessons of the past have become lost to posterity. Therefore, with a view of keeping these programs alive and available for future reference and study, the contact reports from Nicaragua are to be published in the Marine Corps Gazette. It is the intention of the Marine Corps Gazette to publish in chronological order articles containing patrol reports from the Second Brigade in Nicaragua in order that marine officers may gain some information relative to "bush warfare." In addition to being very instructive it is believed that these reports will be very interesting reading.

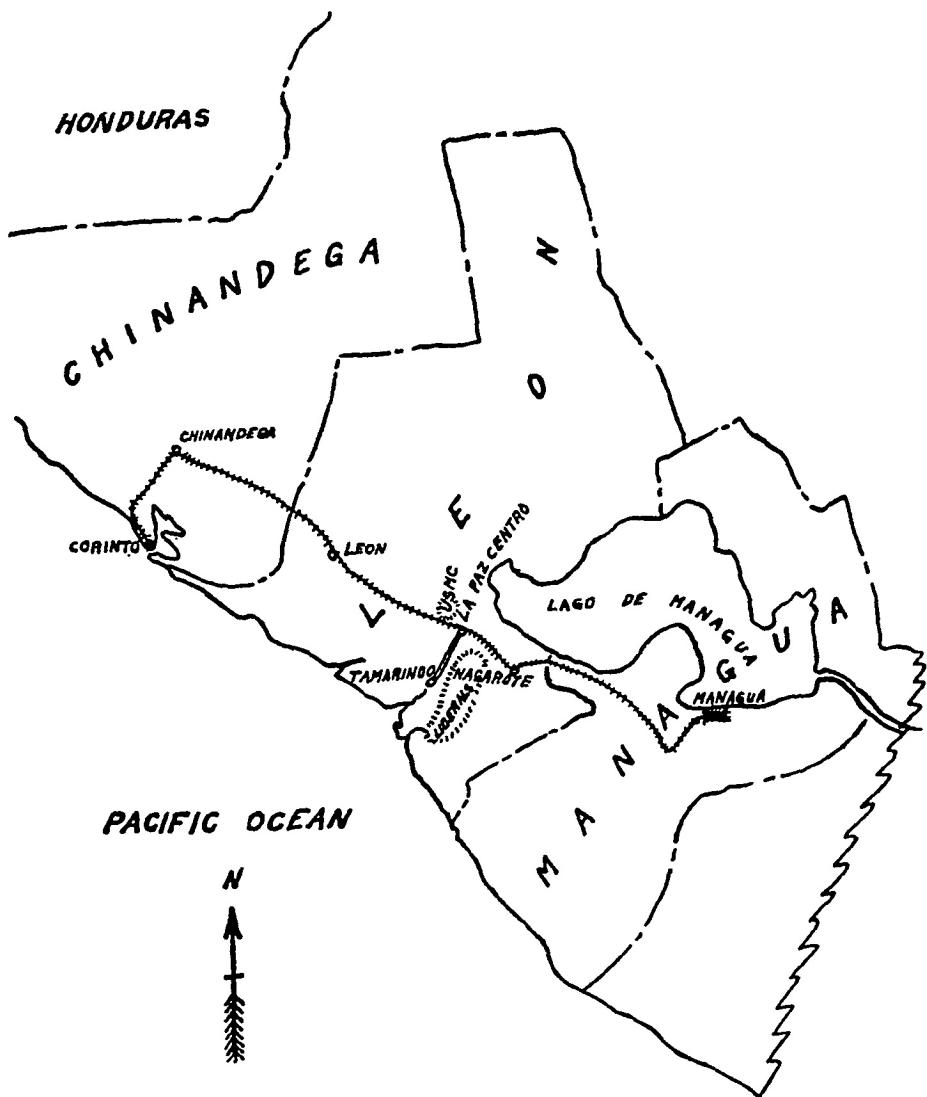
These reports are at present in their original phraseology as received at these Headquarters and articles and comments in explanation thereof are invited by the Gazette. It is desired that articles be submitted which treat of any of the suggested topics:

- The use of Infantry Weapons in "Bush Warfare"
- Reconnaissance and security in "Bush Warfare"
- Intelligence in "Bush Warfare"
- Transportation and supplies in "Bush Warfare"
- Communications in "Bush Warfare"
- The use of air-craft in "Bush Warfare"

REPORT No. 1—LA PAZ CENTRO

The first of these reports, given below, describes the action at La Paz Centro on 16 May, 1927. The general situation at that time was as follows: (See map).

The Corinto-Managua railroad line was being kept open by the United States Forces ashore in Nicaragua, by means of detachments encamped along this line at strategic points. A local force of government (conservative) police was in La Paz Centro for police protection. Rumors had been received that a force of about 350 guerrillas was in the hills in the vicinity of Tamarindo, just south of La Paz Centro. Captain R. B. Buchanan, Second Lieutenant C. J. Chappell and eighty-three enlisted marines as part of the naval landing forces (U.S.S.



FLORIDA and U.S.S. ARKANSAS) were encamped on the north side of the railroad opposite the town of La Paz Centro. The U. S. Navy had a radio station here, having erected two tall masts for the antenna. About 14 May, these masts were dismantled and the radio station moved from this vicinity. About this time one platoon of Captain Buchanan's force was sent to Nagarote for station and duty; this left an enlisted strength of about forty-five men at La Paz Centro. It is believed that the guerrillas observing the departure of the radio detachment and the platoon to Nagarote and the absence of the antenna masts concluded that no United States forces were now guarding this town of La Paz

Centro. Accordingly at about 12:55 A. M. on 16 May, 1927, the guerrillas attacked La Paz Centro. Captain Buchanan and his detachment immediately entered the town to protect the lives and property of peaceful citizens therein and to prevent any hostilities taking place in this neutral zone. Second Lieutenant C. J. Chappell's report of this engagement is given verbatim below:

(See sketch).

MARINE DETACHMENT
LA PAZ CENTRO, NICARAGUA,
18 MAY, 1927.

From: Second Lieutenant C. J. Chappell, U.S.M.C.,
To: Commanding Officer, Landing Forces,
Medical University, Leon, Nicaragua.
Via: Commanding Officer, Leon Detachment.
Subject: Report in detail of engagement at La Paz Centro.

1. At about 0055 16 May, 1927, shots were heard in the town of La Paz Centro. Immediately "Call to arms" was sounded in the camp and one platoon, under the command of Captain R. B. Buchanan, U.S.M.C. and 2nd Lieutenant C. J. Chappell, U.S.M.C., second in command, left camp to investigate. Firing was in the general direction of camp and it was necessary for the men to keep low in order not to be hit.

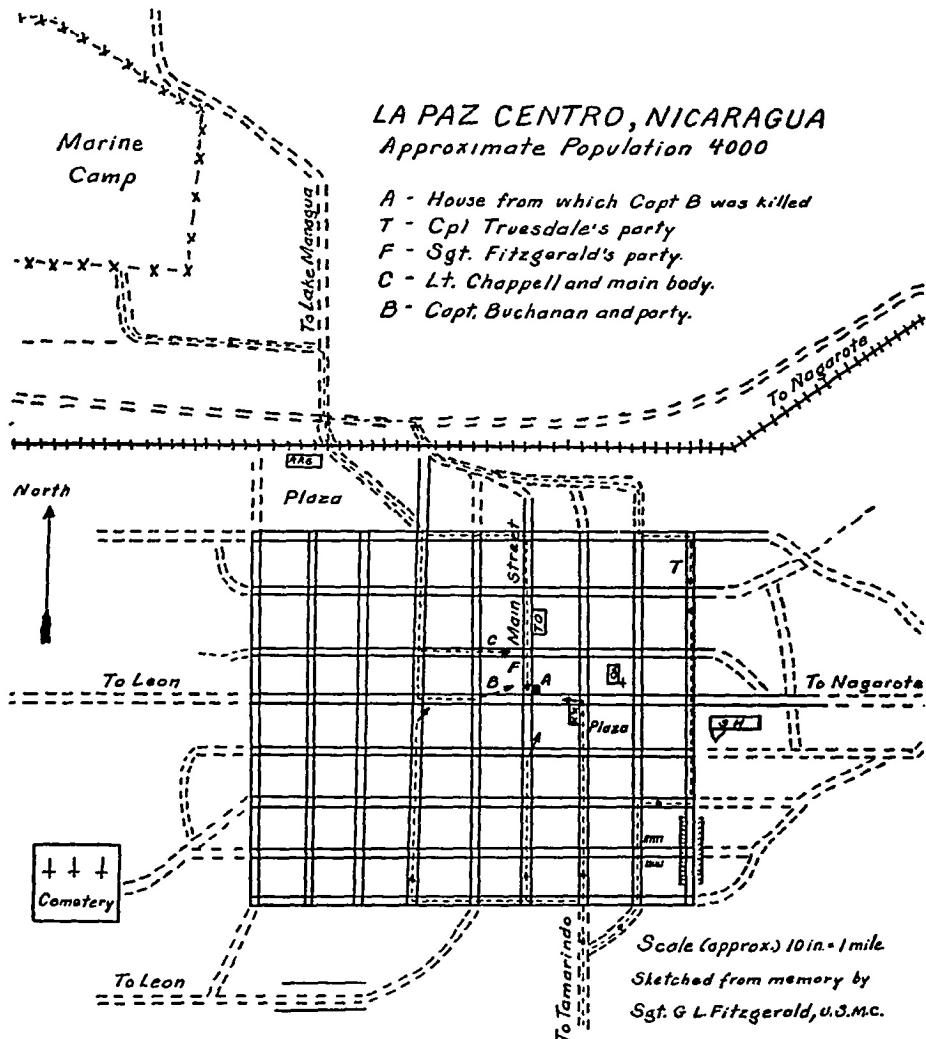
2. A guard of eight men from the Company Headquarters was left in camp under 1st Sergeant Dennis W. Green, U.S.M.C.

3. Captain Buchanan entered the town with his command in patrol formation. One patrol consisting of one squad, under Corporal Donald L. Truesdale, covered the eastern area of town. Sergeant Glendell L. Fitzgerald with the following men, Privates First Class Herman Keith, Carl J. Klopp, Harvey C. Thieling and Private Marvin A. Jackson, covered the main street. A point consisting of Corporal Gavins Strickland, Privates First Class Claude W. Ash, William F. Simon, Jr., Privates Charles W. Joullian, Roy Barrett, Wilson B. Green and Severin Roche, preceded the remaining two squads, covering the area of the streets north of the main street. Captain Buchanan was with Corporal Strickland at the head of the point. I was with the remaining two squads, following at about fifty yards.

4. Captain Buchanan, on hearing firing off to his left, swung in this direction in order to flank them. After advancing for about a block and a half the point was fired on and forced to take cover. The point then moved forward about twenty-five yards, joining Sergeant Fitzgerald's patrol. I was ordered to move the remaining two squads on line and to the left of where the point was located. Private Marvin A. Jackson in attempting to secure a better position was fired upon by a band of guerrillas located in a house and was mortally wounded. He died at about 0420. Corporal Anthony J. Rausch in attempting to join Sergeant Fitzgerald's patrol, which had advanced to this point on the

main street and were engaged in combat with a number of guerrillas located in houses and behind buildings, was fired upon and struck in the chest and arm. Private First Class Joseph H. Downs in moving forward with Corporal Rausch was fired on, the bullet striking his rifle and causing part of the butt plate from his rifle to be driven into his side, this injury did not prove serious. Captain Buchanan, attempting to take up a better position, also across the street, where Sergeant Fitzgerald's patrol was in position, was fired upon from a window and fatally wounded, dying shortly afterwards. Sergeant Fitzgerald had been directing the fire of his men on this house when the Captain was hit and in a short while Privates First Class Keith, Thieling and Klopp were able to enter and clear out the remaining guerrillas located there. As soon as this was done Sergeant Fitzgerald and Corporal Strickland carried the Captain into the house and the men inside administered first aid treatment. During the entire time a heavy fire had been coming from three directions, located in various houses and from a machine gun to the left of the patrol. The remaining two squads moved up into position on the left of where the point had taken cover. Corporal Rausch, Privates First Class Simons and Downs, Privates Roche and Norman V. Jones, took a position where the point was located with Sergeant Fitzgerald's patrol and assisted in clearing out this area. The remaining men in these two squads were located on the left of the patrol and covered the houses and area to their front, routing the remaining guerrillas located there. Corporal Strickland, Privates Colin H. Campbell, Wallace T. Anderson, Joullin and Green, crossed the street and entered the yard in rear of the house the Captain was located in and cleared out the guerrillas located there. Sergeant Charlie Ryerson and I, on hearing that the Captain had been wounded attempted to reach him but due to heavy fire were unable to reach the house where he was located. After about fifteen minutes, at which time the fire had ceased enough to allow us to advance without being hit, we reached the Captain. Upon reaching the house we found that Captain Buchanan had received first aid treatment but was in a very critical condition and practically unable to talk. We also learned of our other casualties and accompanied by Corporal Rausch, who had already been wounded, made our way to the post office, located about one block from the scene of the fighting. I informed Captain Woodward, by telephone, what had taken place and requested medical aid as soon as possible. Then returning to Captain Buchanan's aid we found that he had died about 0230. Privates First Class Keith, Klopp and Thieling were with the Captain at the time of his death. Up to the time of his death the Captain was continually offering words of encouragement to his men and inquiring as to how they were faring outside of the building.

5. Due to the fact that it was very dark and not knowing the exact location of the guerrilla forces we were forced to hold a position deployed along the main street, continuing a heavy barrage on the houses occupied by the opposing forces until they retreated from the city. At about 0300 the guerrillas ceased firing and retreated from the city. Due to the fact that the guerrillas were leaving in small bands we did not attempt to follow them but were reorganized and carried our



casualties to the railroad station for medical aid, leaving a patrol of ten men in the city until daylight. At daybreak the town was thoroughly patrolled, checking up on the dead, wounded and any remaining armed forces.

6. Fourteen guerrillas, some of who had red bands on their hat, are known to have been killed in this engagement. It is assumed, from reports received that morning from the natives of this city, that a number killed and wounded were carried away by the retreating guerrillas. We took a small group of prisoners but they were released on being identified as conservative soldiers by the Commandant.

7. In addition to Captain Buchanan, killed in action, Private Marvin A. Jackson was shot through the brain and died and died at about 0420. Corporal Anthony J. Rausch was wounded in the right side of his chest and in the right

arm and Private First Class William F. Simon, Jr., was wounded in the right hand, the index finger being completely shot away.

8. Lieutenant D. O. Bowan, (MC), U. S. Navy, and two hospital corpsmen arrived on "gasolina" at 0420 to give medical aid and after attending to the bodies of Captain Buchanan and Private Jackson returned to Leon with the two wounded men, leaving La Paz Centro at 0510. The bodies of Captain Buchanan and Private Jackson were sent to Leon on the noon train.

C. J. CHAPPELL.

REPORT OF SERGEANT GLENDELL L. FITZGERALD, U.S.M.C.

IN RE

THE ENGAGEMENT AT LA PAZ CENTRO, NICARAGUA, ON THE
MORNING OF MAY 16, 1927.

At about 1:05 A. M., on the morning of May 16, 1927, "Call to Arms" was sounded. Shots were coming in the general direction of the Camp and it was necessary for the men to keep as low as possible to avoid being struck. The platoon was formed under command of Captain Buchanan with Second Lieutenant Chappell, second in command. I was detailed with one squad of men to proceed to the scene of battle acting as a point. Upon reaching the far side of the plaza opposite the railroad station and about three hundred yards from the Camp, I was overtaken by Captain Buchanan. He split my squad into two patrols of four men each, taking command of one and I took the other. He ordered me to proceed two blocks to the left of him and then swing to the right, covering the main street of the town. After we had advanced about three blocks up the main street we encountered a group of about seventy-five natives, who, at first, were thought to be Conservative soldiers. Upon being challenged they answered the challenge with a volley of shots, immediately retreating into houses and a canteen. We got down and returned the fire, advancing to the next block where we would be able to secure cover from the protruding sidewalks and a number of railroad ties which had previously been placed as a breastworks by the police of the town. Captain Buchanan had advanced to two blocks on the right of my patrol, followed by the main body of two squads under command of Lieutenant Chappell. Corporal Truesdale, with one squad, was ordered to cover the area, two blocks to the left and in rear of my patrol. Upon hearing shots in the direction of my patrol, Captain Buchanan swung his patrol to the left in an attempt to join me.

Private Jackson, a member of my patrol, was struck and went down attempting to secure a better position across the street. Jackson was dragged to a place where he would be safe from further shots. Upon examining his wounds I found that he had been hit several times, possibly by machine gun bullets.

Captain Buchanan's patrol reached my assistance and while attempting to cross the street Captain Buchanan was struck and went down, the shots coming

from the window of a saloon. Upon observing this, I, with Privates Keith, Klopp and Thieling, managed to rid the saloon of guerrillas, killing seven. Captain Buchanan and Private Jackson were then removed to this saloon and Privates Keith and Thieling were ordered to do what they could to relieve their wounds, there being no hospital corpsman available.

By this time several men from the main body, which had taken position to the left and in rear of my patrol, came to the assistance of my patrol. In attempting to do this Corporal Rausch and Private Simons were hit and wounded; Rausch being struck in the arm and chest and Simons in the hand. Even though wounded these two men continued firing throughout the engagement. Private Downs was also wounded from a bullet which struck the butt of his rifle and caused fragments to penetrate his right side. These were not of a serious nature.

Lieutenant Chappell and Sergeant Ryerson made several attempts to reach Captain Buchanan to determine the extent of his wounds but they were unable to reach him for some time due to heavy fire. The guerrillas had concentrated during the battle at points one block to the left of my patrol; one block up the main street from my patrol; and also to the right of my patrol, and were firing from the windows and doors of the building. They started retreating from the town at about 3:35 A. M., and by 4:00 A. M., we were able to reorganize. Lieutenant Chappell in the meantime had been able to reach my patrol and had then notified Headquarters, Leon, of the engagement by telephone. As soon as dawn came, the dead and wounded were removed to the railroad station for further transfer to Leon. A canvass of the town was made to determine the casualties and to rid the town of any further guerrillas that might still be lurking about. Fourteen guerrillas are known to have been killed and it is thought that at least fifty or sixty were wounded. The total number of guerrillas that participated in this engagement was estimated at three hundred and fifty. Captain Buchanan died from wounds at about 2:30 A. M. and Private Jackson died from wounds at about 4:20 A. M.

The following men deserve special mention for their conduct during the engagement: Corporals Rausch and Strickland; Privates Keith, Thieling, Klopp, Jones, Downs, Simons, Barrett and Roache. These men showed great courage and bravery throughout the entire engagement.

This statement is submitted from memory of the engagement at La Paz Centro, Nicaragua, on the morning of May 16, 1927.

GLENDELL L. FITZGERALD.

