

# COMBAT OPERATIONS IN NICARAGUA

*Compiled by DIVISION OF OPERATIONS AND TRAINING*

**Orientation:** In the June issue of the GAZETTE, the operations resulting in the seizure of the bandit stronghold, "EL CHIPOTE," were presented. The final phase of these operations occurred during the last week of January, 1928. As a result of these operations, the concentration of the outlaw force was broken up and their principal base was destroyed. A considerable number of the outlaws still remained at large, however, and were still active. The problem became one of pursuing and destroying the small scattered groups of outlaws that remained in the field.

## Report of Commanding General for Period January 15th to February 27, 1928

Brigadier General Logan Feland assumed command of the Brigade January 16, 1928. The following outline of the situation is quoted from his report to the Major General Commandant covering the period from January 17th to February 27th:

"I have divided those parts of Nicaragua occupied by this command into areas as follows:

**NORTHERN AREA**—All of western Nicaragua north of the general line: SOMOTILLO (exclusive)—ACHUAPA-ESTELI (both inclusive)—JINOTEGA (exclusive). This area is now commanded by Colonel R. H. Dunlap (C. O. 11th Regiment) with headquarters in OCOTAL.

**SOUTHERN AREA**—All of western Nicaragua south of the general line: SOMOTILLO (inclusive)—ACHUAPA-ESTELI (both exclusive)—JINOTEGA (inclusive). This area is now commanded by Colonel R. R. Wallace (C. O., 5th Regiment) with headquarters in MANAGUA.

**EASTERN AREA**—The east coast of Nicaragua and such Nicaraguan territory inland as can be controlled by troops supplied from the east coast of Nicaragua. This area is now commanded by Major H. H. Utley, with headquarters at PUERTO CABEZAS.

"During the latter part of January, troops based on SAN ALBINO ascended and thoroughly combed "EL CHIPOTE." During the same period these troops repeatedly patrolled, and by frequent contacts kept outlaws on the move in the area: SAN ALBINO-TELPANECA-QUILALI.

"During the latter part of January a detachment pushed intensive reconnaissance to the east of MATAGALPA.

"During the early part of February it became apparent that outlaws were congregating in the vicinity of TERRERO GRANDE. This area was promptly and aggressively reconnoitered with the result that outlaws have not since been reported there.

"YALI and SAN RAFAEL DEL NORTE, two towns which have been favorite places of Sandino, were occupied by detachments on February 6th and 7th, respectively. There is now a detachment of fifty men at each of these places.

"About February 7, 1928, it became apparent that Sandino and some of his followers were in the coffee district in the vicinity of MATAGALPA and JINOTEGA. Repeated information from native sources indicated that it was Sandino's intention to attack JINOTEGA. There are several American and other foreign planters in this coffee district and, from the nature of the case, it was essential that this area be made secure from depredations by outlaws. Lieutenant Colonel Berry, with the forward echelon of the 5th Regiment, was promptly established at MATAGALPA and there was organized at that place an active intelligence service with the valuable assistance of American and other foreign residents. By marches and motor transport movements, the strength at MATAGALPA and JINOTEGA was increased to over 450 officers and men. Major Rockey, with over 200 men (170 of whom were mounted) from MATAGALPA and JINOTEGA, has carefully reconnoitered this district without contact with outlaws, but with the certain result that no sizable band remains herein.

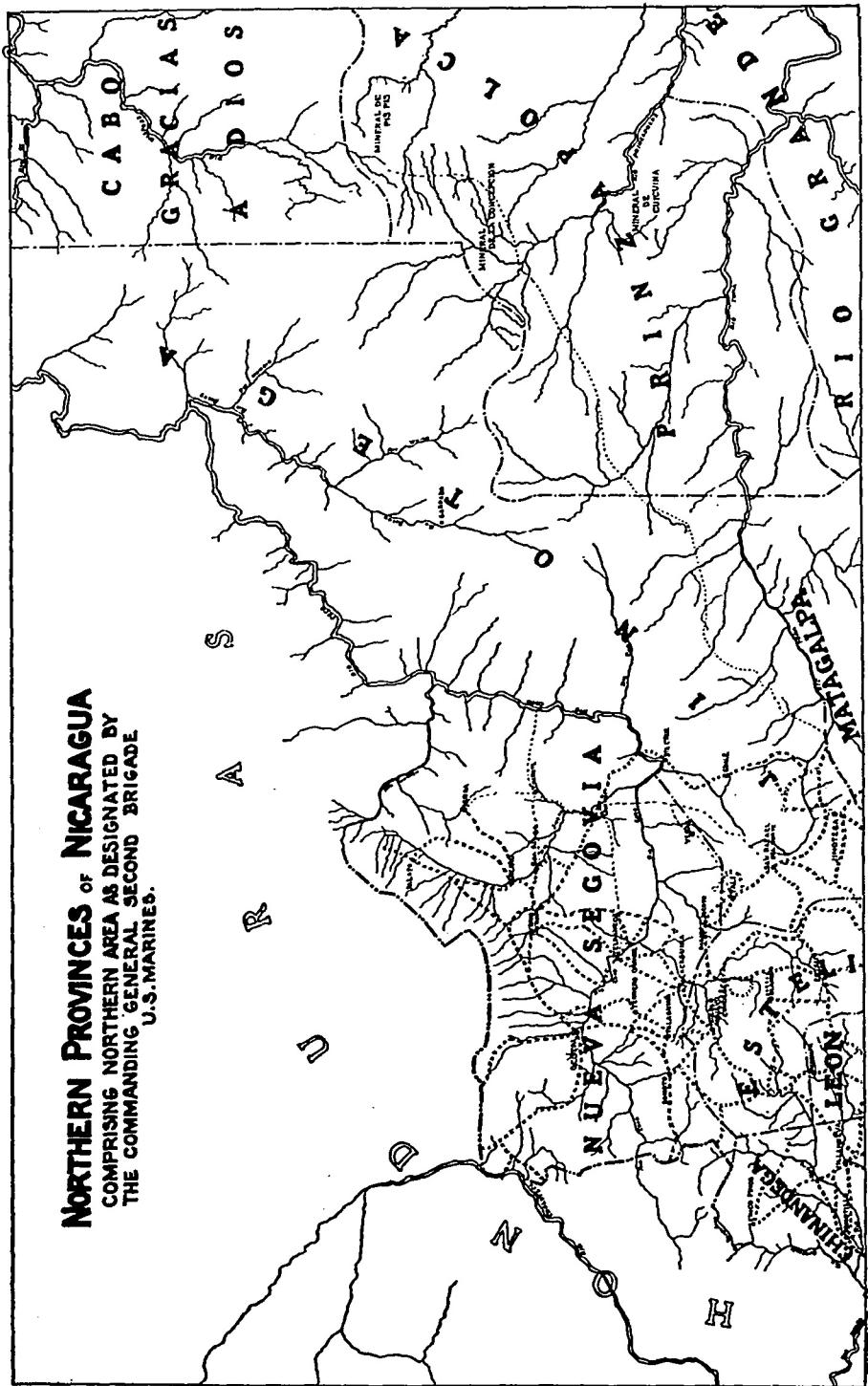
"All detachments have pressed active patrolling with the result that outlaws have been kept constantly on the move, denied towns of any importance and permitted no rest.

"Orders were issued February 27th for Major Rockey's command (operating out of MATAGALPA and JINOTEGA) to reconnoiter and seek contact with outlaws in the area north of JINOTEGA between the JINOTEGA-GUALI-STA CRUZ road and the JINOTEGA-SAN RAFAEL DEL NORTE-YALI road, as far north as the RIO COCO; then for Major Rockey with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 11th Regiment, and with one Rifle Company of same battalion (all mounted) to continue northward from the RIO COCO with QUILALI as their destination. This force will remain in the Northern Area.

"Outlaw groups will not withstand an attack. Upon the approach of a column of Marines, they will remain in a position only when it is an ideal ambush of their own choosing with a good avenue of escape to their rear. A detachment of Marines as small as a platoon, when moving during the daytime, becomes a column in this country. As such, it cannot hope to obtain surprise without which contact will not be gained.

"Instructions have been issued to Area Commanders enjoining the em-

**NORTHERN PROVINCES of NICARAGUA**  
COMPRISING NORTHERN AREA AS DESIGNATED BY  
THE COMMANDING GENERAL, SECOND BRIGADE  
U.S. MARINES.



ployment of heavily armed patrols moving secretly at night and resorting to ambush in order to obtain surprise against outlaws during the *daytime*. This method is now being employed in the Northern Area where operations against outlaws are almost exclusively confined. I believe that this tactical method will result in many casualties among the outlaws, with a minimum of casualties suffered by our troops, or will compel outlaws to leave areas covered by patrols thus conducted."

Contacts During Period January 15th to April 18th.

In a report subsequent to the one above quoted, the Commanding General stated:

"For the period mentioned (January 15th to April 18th, inclusive) there have been twenty-eight (28) contacts by ground troops with armed outlaws. In determining this figure 28 the conduct of two detachments, each of which had several small affairs, are counted as only two contacts."

In the same report he noted three principal contacts:

(a) On February 28, 1928, an empty pack train, commanded by Lt. Edward F. O'Day, was ambushed near the DARAILI RANCH (vicinity of JOCOTO on Ham map) by about 200 outlaws, armed and having machine guns. Five marines were killed and eight marines were wounded.

(b) On March 19th, near MURRA, our planes made contact with about 100 outlaws who had at least one machine gun. The planes made three successive contacts that day; the planes were hit several times. Captain Francis E. Pierce, U. S. M. C., Observer, was wounded (shot through the foot) during the first contact by the planes.

(c) On March 31st, about twelve miles northwest of BLANDON, a patrol attacked and completely routed a marching outlaw group of about 75 men. No marine casualties.

Reports made in connection with the two contacts first mentioned follow. The report of the contact on March 31st will be published in a subsequent issue.

#### ATTACK ON O'DAY'S COLUMN—LIEUTENANT O'DAY'S REPORT.

Headquarters, 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment,

Condega, Nicaragua, 1 March, 1928.

From: 1st Lt. Edward F. O'Day, U. S. Marine Corps.

To: The Battalion Commander, 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment.

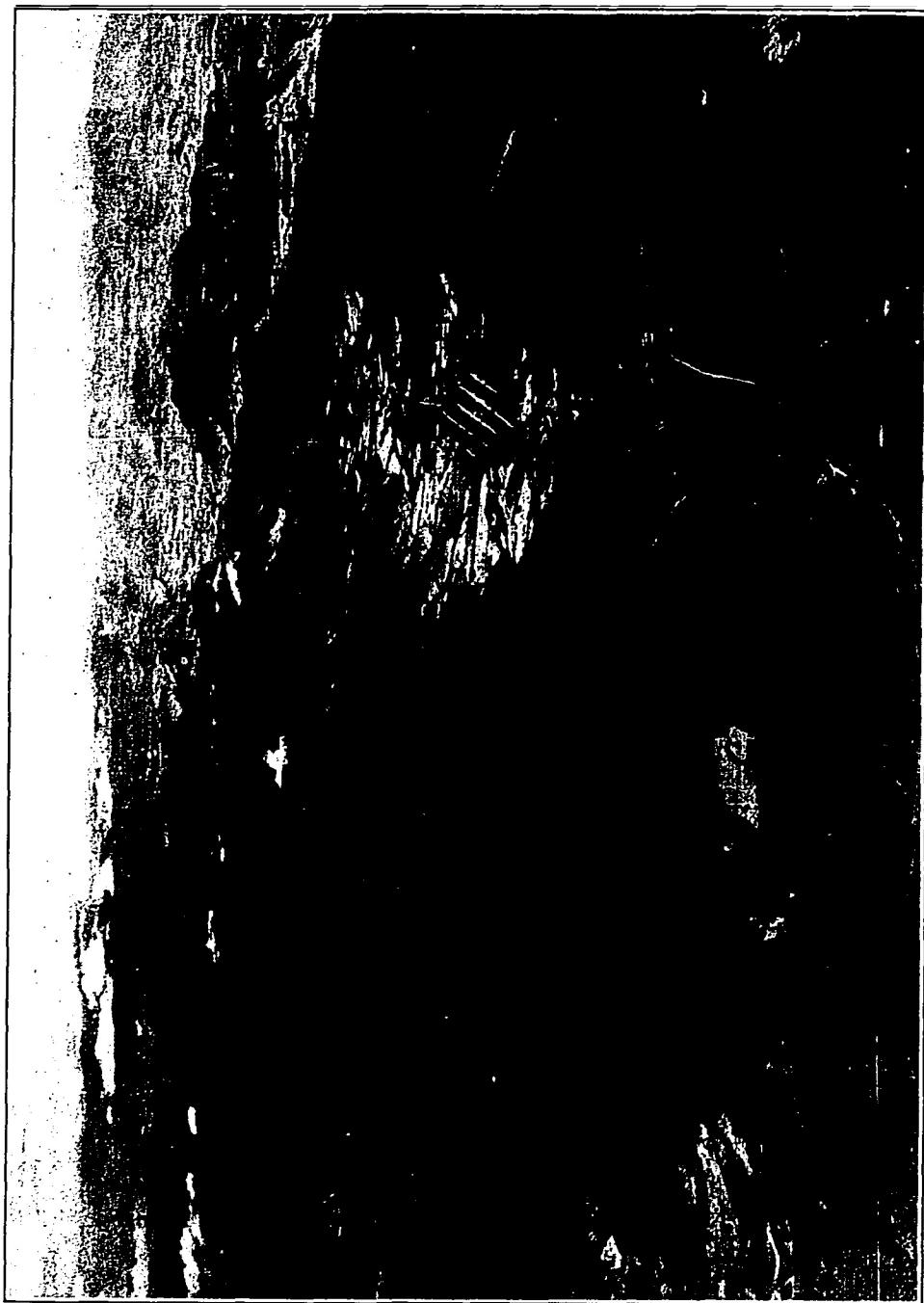
Subject: Report of Engagement with Bandit Forces.

1. The following report of a skirmish with bandit forces is herewith submitted:

On 27 February, 1928, the ration train under my command that left

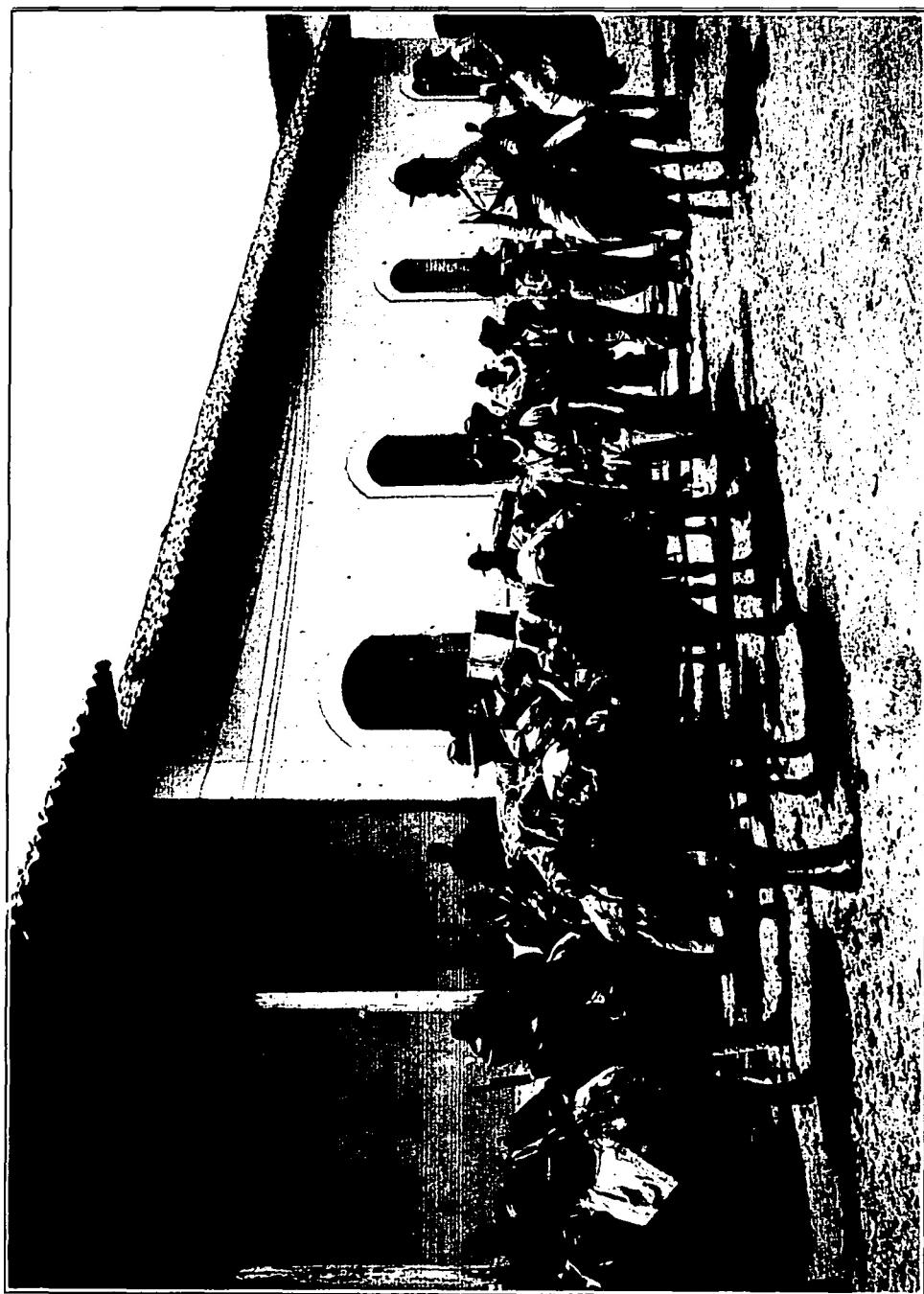


*Brigadier General Logan Feland, U. S. M. C., at Headquarters,  
Second Brigade, Managua, Nicaragua.*



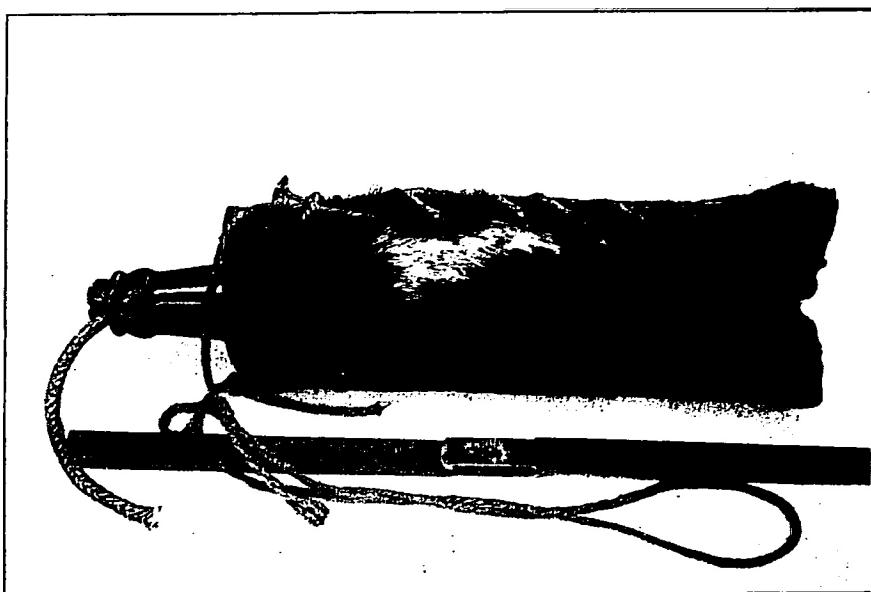
*Airplane理科 of Jinotega, Nicaragua*

*Marine Patrol with Pack Train*





*Planes over Volcano Monotombo*



*Beer Bottle Dynamite Bomb Used by Nicaraguan Outlaws*

ESTELI on 23 February, 1928, and proceeded to SAN RAFAEL and YALI with commissary stores, cleared YALI at 8:15 a. m. on 27 February, 1928, all stores having been delivered. The column consisted of one officer, 35 Marines, 1 Pharmacist's Mate 3c, U. S. Navy, 20 muleiros and 2 "jefe" muleiros with 95 mules, and was proceeding along the trail between YALI and CONDEGA. At approximately one-half the distance between the two towns, the column was ambushed by the bandit forces. The exact location of the skirmish is about 1,000 yards west of a town named BROMADEROS.

2. The column had just been closed up and was proceeding west, and as it entered the flat space of ground between two ranges of hills the bandit forces opened fire on the right flank of the column throughout its entire length, also from the front and rear of the column.

3. The firing commenced at approximately 1:30 p. m., and lasted until 8:30 p. m. the same date, when it subsided to irregular harassing fire throughout the night. It is estimated beyond doubt that the bandit forces had a minimum of four machine guns, at least 600 rifles, and a large quantity of dynamite bombs. At least 200 dynamite bombs were discharged.

4. The bandit forces withheld fire until the entire column was in front of them, varying in distance from 75 to 200 yards along the trail. The first shot of the skirmish was directed at the undersigned and was immediately followed by simultaneous firing along their entire line, opening up with everything that they may have had. The mule train was stampeded upon the initial burst of fire along the line. The Marines eased off to the brush on their left and commenced firing. Being outnumbered to such an extent, and the bandit forces having fire superiority, the Marines moved to the left gradually, taking position on a ridge. The bandit forces continued incessant fire until about 2:30 p. m., when they advanced towards the Marines in line of skirmish, the machine guns keeping up fire on the Marines' positions, in addition to rifle fire. After advancing to the foot of the hill, the bandit forces fell back at about 3:00 p. m., leaving in the vicinity several groups of their men. As they fell back to their positions they ravaged what could be found on the train. At about 6:30 p. m. they again moved forward in skirmish formation and proceeded to the base of the hill. This advance was also broken up and stopped by Marine fire. The bandit forces kept firing during the entire time until about 8:30 p. m. They were evidently well supplied with ammunition, as one or more machine guns were firing practically all of the time in addition to rifle fire and bombs. During the night there was a great deal of movement of bandit troops and what sounded like bull carts and a mule train. The Marines maintained the position occupied until daybreak when reinforcements from the 57th Company, under command of Captain William K. MacNulty, U. S. M. C., arrived on the scene. The attack on the bandit forces was then taken up.

5. Three Marines were killed in action on 27 February, 1928. Two

more died the following day from wounds received in action on 27 February. There were eight men wounded. Four of the 20 muleros with the column were wounded by rifle fire, two of them leaving the vicinity for ESTELI at dusk, one going to CONDEGA. The other, being wounded in the groin, remained with the Marines.

6. On the morning of 28 February, 1928, after the attack upon the enemy emplacements, the three dead Marines were collected and interred near the village of BROMADEROS under the supervision of Captain MacNulty. Such equipment and effects as were found were returned to CONDEGA. The bandits killed and wounded in the skirmish were taken to their rear and it is impossible to ascertain the number or to form an estimate, although there were many evidences of bandits having been wounded and evacuated.

7. The two Marines that died on 28 February, 1928, were interred at DARAILI. Existing instructions pertaining to deceased Marines were complied with to the best extent practicable.

8. Two or more of the bandit forces could speak irregular English and made a specialty of harrassing the Marines with slurs and insults during any lull in firing. All the bandit troops that came in sight of the undersigned were outfitted with shoes.

9. At about 7:30 p. m., their fire was lulled and someone with a tenor voice complimented the bandits for their work. This was repeated in loud tones all along the line. The message as heard seemed to be: "Complimentado todos soldados por trabajo bueno." Upon the message being repeated, three tremendous cheers were given, interspersed each time with the detonation of from six to ten bombs. The cheer was "Vive la Sandino; vive las Nicaraguans."

10. Immediately following this cheer, three more were given for some General whose name I could not understand but it sounded as though it had three syllables.

11. Shortly after 8:30 p. m., some of the bandit troops started to leave. This was the signal for more cheers. Some that were understood were "Bueno Concordia, Adios Condega, Adios Jinotega,"—apparently detachments from those vicinities.

12. Approximately one-third of the horses and mules in the column were killed, wounded, or captured by the bandit forces.

13. The Marine dead were whacked over the head with bolos by the bandit skirmishers, splitting their skulls wide open.

EDWARD F. O'DAY.

### Captain MacNulty's Report

57th Company, 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment,  
Condega, Nicaragua, 5 March, 1928.

From: Captain William K. MacNulty, U. S. Marine Corps.  
To: The Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment.  
Subject: Report of Action, Patrol of 57th Company, Commanded by  
Captain William K. MacNulty, U. S. Marine Corps.

1. In compliance with orders from Battalion Commander, 2d Battalion, 11th Regiment, dated 27 February, 1928, I cleared CONDEGA at 5:34 p.m., 27 February, 1928, with two commissioned officers, one warrant officer and 85 enlisted marines and one hospital corpsman, enroute to YALI and VEGAS via DARAILI, to investigate and suppress any bandit activities at those places.

2. At 10:30 p.m., 27 February, 1928, the column was halted by Corporal Homer T. Provost about four miles from Daraili, who reported that Lieutenant O'Day's column had been ambushed about three miles the other side of DARAILI and that he made a getaway to report to CONDEGA. (Corporal Provost is in the Intelligence Section, 2d Battalion.) I proceeded to DARAILI, where the mule train and all extra equipment were left under guard.

3. Mr. Gonzales at DARAILI was questioned and stated that he had heard firing between 1:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. but did not know anything about what was going on. A patrol was dispatched to CONDEGA with this information for the Battalion Commander.

4. At 12:45 a.m., 28 February, 1928, the column left DARAILI for Lieutenant O'Day's relief. After marching one and one-half hours, I decided that we were nearly up to the place of ambush. No firing had been heard and only a few native yells. As soon as it was light enough, a reconnaissance was made and it was found that we were about 500 yards from the place. Moving forward, our point entered an open space. I had gone forward at this time and we saw two pack mules, one packed with what looked like ammunition, running toward the hill on our left front. I called to Marine Gunner Allen to shoot it, which he did. At the same time I halted the column in the brush and got the point under cover. At this place we found a marine hat and some equipment (sketching board and map case).

5. Shortly after the shots had been fired at the mules, I heard Lieutenant O'Day call from the brush on the right of the trail asking "Who is there?" I answered "Captain MacNulty with 57th Company." Lieutenant O'Day then came up through the brush alone and joined the Company, giving me the approximate location of bandit positions, and stating that his column was badly scattered.

6. I gave Marine Gunner Allen instructions to get his machine gun in a position where he could sweep the crest of the hill on our left front and formed my company along the trail, Lieutenant Chappell on the left, Lieutenant O'Day on the right, myself in the center. We started to ad-

vance at 6:45 a. m., moving off to the northeast, making a turning movement to the right and advancing due east, striking the bandits on the right flank (see Intelligence Section sketch). They opened fire at about 2:12 a. m., which was returned. The advance was continued by short rushes, the machine gun covering the ridge ahead of us as we advanced. The gunner, having a good view of the crest of the hill, gave us excellent position fire with very little danger to our line.

7. Our advance continued until 8:20 a. m., when the last bandits were cleared out of the vicinity.

8. It is estimated that on the morning of 28 February approximately 200 bandits were in position, and a conservative estimate of their casualties would be 10 dead and 30 wounded. Seven dead horses were counted on the hill after the attack. There were no marine casualties during the attack of February 28, 1928.

9. It is believed by the undersigned that the attack on the morning of February 28, 1928, was a surprise to the bandits. They were waiting until daylight to complete the destruction of Lieutenant O'Day's organization and had no information that reinforcements had arrived. When our automatic weapons started firing, there was a surprised yell all along their line.

10. The troops were withdrawn at about 9:30 a. m., and outposts established. In assembling Lieutenant O'Day's patrol, it was found that he had three dead and 10 wounded. The dead were buried, Brigade Order No. 28 of 1 March, 1927, being complied with as nearly as possible. Stretchers were improvised and preparations made to return to DARAILI with the wounded. At about 12:10 p. m. an aeroplane sighted us and reports of casualties were made.

11. The column left BROMADEROS at 1:00 p. m., and arrived at DARAILI at 2:10 p. m., where the Battalion Commander was waiting.

12. The entire command conducted themselves in the most soldierly manner during the attack of 28 February. Most of the Company were recruits with less than four months' training, yet they responded instantly to orders and the line never faltered in its advance.

W. K. MACNULTY.

### Resume of Air Operations against Hostile Outlaws in Vicinity of Murra 18th, 19th and 20th, March, 1928.

18 MARCH, 1928

1120—The leader of a two-plane air patrol heard two distinct shots fired while reconnoitering at low altitude about two miles south of MURRA. Machine gun fire was directed into the underbrush but the enemy was not developed. The houses in the area about MURRA had a suspicious appearance.

1250—The patrol landed at MANAGUA and found that the plane flown by Lieutenant Lamson-Scribner had been hit twice. One bullet punctured the tail of a bomb and the other passed through the right wing. Immediate report of outlaw group two miles south of MURRA was made by telephone to Brigade Headquarters with a request for transmission of same by radio to Area Commander, OCOTAL.

19 MARCH, 1928

1210—A two-plane patrol encountered hostile fire at a house one-half mile northeast of MURRA. Enemy was engaged with bombs and machine gun fire. A few minutes later, fire was encountered from at least three more groups about two miles south of MURRA. Enemy was again engaged at this place. At this time Captain Pierce, the chief observer, was shot through the left foot, and as he became weak from loss of blood, the engagement was broken off and the patrol went to OCOTAL to evacuate him. Private Murphy, a member of the OCOTAL garrison, volunteered to take the place vacated by Captain Pierce, and the patrol returned to MURRA.

1345—Hostile fire was again encountered from eight different groups in the vicinity of MURRA. All groups were engaged by the planes, using both machine guns and bombs.

1410—Broke off engagement after expending all ammunition and bombs.

1420—Reported enemy location to Commanding Officer, SAN ALBINO.

1430—Report of engagement received at MANAGUA via transport plane pilot. Immediately dispatched additional plane to reinforce patrol at MURRA, and sent another plane with an aircraft armorer to OCOTAL.

1530—Two planes returned to MANAGUA from MURRA sector and reported events. Both planes were serviced and immediately sent back to that area.

1620—The single plane sent to join the patrol arrived at MURRA. A group of outlaws was found three miles north of MURRA and immediately engaged. All ammunition was expended, and attack broken off.

1655—The single plane landed at OCOTAL.

1715—The two-plane patrol again arrived and found outlaws gathering horses and loading pack trains preparatory to marching. Three groups were again attacked, as well as a pack train. Hostile fire was again encountered but was beaten down by the bombing attacks. The attack was broken off on account of darkness, and the planes returned to OCOTAL.

20 MARCH, 1928

Another plane joined the flight at OCOTAL, and the MURRA area was carefully patrolled. No outlaw groups could be located. At about 10:45

the ground troops from JICARO arrived at MURRA. The area north of MURRA appeared normal, but south there were some outlaw signs.

*General:* The outlaws had at least one machine gun, probably two; were equipped with high-powered 30-30 rifles and were plentifully supplied with ammunition. They had a large number of horses, several small herds of cattle, and at least one pack train.

They were scattered over an area approximately two miles wide by four miles long (north and south of MURRA). The estimated number of armed men present, including at least eight groups, is 150. They displayed an aggressiveness and a willingness to expend ammunition beyond the ordinary. They fought with greater tenacity than was usual.

It is impossible to estimate the casualties inflicted on the enemy, due to the heavy underbrush. Their losses were no doubt considerable, as numerous direct hits were made with bombs and a large volume of machine gun fire was well placed. Four or five dead horses and mules were seen. Large numbers of vultures were observed the following day about the places where contacts had been made.

The planes expended about 4,000 rounds of ammunition and 50 bombs during the operations.

During the action one officer was wounded and the planes were hit 12 times by hostile fire. One bomb was struck and a flying wire was shot away on Chief Gunner Wodarczyk's plane. The rest of the hits did no great damage.

The major part of the credit for the engagement belongs to Chief Marine Gunner Wodarczyk, the leader of the two-plane patrol. He and Captain Pierce, his observer, discovered the enemy, and thereafter Mr. Wodarczyk conducted the attacks with skill and courage. Captain Pierce displayed great courage and kept his gun in action until he could no longer stand the pain and loss of blood. Private Murphy, who had never been in an airplane before, deserves commendation for going into the air fight voluntarily, although not a member of the Aircraft Squadrons.