

La Flor Engagement

By

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Captain Victor F. Bleasdale, U.S.M.C., on the Trail in Northern Nicaragua, 1927

THIS action was fought on May 13 and 14, 1928, near the finca and logging camp of LA FLOR, in Nueva Segovia, Northern Nicaragua. On account of the location it was so named in the Guardia Nacional reports though it has been referred to also as the "Hunter Contact," the "Pena Blanca Action," and the "Bocaycito River Engagement," as it occurred in wild jungle and mountainous country. It was a meeting engagement between a Marine-Guardia Combat Patrol, commanded by Captain Robert S. Hunter, U.S.M.C., and a large force of Nicaraguan bandits commanded by General Jiron, Sandino's Chief of Staff.

The nature of the engagement and its results were such as to make it interesting for study by Marines interested in the much discussed subject of Bush Warfare.

Sandino and his bandit forces had been forced to abandon the Chipote area in Neuva Segovia because of the activity of the troops of the United States Marine Corps and Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and to seek a "rest area" in the Cua region. He withdrew to this "rest area" and established his main camps at Garrrobo and Gulkes Camp.

About May 12, 1928, he received information that Captain Hunter's combat patrol was approaching the Cua area and, not wishing to have his "rest area" discovered and penetrated, sent a force (probably mounted under Jiron and another under Sanchez to engage it and destroy it or drive it back. The Jiron and Sanchez units, which totaled about 125 men, marched together but the command was divided. These units were guided by friendly or intimidated natives and, marching toward Captain Hunter's patrol, engaged it on May 13th and 14th, killing two and wounding two of its members, and caused the Marine-Guardia patrol to withdraw.

The bandits had disappeared from their old haunts in the Chipote area and it was desirable that they be located. Information had been received which indicated that they might be in the Cua area and to investigate this information, the Commanding Officer of Marines in the State of Nueva Segovia directed that a combat patrol be sent from the Quilali garrison toward the Cua area to reconnoiter and make contact if possible.

Several other patrols were sent out from other stations with missions somewhat similar. Captain H. H. Phipps, U.S.M.C., was in the field with a patrol from Matagalpa and Lieutenant David Claude had another out from Corinto Finca.

The combat patrol we are concerned with in this article was formed in Quilali, Nueva Segovia, on May 8th and on May 9th cleared Quilali to march on the Cua area with the mission to reconnoiter that area and to make contact with the bandits, and was composed as follows:

U. S. Marine Corps—Captain Robert S. Hunter, U.S.M.C., Commanding Patrol; Second Lieutenant Earl S. Piper, U.S.M.C., second in command; 25 enlisted Marines, formed into three squads, and 1 hospital corpsman, U. S. N.

Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua—Cadet Ollie R. Blackburn, Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua (gunnery sergeant, U.S.M.C.), commanding Guardia, and 9 enlisted Guardias, formed into one squad.

Animals, Pack Train and Supplies—Thirty-eight riding mules which mounted the entire patrol, 11 pack mules and 10 days' rations.

The three officers and the platoon sergeant were armed with .45 Colt automatics. Each carried three filled magazines.

Each of the three squads of Marines were armed as follows: One man with a Browning automatic rifle and a belt and Browning automatic rifle shoulder bandolier of ammunition; one man with a Thompson sub-machine gun and three 20-round box magazines and two 50-round drums; one man with a Springfield rifle, rifle grenade discharger, 10 rifle grenades and a belt of ammunition; one man with a Springfield rifle, 2 hand grenades and a belt of ammunition; four men armed with Springfield rifles and belts of ammunition. Three of these carried two extra bandoliers of ammunition and one was the assistant Browning automatic rifle man and carried a shoulder bandolier for the Browning automatic rifle.

The nine enlisted Guardias were armed as follows: One had a Thompson sub-machine gun; eight had

Krag rifles with belts of ammunition and an extra bandolier per man.

Marine Officers—Captain Hunter. Fifteen years of enlisted and commissioned service in the Marine Corps. A major during the World War. Served five years in the Dominican Republic, West Indies, much of it in the field. Participated in an engagement with bandits at Magarin, Seibo Province, Dominican Republic. Graduated from the Company Officers' Course at the Marine Corps Schools. Commanded 47th Company (mounted) Marines for several months in the field in Nicaragua.

First Lieutenant Piper. Graduate from U. S. Naval Academy in June, 1927. Commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the U. S. Marine Corps in June, 1927. Graduated from Basic Course of Marine Corps Schools. Commanded a platoon of the 47th Company (mounted) Marines for several months in the field in Nicaragua.

Marine Enlisted—The enlisted Marines were members of Lieutenant Piper's platoon of the 47th Company (mounted), 11th Regiment. They were chiefly recruits with less than one year's service. The platoon, as part of the 47th Company, landed in Nicaragua in January, 1928, and received one month's training in Managua and Matagalpa prior to taking the field. Lieutenant Piper had schooled his men in their respective weapons. The training in Browning automatic rifles, Thompsons, and hand and rifle grenades had been particularly thorough for the limited time allotted. He had a few small tactical problems on the trails in the vicinity of Matagalpa in which the platoon simulated that it had been ambushed.

About February 15th, the 47th Company, as part of Major Rockey's mounted column, took the field in an active campaign against the bandits. Captain Hunter took command of the 47th Company about March 1st. The company operated in the mountains and jungles for two months and on February 18th took over the garrison at Quilali. On April 1st, 1928, the company had a taste of hostile fire in a contact at Santa Cruz in which one bandit was killed.

From February 18th to March 9th, the date Lieutenant Piper's platoon departed on the mission set forth in this article, Captain Hunter's company engaged in active patrolling in the Quilali area.

The most remarkable thing about the patrol is that the Marine element of it was composed of a platoon that had remained intact for five months under the same platoon commander.

Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua—The Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua is the military and police force of Nicaragua. The organization of it under officers of the U. S. Marine Corps and U. S. Navy (Medical Corps) started in May, 1927. Its organization, in a general way, is similar to that of the infantry and mounted infantry units of Marines in Nicaragua. In 1928 its officers were officers and non-commissioned officers of the U. S. Marine Corps and U. S. Navy (Medical). The enlisted personnel was recruited from young Nicaraguans with no prior military training.

Guardia Officer—Cadet Blackburn was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps and had been detailed to serve as an officer in the Guardia. Blackburn had

fought with the marines in the battle of Ocotol in Nicaragua in July, 1927, and after the battle was highly commended by his commanding officer for his display of courage, aggressiveness, and combat efficiency demonstrated during the eighteen hours of fighting. Blackburn joined the Guardia about May 1, 1928, and had reported for duty with the Guardia at Quilali only a few days before leaving with Captain Hunter's patrol. He could speak only a few words of Spanish and knew very little about handling Guardias. His men did not know him.

Guardia Enlisted—The nine enlisted Guardias were a poor choice for the patrol. They were from the Quilali garrison and, with one exception, were the poorest men of the garrison. The good men of the garrison had been exhausted on previous patrolling. Indications are that they had been promised transfers from the zone of hostilities to peaceful areas and were dissatisfied because this had not been done.

Bandits—The bandits were chiefly men who had participated in the 1926-27 revolution in Nicaragua and some in previous revolutions in Nicaragua and Honduras and had been in the field for ten months against the Marines and Guardias. They seem to have been well armed and plentifully supplied with ammunition, and well clothed, some being in khaki.

Bandit Leaders—Sandino, the bandit leader, and the one who sent the Jiron-Sanchez column out to engage Captain Hunter's patrol, is an example of a man creating a place for himself and making himself essential to others. Sandino has little military ability, but to the bandits of Nicaragua, and many other people throughout the world, including some in the United States, he represents a cause. The author has never been able to determine just what Sandino's cause is. He changes it at times to suit changing situations. In May, 1927, he said that he would lay down his arms if the Marines would throw the Nicaraguan President and other Nicaraguan officials out of office and set up a military government. Today Sandino would probably be satisfied if the Marines were withdrawn from Nicaragua, the Guardia disbanded, and the country turned over to him and his bandits. But the thing to remember is that Sandino is the bandit leader who represents a cause to which all criminals of Nicaragua can subscribe and thereafter go forth and loot, rape, and murder Nicaraguans with the feeling that they are doing it for the cause. This probably makes their criminal acts less disagreeable to them. A cause is always a help. Fortunately, in the United States our criminals have not yet developed a cause that gives them a commendable standing with some people that are not criminals. In this respect our United States bandits are more backward than the Nicaraguan bandits.

General Jiron—Sandino's chief of staff, seems to have been a high type guerrilla officer, probably the most able that ever served under Sandino. He was a citizen of Guatemala and had been a governor of a state in that country and was considered an able soldier as he had served many years as a soldier of fortune in various Central American revolutions. He was influenced by the Sandino propaganda that was quite active throughout Central America and believing Sandino had a just cause, and looking for work of

a military nature, he went to Nicaragua and joined him.

Colonel Sanchez—An aggressive, courageous, and fairly able guerrilla leader. He commanded the bandits that engaged the Nueva Segovia Expedition at San Fernando and Apali Hacienda during July, 1927. His origin seems to be obscure. Some say he was from Honduras, where he was known as a "bad man" and a "killer."

March Formation of the Patrol—The normal march formation of the patrol on the trail was as follows:

All personnel and animals in a column of files. All personnel was mounted on mules.

The point, consisting of one corporal and four privates, marched with a twenty yards distance between men and preceded the main body by twenty yards. Captain Hunter marched with the point, generally between the second and third men, and assumed active charge of the point.

The main body, under Lieutenant Piper, followed the point at twenty yards. Lieutenant Piper marched at the head of it and the patrol sergeant marched at the rear. There was one mule length between men.

The pack train was the last element in the main body.

The rear guard alternated daily between the Marines and the Guardias. On the Marine day the rear guard was composed of one sergeant and four privates, and on the Guardia day of one officer and nine enlisted.

The rear guard followed the main body at the distance of one mule length and maintained one mule length distance between men.

On the day the Guardia were not marching as rear guard they handled the pack animals on the trail.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 9, 1928

The patrol cleared Quilali at 8:30 A.M. and marched on Santa Cruz and the Coco River en route to the Cua area. The weather and the trails were excellent.

The author now quotes from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report": "Arrived Santa Cruz 1:30 P.M., and made camp. Five Guardia were put on outpost about 150 yards northeast of camp. About 7:00 P.M. firing was heard from this outpost. Upon being investigated the Guardias said they had fired at five men mounted, coming down the trail. No evidence was found and report was unverified."

The above incident is typical of many that happened in Nicaragua. Here we have an outpost of five Guardia with five unsuspecting mounted bandits coming toward them. The outpost got excited or frightened and opened fire at an impossible range, hit none, drove the bandits into flight, and exposed their own presence and that of their unit. Had these Guardia had confidence in themselves, hidden in the jungle, allowed the bandits to ride up to them and then covered them with their weapons so that the bandits would have their choice of surrendering or dying, they would have contributed something to help Nicaragua.

An outpost of Marines, established by Lieutenant Hannekin, U.S.M.C., captured General Jiron, a prize catch, by observing him first, taking cover, and then leaping out on him and covering him with their weapons.

There are two principal reasons why men open

fire hastily; either they get excited or they overestimate their ability to hit.

Men must be taught to realize that 100 yards is the maximum battlefield range at which the average man armed with a shoulder weapon can deliberately aim and hit a man on the other side. Even then the target must be motionless, large and distinct, with excellent visibility.

Readers unacquainted with battlefield shooting may wonder if I mean to say 100 yards. I will qualify that statement by saying that occasionally a man deliberately shoots at an enemy at a range of over 100 yards, but for every such hit there are ten misses.

Some men can be taught to hit small, indistinct, moving targets at unknown ranges; but not by shooting for record on a rifle range. Marines training for bush warfare should fire a sniper's course.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 10, 1928

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report": "Cleared Santa Cruz 7:30 A.M., May 10, and marched in general northeast direction. Crossed high range of bare mountains and traveled through heavy bamboo brakes, trails good. Many houses along trail were burned. Reached Cua River about 2:30 P.M., having traveled twelve miles from Santa Cruz. Trails were investigated mile up river and camp made in immediate vicinity on river bank. At 6:00 P.M., while several of our men were bathing in river, a native dugout was seen coming close to our camp. Upon seeing men in river, dugout was hastily beached and natives ran into bushes on opposite bank, both carrying rifles. Shots were fired at them, and a short chase given but they escaped. The dugout contained native food which being warm had just been prepared and the men were evidently making a journey some distance downstream. At 8:00 P.M. Marine on guard 100 yards upstream from camp fired two shots saying a man had appeared in trail ahead of him. No evidences were found to verify this report. These two incidents caused us to believe that we were in vicinity of bandits."

The houses referred to above as being burned had been burned in earlier operations by the bandits.

Here we again see the patrol allowing bandits to escape from them. These escapes robbed the patrol of valuable sources of information and furnished it to the bandits. The above contacts served to warn Sandino that his "rest area" was being approached. Undoubtedly he had many warnings from other sources. Dashing to Sandino with valuable information is the easiest way for a peacefully inclined native to gain favor with the bandits. He may hate the bandits, but he and his family must live among them and he has his choice of letting the bandits feel that he is with them or against them. If he is known to the bandits as a bandit sympathizer, he is reasonably safe. If he is known to them as a dangerous enemy, one who assists the Marines and Guardia, he is in a dangerous position and had better quit the country if he loves his family or values his life.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 11, 1928

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report": "Cleared camp 7:30 A.M., May 11, and marched up Cua River to junction of Cua and Guasineros Rivers. Followed upstream for distance of about five miles.

The immediate vicinity is known as 'Finca de Cua.' There is a native hacienda about twelve miles up Cua River and four miles southwest of its banks which owner said was known as 'Finca de Cua.' Everything here appeared peaceful and there was nothing to arouse suspicion. They said bandits had passed through this territory eight days previous. Made camp that night on Guasineros River about five miles from its junction with the Cua."

INCIDENTS OF MAY 12, 1928

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report": "Cleared camp May 12th at 7:00 A.M., traveling east until we struck Cua River and then followed trail paralleling river upstream. Weather and trails good. During morning crossed bare, rocky hills and in afternoon crossed heavily wooded mountains. Made camp 2:00 P.M. at La Flor, belonging to Guadalupe Zelaya, this finca evidently being a deserted logging camp and located on bank of Cua River about seventeen miles from its mouth. About 11:00 P.M. the Marine on guard close to camp fired several shots at what he said was a moving light about 100 yards to south of camp. Next morning blood was found along trail verifying in part his statement."

The "La Flor" referred to above is the origin of the name given to the meeting engagement described in this article.

"La Flor," which is a farm and was at times a logging camp, included a substantial house. Prior to the Revolution of 1926-27 and the present bandit war much mahogany was cut in this area for export. United States interests were chiefly concerned in the mahogany trade.

We again see a Marine driving away a possible source of information. The fact that the target shot at was carrying a light shows that he did not suspect the presence of the patrol. How much better it would have been to have captured the bearer, or have engaged the group of bandits at close quarters if the light happened to belong to such. But much patient training in "Scouting and Patroling" is necessary to qualify men for a job of this nature.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 13, 1928

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report": "Cleared camp May 13, at 7:00 A.M., marching to southeast. Traveled until noon over good trails which crossed heavily timbered range of mountains. Passed several houses, some of which were occupied by apparently friendly natives. Others had evidently been deserted in a hurry. At noon reached Bocaycito River, said by natives to be approximately twenty miles from its mouth on the Coco River. This river, like the Cua, runs to the southwest, and is about the same size. Followed trail paralleling Bocaycito River downstream. Several more houses were passed, mostly containing apparently friendly natives, this territory being more thickly populated than any we had yet passed through. At 3:40 P.M., after traveling through heavy timber and underbrush over good trails, reached scene of combat."

All inhabitants interviewed prior to the engagement gave the patrol no information that would indicate the presence of bandits.

Lieutenant Piper's geographical descriptions given in his "Patrol Report" as quoted above may confuse

the reader. For example, he states that the Cua River flows to the southwest and it undoubtedly does in this particular locality that he was speaking about, but its general direction of flow is northwest.

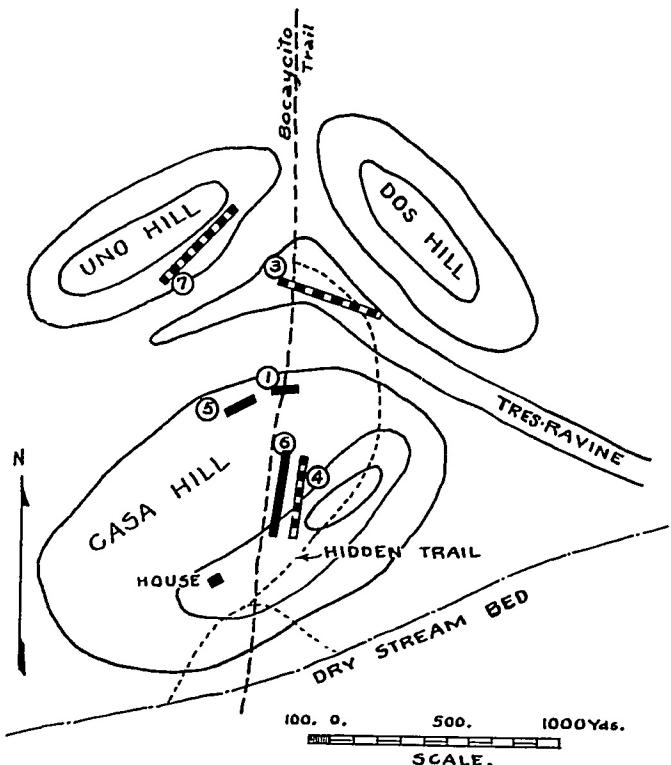
We now come to the engagement that we have been leading up to and the author will endeavor to describe how this engagement was fought with the idea of enabling the reader to profit by it.

The engagement lasted two days and was divided into two distinct parts. Each day will be covered separately.

LA FLOR ENGAGEMENT ON MAY 13

(See Sketch Map No. 1.)

At 3:40 P.M. the patrol, marching north on the Bocaycito trail, reached the crest of a well wooded hill, known in this article as Casa Hill which was heavily wooded except for a small clearing around a house, and the Bocaycito trail itself, which was cleared to a width about twenty feet. As the point passed the house, which was on the crest and the only house on the hill, Captain Hunter questioned a man and several women that were in the house, and then ordered the patrol to proceed. The point, following the trail, descended the north slope of Casa Hill into Tres Ravine, and on reaching a point about half-way down to the bottom it was lightly fired upon by several rifles from the dense jungle to its right and from the



MAP NO. I. LA FLOR ENGAGEMENT

All terrain heavy timber and jungle except in vicinity of house and the Trail which was 20 feet wide.

(1) Point, 5 Marines.	(6) Main body and rear point, 15 Marines and 10 Guardia.
(3) 30 Bandits.	(7) 40 Bandits.
(4) 25 Bandits.	
(5) 5 Marines.	

bottom of the ravine. The point dismounted, abandoned or tied their mules (Captain Hunter tied his), and, while returning the fire, fell back toward the main body to a position about thirty yards in rear of the military crest, where the point formed a firing line facing Tres Ravine (See [1] on Map I.), and continued their firing until enemy firing in Tres Ravine was silenced. By taking up position in rear of the military crest part of Tres Ravine was deflated, but undoubtedly Captain Hunter's thought at the time was to fall back on the main body to avoid being cut off. It is questionable whether anyone in the point was concerned with taking a position on the military crest so as to command the entire ravine.

When the point was fired upon, the main body, which was on the geographical crest, dismounted and prepared to defend itself in the Bocaycito Trail. (See [6] on Map I.). The trail was clear for about a width of twenty feet, but beyond that on each side was dense jungle and the maximum visibility in the jungle was about twenty feet.

A minute or so after the point had been fired upon, the main body was lightly fired upon by rifle men and bombers from the dense jungle that lies between the Bocaycito Trail and the Hidden Trail on the east side of the Bocaycito Trail (See [4] on Map I.). The patrol took up a position in the trail on the edge of the jungle (See [6] on Map I.), and engaged the bandits at (4). The frontage of the bandits' position equaled that of the Marines, but the bandits were not visible to the Marines. The Guardia were the rear guard and do not seem to have been very active in the fire fight. At 3:55 P.M., after a fire fight lasting about ten minutes, all bandit fire was silenced, and it seems to have been assumed by the patrol that the bandits had fled. No scouts were sent out to reconnoiter and to take possession of the terrain apparently abandoned by the enemy, or for purposes of protection.

Captain Hunter and Corporal Williamson came back to the main body at (6) from the point's position at (1), and Captain Hunter ordered a reconnaissance made of the terrain in the vicinity of the house on Casa Hill. Later during the battle the house was destroyed.

The bandit fire remained silenced for about five minutes, then they opened up on the point's position at (1) with a heavy volume of rifle and Thompson sub-machine gun fire from (3) in Tres Ravine and (7) on Uno Hill. The bandit position at (3) in Tres Ravine was about 150 yards north of the point's position and that at (7) on Uno Hill about 300 yards northwest. They seemed to have about 60 men at (3) in Tres Ravine with at least one Thompson sub-machine gun, and 40 men at (7) on Uno Hill. The point at (1) called for reinforcements and Lieutenant Piper and three men, followed soon thereafter by Captain Hunter and Corporal Williamson, went forward and built up the point's firing line at (1). While standing behind a tree and firing a rifle at the bandits, Lieutenant Piper saw several bandits leading away the mules that the point had abandoned in Tres Ravine when initially fired upon. Lieutenant Piper notified Captain Hunter and Captain Hunter, Lieutenant Piper, and six men ran forward about thirty-five yards to the military crest, from where they could take cover, and not have the bandits capturing their mules deflated. When this group of eight men ran forward they ex-

posed themselves and were subjected to a heavy volume of well directed Thompson sub-machine gun fire and rifle fire from the 60 bandits in Tres Ravine. Corporal Williamson, a Thompson sub-machine gun man, while running forward was killed by a Thompson sub-machine gun fired from Tres Ravine at a range of seventy-five yards. Hospital Corpsman Young, who generally accompanied the point, picked up Williamson's Thompson but could not fire it as he was not acquainted with the weapon. Captain Hunter checked up on the armament of the men that occupied the military crest and found that there were no automatic weapons there and knowing the immediate need of them to reduce the enemy superiority of fire, he ran back to Williamson's body and got his Thompson from Young who was still trying to fire it, on his way back to the military crest stopped and, in a standing position, fired into the bandits and felled two of them but in turn was shot in the chest by a bandit Thompson at a range of 50 yards. Although seriously wounded Hunter got up and continued toward the firing line and was shot down with another Thompson bullet which hit him in the shoulder. Hospital Corpsman Young then dragged him to cover and dressed his wounds. Some other Marine got Williamson's Thompson into action. About this time Private DuBois received a flesh wound in the shoulder from a bandit rifle in Tres Ravine at a range of 75 yards. When he was hit he was in a prone position but exposed to observation.

The main body at (6) kept the bandits to its front at (4) engaged. These bandits threw several dynamite bombs among the Marines who in turn threw several hand grenades into the jungle occupied by the bandits. The dynamite bombs consisted of dynamite in a bullhide bag and, due to the fact that they contained no metal fragments to inflict casualties, they were only dangerous when they landed so close that the concussion could injure or kill. Several Marines received scratches from dirt and stones thrown against them by the exploding dynamite and several were severely shaken by the concussion but the bandit bombs do not seem to have affected the morale of the main body after it was discovered that the bombs contained no dangerous metal fragments.

The Guardia were in the rear guard of the column and do not seem to have been active in the engagement. They probably remembered their rear guard mission and stayed on the extreme right of the main body when it formed a firing line facing the east and, as the bandits' position did not extend sufficient to engage them, they probably had little to do.

At 4:30 p. m. all bandit fire was silenced and the bandits evidently fell back some distance from their position at (7) (3) (4). Lieutenant Piper, now in command, made preparations to spend the night on Casa Hill. He brought his men in from their positions at (1) (5) (6) and prepared camp on the crest in the vicinity of the ruins of the house. The dead, wounded, and animals were brought in.

Knowing he was facing a numerically superior force that might attack him, Lieutenant Piper made camp for the night in such a manner that he could repel an attack from any direction. He distributed his men over a position that encircled the hilltop. The circular position was about 75 yards in diameter and the men were in pairs in fox holes that were about

fifteen yards apart. The plan was that one man should be awake and on the alert while the other slept. The foxholes occupied by the pairs of men were chiefly natural depressions in the ground with some additional cover placed in front. Entrenching tools were scarce. The wounded, supplies, and some of the animals were placed inside the circle. Some of the mules were tied to trees and bushes near the outside of the circle but so they could be protected by the men in the fox holes. There was no field of fire in the dense jungle that surrounded the position. At 11:25 p.m. Corporal Williamson was buried. The night was a trying one. Lieutenant Piper felt that he was surrounded and that the bandits had ambushes laid in both directions on the Bocaycito Trail and he expected to be attacked during the night, and if not attacked during the night had cause for concern about the enemy that would face him at daylight. The patrol's only water was the little they had in their canteens when the battle started at 3:40 p.m. and much of this was needed to dress wounds.

Two men were sent to the Dry Stream bed during the night but though they reached it unmolested they were unable to find water. (Hence the name.) It was too dangerous to send men to Small Stream.

During the day's combat the bandits did no yelling or cheering.

Lieutenant Piper and his non-commissioned officers cautioned all men about the conservation of their ammunition and grenades and their situation was so obvious that ammunition was expended sparingly.

LOSSES SUFFERED DURING COMBAT ON MAY 13TH

Marine Corps—1 killed (Corporal Williamson); 1 wounded, seriously (Captain Hunter); 1 wounded, slightly (Private DuBois). Several Marines received minor scratches from explosions of dynamite bombs.

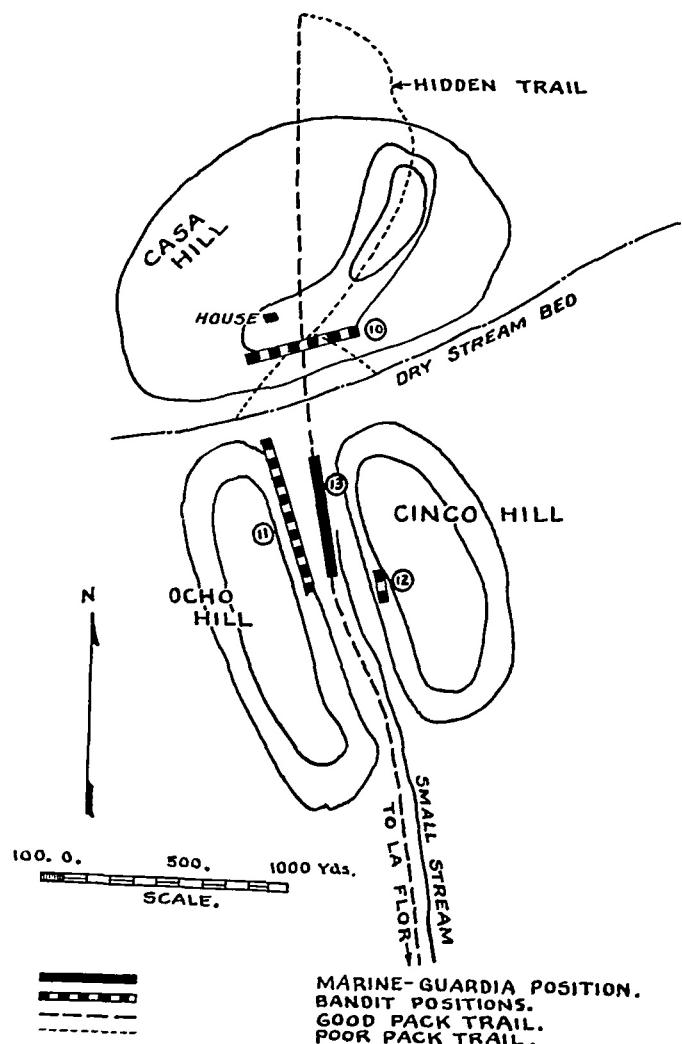
Two mules, completely saddled, that the point had abandoned in Tres Ravine, were captured by the bandits. Two more mules that the point abandoned in Tres Ravine were killed but their saddle equipment was recovered.

Guardia—No losses.

Bandits—Three bandits were seen to fall after Marines had shot at them and although it is the natural thing for a man to do when he is shot at, it is reasonable to assume that some of the Marine bullets found their mark and killed or wounded several bandits. One hand grenade thrown by a Marine in the main body (6) into the bandit position on Casa Hill (4) silenced some of their fire and later investigation revealed spots of blood where the grenade had exploded. Two bandits were seen to fall before Captain Hunter's Thompson sub-machine gun fire. No dead bandits were found on the field.

LA FLOR ENGAGEMENT ON MAY 14TH, 1928 (See Sketch Map No. 2.)

At daybreak Lieutenant Piper sent out a reconnaissance patrol that reconnoitered the bandit positions of the 13th on Casa Hill at (4), Uno Hill at (7), and Tres Ravine at (3). This patrol also discovered "Hidden Trail," which was a footpath that ran along the geographical crest of Casa Hill and nearly parallel to the Bocaycito Trail and about 150



MAP NO. II. LA FLOR ENGAGEMENT

All terrain heavy timber and jungle except the Trail toward La Flor which was 50 feet wide.

(10) 35 Bandits.
(12) 10 Bandits.
(11) 80 Bandits.

(13) Marine-Guardia Patrol,
37 strong.

yards east of it. It branched from the Bocaycito Trail in Tres Ravine and rejoined it near the house on Casa Hill (4).

The reconnaissance patrol disclosed no bandits so Lieutenant Piper decided that they were lying in ambush in both directions on the Bocaycito Trail as they probably preferred attacking him from ambush after he had abandoned his night position to take up the march rather than attack him in it.

The patrol was in a position that could easily become difficult. It had accomplished its mission by making contact with Sandino's bandits and had located them in sufficient force to inform the Commanding General of their then whereabouts. It was burdened with a seriously wounded man and a slightly wounded one. To save the life of the seriously (probably mortally) wounded one it had to evacuate him to a hospital which, at best, was five days away. Ammunition, rations, and medical supplies were

limited and the patrol would probably have to fight to get water.

He could expect little supply and communications assistance from the planes as the air service had not worked the patrol since its departure from Quilali on the 9th. It was expecting too much to hope that plane observers could locate the small patrol amid the mountains and jungles of the area until it reached some known point generally flown over by the planes.

Lieutenant Piper did not know the mountain and jungle to his front (toward Sandino) and did not know any route to cut his way to a friendly garrison or patrol.

Lieutenant Piper completed his estimate of the situation when his daylight reconnaissance patrol returned and decided to evacuate his wounded by retracing his steps over the route marched from Quilali.

An improvised stretcher was made for Captain Hunter by securing a navy hammock to two poles. Two men carried the poles on their shoulders.

At 8:00 a.m. the patrol was formed and marched via the Bocaycito Trail on La Flor and Quilali. The formation was a close column of files with a mule length between mules. All personnel marched dismounted, and leading their mules. The point and rear guard marched with mule length distance between individuals and mule length distance between these units and the main body. The Guardia was the rear guard. The pack train marched at the rear of the main body, and Captain Hunter was carried in the center of the main body.

As the patrol started to march south down Casa Hill toward Dry Stream and La Flor on the Bocaycito Trail a bandit appeared in the trail ahead of the point and then vanished into the brush, showing that there were bandits ahead. Lieutenant Piper placed a Thompson sub-machine gun man and a rifle grenadier as the leading men of the point and directed them to engage immediately any bandits or bandit positions that were disclosed. The terrain toward the new front was heavily wooded and with dense underbrush with the exception of the Bocaycito Trail toward La Flor which was clear and about fifty feet wide. The patrol advanced and at 8:15 a.m. a group of bandits was observed and the Thompson man fired into them. The bandits then opened a heavy fire from positions at (10) on Casa Hill, at (11) on Ocho Hill. The 40 bandits that occupied Casa Hill at (10) as the patrol cleared it had probably been in ambush on Uno and Dos Hills to engage the patrol if it had marched that way and when the bandit observers discovered that the patrol was going to march into the bandit ambush on Ocho Hill, the bandits on Uno and Dos Hills moved toward Casa Hill and occupied it as the patrol cleared it so they could attack the rear of the patrol when it was ambushed, by the bandits on Ocho Hill. It would appear that some of the bandits from Uno and Dos Hills were supposed to occupy Cinco Hill to assist in the ambush as during the latter part of the engagement about ten appeared there, evidently from the direction of Casa Hill. Probably some of the 80 bandits that were in ambush on Ocho Hill (11) came to that point direct from Uno Hill (7). From the whole setup one gathers the impression that the bandits had ambushes laid to the north and south of Casa Hill so they could engage the patrol regardless of which direction it marched

and that the ambush found unnecessary would immediately go to the aid of the attacking ambush and engage the rear of the patrol and also strengthen the firing lines of the attacking ambush.

The initial volume of bandit fire was heavy and well directed and consisted of fire from rifles, at least one Thompson sub-machine gun, and dyramite bombs. The Marines took cover in Small Stream (running water) that ran alongside the Bocaycito Trail and returned the fire. Captain Hunter was placed under cover in the stream bed but, though fatally wounded, leaped from his stretcher and insisted in participating in the fire fight and had to be overpowered and returned to his stretcher.

A desperate fire fight then ensued between the patrol and the bandits that lasted from 8:15 to 9:00 a.m. The fighting at the head of the patrol was at close quarters but the bandits at (11) on Ocho Hill kept well hidden in the jungle which came up to the edge of the trail. The head of the patrol at (13) engaged in a Thompson and hand grenade battle with the bandits facing them. Sergeant Brown made some hand grenade throws that made his comrades inquire if he was the world's champion discus thrower. He threw most of the grenades for the grenadiers. A Marine Thompson silenced a bandit Thompson by fire after determining its location by the reports from its shots. But in the rear guard and the rear of the main body things were not going so well. The bandit volume of fire from (10) on Casa Hill and the left of their line at (11) on Ocho Hill kept the Guardia rear guard and the Marines in the rear of the main body so pinned down that the bandits started to close in, some even rushing forward to the assault. The nine enlisted Guardias could not face the ordeal and although their officer, Cadet Blackburn, set a wonderful example of bravery and did all he could to hold them in the fight, they scattered and fled to the jungle of Cinco Hill. The last Guardia to get up to flee from his prone position under cover was Private Rosenberg and as he exposed himself to get up he received a bandit dum-dum bullet through the head which killed him instantly.

Cadet Blackburn, though abandoned by his men, held his ground, and in an exposed standing position, engaged the enemy with his pistol until several Marines from the main body were sent to his assistance. Lieutenant Piper then armed him with a rifle grenade outfit because Blackburn could use this weapon to better advantage than the less experienced grenadiers.

Blackburn placed several rifle grenades among the enemy on Ocho Hill (1) and Casa Hill (10) which were a big help in reducing the bandit fire and stopping the bandit assault. All Browning automatic rifles, Thompsons, and Springfields in the rear of the patrol came into action against the bandits that were threatening the rear and gained fire superiority.

At 9:00 a.m. all bandit fire was silenced and Lieutenant Piper decided to continue the march. Private Rosenberg (Guardia) was hastily buried and the patrol was formed and marched. The formation was the same as when clearing Casa Hill except Marines were put at the rear of the column as the rear guard to replace the missing Guardias.

The patrol had advanced about one hundred yards when the bandits opened fire on it again. The heaviest

fire was directed against the rear of the patrol and came from the left of the bandit position on Ocho Hill (11) and Casa Hill (10). A little fire was directed against the head and flanks of the patrol and that came from the right of the bandit position on Ocho Hill (11) and from a new group of about ten bandits that had taken up a position at (12) on Cinco Hill. This group probably came from Casa Hill and may have been part of a larger group that was supposed to have occupied Cinco Hill during the ambush fight. Due to the fact that the bandits seemed to concentrate so much on the rear of the patrol, which contained the pack train, it would seem that the bandits were hoping to be able to cut the pack train out of the column. Marine Corps pack animals meant military supplies, especially ammunition, for the bandits and they generally made great efforts to capture them.

When fired upon, the patrol again took cover behind the banks of Small Stream. There was tall grass near the stream that afforded excellent cover from observation.

The rear point was subjected to superior bandit fire, and had to call for reinforcements, which Lieutenant Piper sent. All weapons got into action, but the most destructive fire (to bandit morale) was that of Cadet Blackburn's well placed rifle grenades fired from the rear of the patrol against the bandits on Ocho Hill (11).

The bandits yelled at the Marines and Guardias in Spanish during the fight and called them "muleros" and many other unkind names and told them that they were going to cut all their throats before they got out of Nicaragua and that they would run the country themselves.

By 10:15 A.M. all bandit fire was silenced and the bandits retreating toward the north (toward Sandino's "rest area"), pursued by a little Marine rifle fire.

Soon after the firing ceased a Marine Corps airplane flew down the trail so that it was directly over the trail and the patrol at an elevation of 500 feet. Some of the Marines waved their arms, but the plane observer did not see them. This was unfortunate, as it was the first plane they had seen since leaving Quilali on May 9th, and they sorely needed the communication, supply, and evacuation services the planes could furnish. Also, by means of panels, the patrol could have directed the plane to bomb the hilltop in the direction the bandits had retreated.

In reading this plane incident, the reader must remember that it is difficult for a plane observer to see the terrain directly underneath the plane. It is also difficult for plane observers to see small units of men in the jungle trails unless panels are displayed in clearings.

About 10:30 A.M. the patrol resumed the march. As it was forming, six of the eight Guardia stragglers rejoined the patrol from their jungle retreats on Cinco Hill, and about two hours later the other two rejoined the patrol on the trail.

LOSSES SUFFERED DURING COMBAT ON MAY 14

Marine Corps:—None.

Guardia:—One killed (Private Rosenberg). One Krag rifle and rifle equipment. (This was Rosenberg's

and was left behind by a Guardia who was supposed to carry it.)

Bandits:—The bodies of no dead bandits were seen, but in making this statement one must consider that the jungle positions occupied by them were not all visited. Due to the volume of Marine fire delivered from Browning automatic rifles, Thompsons, Springfields, rifle and hand grenades, that silenced the bandit fire and forced them to withdraw, it is safe to say that several of them must have been hit. In estimating the bandit casualties, it is well to remember the amount of bandit fire the patrol received, and that it only killed Rosenberg. (Men are difficult to kill, even in battle.)

To set forth the incidents of May 14th that occurred after the patrol resumed the march at 10:30 A.M., the author quotes from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:"

"On May 14th, continued march at 10:30 A.M. over previously traveled trail, but in opposite direction, our object being to evacuate wounded as soon as possible. A plane appeared directly overhead immediately we began to move, but being so directly over our column we were unable to attract his attention. We continued our way slowly but unmolested. All houses along the trail being deserted, and succeeded in reaching a fair position on high ground at 4:00 P.M. about six miles from scene of combat, where we made camp. Captain Hunter gave signs of having stood the trip very badly, and the men carrying him were in an almost exhausted condition."

INCIDENTS OF MAY 15

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "On May 15th cleared camp at 6:30 A.M., our objective being La Flor finca. Houses along trail showed signs of hasty desertion, none being occupied. Native footprints were found in trail headed in our line of march, and one place evidently had been the camping ground of a group of natives, remains of several small fires being found. Reached La Flor at 10:40 A.M., Captain Hunter again showing signs of weakness and men again exhausted. Realizing that Captain Hunter could not be moved for several days and that we could not move him without reinforcements we asked for same and also rations when planes appeared at 11:00 A.M., and, when it was found impossible to arrange a pickup at this place, the panel 'Help' was put out to give planes information that all was not well. Proceeded to make camp, surrounding same with log barricade, and gave Captain Hunter all attention possible."

La Flor was not the type of geographical location that planes would usually reconnoiter for bandit or Marine-Guardia activities.

We begin to see here the difficulties associated with evacuating one wounded man from the mountains and jungles when he has to be carried by hand. Carrying a man on a stretcher is killing work and requires large carrying parties.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 16

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "On morning of 16th when plane appeared, gave information that Captain Hunter was wounded and that we requested medical supplies. Received information that relief columns were heading in our direction, and

settled down to wait for same. Captain Hunter appeared to be gaining in strength. Private Du Bois' wound was healing nicely. Gave men all rest possible."

On this day Lieutenant Claude's patrol from Corinto Finca, which was coming to Lieutenant Piper's assistance and was only a day's march from him, became lost because of an unreliable guide and was forced to begin its return to Corinto Finca.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 17

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "On 17th planes dropped medical supplies and rations as requested. Captain Hunter resting more easily and evidently gaining strength as he was now able to swallow a few liquids and could talk much better. Planes in afternoon asked advisability of evacuating Captain Hunter via Coco River. Answered, 'Yes, considered advisable,' and prepared to move when reinforcements should arrive."

By getting Captain Hunter to the Coco River it would be possible to get him out by hydroplane, which could land on the river, or by floating him down the river by canoe. Either way would be preferable to a trip overland to a plane landing field (probably the one at Apali Hacienda).

We see here what one serious casualty can do to a patrol on an isolated mission. What would several serious casualties received on Casa Hill have done to it?

INCIDENTS OF MAY 18

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "Captain Hunter's condition remained practically unchanged until his death at 3:25 A.M. May 18, 1928. Cadet Blackburn, who was with him at the time of his death, said that he passed away quietly after a few short breaths. Cadet Blackburn called the hospital corpsman, who was sleeping about ten feet away, when he noticed the difference in breathing, but Captain Hunter died before the corpsman could reach him. Captain Hunter's courage and fortitude were inspiring up until his death.

"Buried Captain Hunter at 9:30 A.M. Gave planes information of his death when they appeared that morning. Received information when they dropped rations and more medical supplies that Major Rockey was proceeding to join our column."

INCIDENTS OF MAY 19

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "On afternoon of 19th, planes dropped sugar and gave information that Corinto column had been halted. Also that Major Rockey's column was close to junction of Cua and Guasineros Rivers. Planes asked for location of Captain Hunter's wounds. Gave chest as location of one wound as it was impossible to describe his shoulder wound by panel."

The following method of communications between the ground and the air was employed: The plane would drop a drop message to the patrol, the message containing a list of questions it wished answered, each question numbered. The patrol would lay out panels so as to show the number of the question and generally spell out the answer. This spelling out of many of the words and phrases was necessary because the nature of them was so unusual that they were not in

the Airplane Panel Code. Many panels were necessary and mosquito nets were torn up and used.

INCIDENTS OF MAY 20

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "All quiet on the 20th. Planes dropped brigade field message in morning."

INCIDENTS OF MAY 21

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "Gave planes information on morning of 21st that Major Rockey had not yet arrived. Also requested rice, coffee, and bacon, as our supply would soon be exhausted. Received rations as requested in afternoon and planes gave us information that Major Rockey was now headed in our direction."

INCIDENTS OF MAY 22

Extract from Lieutenant Piper's "Patrol Report:" "Major Rockey arrived La Flor 11:30 A.M. May 22, 1928."

The reader will observe that it took seven days to get assistance to Lieutenant Piper's patrol. It is an example of how isolated one can become in northern Nicaragua.

After Major Rockey arrived at La Flor he took charge of all troops and marched them back to their stations at Quilali, and San Albino Gold Mine and Captain Hunter's Patrol from Quilali passed into Marine Corps history.

DISCUSSION OF MATTERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ENGAGEMENT

A Meeting Engagement—The Hunter contact started as a meeting engagement and Captain Hunter's failure to realize that or to protect himself by throwing out scouts and security after the initial bandit fire was silenced at 3:55 p.m. on May 13th can be criticized. A study of the battle leads me to believe that the Jiron-Sanchez column was marching on La Flor to ambush the patrol that they knew was penetrating their "rest area." When the bandit advance guard had started up the Hidden Trail when Hill via the Hidden Trail so as to approach the house on Casa Hill unseen. Part of the bandit advance guard had started up the Hidden Trail when Captain Hunter's point encountered the remainder of it in Tres Ravine and brought on the initial firing. The part of the bandit advance guard that found themselves on Hidden Trail worked their way through the jungle to the position on Casa Hill (4) from where they could engage the flank of the patrol (6). The patrol, having superior fire, soon silenced the bandit advance guard but here Captain Hunter made the mistake of considering the battle over and not sending out scouts to reconnoiter the terrain and for security. The bandit main body under Jiron and Sanchez pushed forward on the trail, occupied Tres Ravine in force, placed a unit on Uno Hill, and probably sent more men to assist the advance guard on Casa Hill (4), and in five minutes' time they were able to re-engage the Marine-Guardia patrol with the entire bandit force. It was in this resultant fire fight that Captain Hunter, Corporal Williamson and Private DuBois were shot.

Captain Hunter's service in the Dominican Republic had probably led him to underestimate the

fighting qualities of the Nicaraguan bandits and he undoubtedly thought that when the initial bandit firing ceased that the bandits had fled. Marines must learn that modern weapons and better leaders make it more possible for their enemies to face them in severe infantry fire fights. We must know that "meeting engagements" are still easily possible for small units operating in mountains and jungle.

An interesting feature of this fight is that the bandits occupied Tres Ravine (deliberately or accidentally) and from that low position engaged the patrol above them on Casa Hill. As a rule the bandits always selected ground that would command that occupied by Marine-Guardia units. Of course, it is easily possible that the bandits that fought from Tres Ravine were originally intended for the position at (4) on Casa Hill and were cut off by the Marine fire while en route to that position.

The Point of the Patrol—The Marines in the point were well trained in their duties and had had much practical experience in the points of patrols. Among them was a North American Indian (Private Hon-yust) who though city reared possessed instinctive powers of close observation.

Captain Hunter erred in not having Guardias in the point. This could have been done in different ways. He could have placed two Guardias at the head of the single point he used, or he could have had a double point out by having a point of Guardias preceding the Marine point. The Guardia point could have been composed of one-half of the Guardia personnel, or five persons. It could have preceded the Marine point with 20 yards distance between persons and between the two points. The other five Guardia could have been employed as rear point or on the pack train.

It has been proven that a native Nicaraguan in the Guardia can detect the enemy's presence where a Marine will fail to do so. This is only natural. To detect the presence of the enemy one must be able to notice and correctly interpret those telltale signs that a poorly trained and disciplined enemy generally leaves. The native Nicaraguan can pick up unusual signs in the foreground because his eyes are accustomed to observing the mountains and jungles when everything is normal and he will notice things that are suspicious. To the Marine the whole foreground is unusual and he is liable to miss details that would expose the enemy.

We do not know what a Guardia point would have exposed on the initial contact on May 13th but we do know that the Marine point did not see the enemy until it was fired upon.

It is difficult for one who has never marched on a mountain trail through jungles to realize how difficult it is for a point to expose an enemy. Even Guardia points of excellent Nicaraguan soldiers have been known to pass through a bandit ambush without detecting it. As the bandit war in Nicaragua continues, the bandits become better soldiers and develop more capable leaders, with the result that their ambushes become increasingly difficult to expose. Many bandit ambushes have been disclosed because a bandit with a nervous trigger finger fired at the point. Experience and leadership reduces these premature firings.

Captain Hunter made a practice of marching with

the point. That brings up the question of just how much a commander of a unit should expose himself to enemy fire when the tasks can be performed by subordinates. Personally I do not think that Captain Hunter should have been with the point but we do not know what actuated him. He was undoubtedly the most experienced bush warfare man in the column and the best on "trail knowledge" and he may have felt that this knowledge should be employed in that part of the column that would make first contact with the enemy. If that was his motive I think that he was wrong. The success of a mission, even the safety of a unit, too often depends wholly upon the leaders. Too often they alone have the knowledge, training and experience necessary for success and safety. They should not jeopardize their lives unnecessarily. It is very difficult for aggressive, courageous officers to hold themselves back but they must consider the welfare of the unit and not their own personal feelings.

Sometimes trails are unknown, many, and confusing, and the leader alone is able to select the route he wishes to follow. Under such conditions it is excusable for him to be in or near the point until he can get the point on the trail he wishes to follow, then he should drop back.

Captain Hunter had an excellent second in command and that probably made him less careful of his own safety.

Medical Personnel as Combatants — Hospital Corpsman Young was a courageous, aggressive blue-jacket and often accompanied the point as he "wanted to get in the fight." Many of the medical personnel the Marines get from the Navy wish to participate as combatants in the actual fighting of the Marines but this should be discouraged. The medical personnel should be taught that, unless the situation requires every man in the firing line to save the unit, their mission is to care for the wounded and to preserve themselves from becoming casualties as long as possible so the wounded will receive expert medical attention.

Interpreters and the Gaining of Information—Captain Hunter, Lieutenant Piper, and one enlisted Marine had a fair knowledge of the Spanish language. Cadet Blackburn, commanding the Guardia, did not know Spanish. The enlisted Guardias do not seem to have been able to get any helpful information from the inhabitants. This was only natural because until the people of an area have confidence in the Guardia they hesitate to come forward with information against bandits. Too often they feel that there may be bandit sympathizers among the Guardias that will inform on them to bandits or bandit sympathizers. The peace-loving native of the bandit-infested mountains and jungles generally finds it to his interest to "know nothing." The Marines and Guardia cannot post a guard around every Nicaraguan that has incurred the hatred of the bandits whereas, on the other hand, the bandits can come along and lop the head from the body of any of their enemies that find themselves many yards from the protection of Marine Corps and Guardia weapons. Assassination, or "putting them on the spot" as our Chicago bandits say, will silence many tongues apart from those of the slain.

Fighting Qualities of the Marines—In studying

this engagement I was soon impressed by the excellent fight put up by the Marines. The reader will observe their high morale, their willingness to engage the bandits in a fire fight at close quarters, the rapidity with which men went to the assistance of threatened points, their careful expenditure of ammunition, and the apparent effectiveness of their fire. I attribute the above to the length of time the officers and men had served together, the very good training the enlisted men had received and the good leadership by the officers and non-commissioned officers.

Lieutenant Piper states that the coolness of the men under fire, their general efficiency, and their careful expenditure of ammunition was more pronounced in the second day's fighting than in the first. Men are bound to become veterans in battle if they are allowed to survive several ugly engagements.

Ammunition Supply—Individual Marines averaged an expenditure of about one-half of their ammunition and grenade supplies. When we remember that there were only 30 rifle grenades and 24 hand grenades in the patrol we can realize how carefully all ammunition was expended.

Considering the mission and the situation I feel that the patrol should have had more ammunition and would assign the following reserve supply to the pack train: 50 hand grenades, 75 rifle grenades, 2,000 rounds caliber .30, 1,000 rounds caliber .45. This could be carried on three pack animals (light loads).

Lieutenant Piper states that the reason they did not have any ammunition in the pack train was because they were afraid of having the pack animals killed or captured in a contact and that for that reason Captain Hunter wished all ammunition on the persons of the men. Captain Hunter estimated that his ammunition supply was sufficient and we see that it was, with 50 per cent to spare. Lieutenant Piper states that if he was to make the same patrol over again, with the same mission and under the same conditions, he would not change his ammunition supply.

Armament of the Officers—In this engagement we have all the officers seeing fit to arm themselves with weapons other than their pistols. Captain Hunter with a Thompson, Lieutenant Piper with a Springfield, and Cadet Blackburn with a rifle grenadier's outfit. The question that arises is whether they should have been so armed when they started out. Lieutenant Piper states that were he to make the patrol over again he would be armed with a Thompson as he considers it the ideal weapon for infantry fighting at ranges under two hundred yards. (The dangerous ranges of an infantry fire fight.)

There has been much discussion about how an officer should be armed in battle and his duties in battle. Of course an officer's first duty with a small patrol is to lead his men and control and direct their fire but I am sure he can do this just as well with a Thompson or Springfield in his hands as with a Colt pistol in his holster.

What is the ideal weapon for the officer on the battlefield? I do not know. It depends on the situation. In rushing an enemy position and in being rushed I would suggest a Thompson. In a shooting duel at over two hundred yards I would suggest a Springfield.

Armament of the Enlisted Marines—The Platoon Sergeant who was armed with a pistol should have had a Thompson.

There should have been an additional Thompson in each squad, which would have given them two Thompsons, and one Browning per squad. With these additional Thompsons in the patrol the .45 ammunition in the pack train should be increased from one thousand to two thousand rounds.

Automatic Fire—Indications are that much of the fire from the Thompsons and Browning automatic rifles was automatic, and not semi-automatic. In this situation where the patrol was on the defensive and more interested in driving the bandits off than in holding them in the fight I would say that some automatic fire in short bursts would raise the morale of the Marines and Guardia and lower the morale of the bandits and at the same time prove effective in combing spots apparently occupied by the unseen enemy. But automatic fire from Thompson and Browning automatic rifles is seldom advisable. The casualties are not commensurate with the amount of ammunition expended. Poorly trained men allowed to fire automatic fire will burn up all their ammunition and hit none of the enemy.

Employment of Hand and Rifle Grenades—An interesting feature of the fight is the employment of hand grenades. Hand grenades thrown out in the open can easily prove as dangerous to friendly troops as to the enemy. In fact, excited, poorly trained hand grenadiers can be a menace to their own comrades and unit commanders should be very careful in the selection of men for hand grenadiers.

The fact that Captain Hunter's hand grenadiers employed their grenades effectively and without harm to their comrades proves their excellent selection, training and coolness in action.

Lieutenant Piper states that the rifle grenades were the most effective weapons in breaking up the bandit attacks on the rear of his column on May 14th.

Rifle grenades have a greater morale than physical effect. They tend to lower the morale of the enemy and raise ours. In this engagement the employment of rifle grenades was very commendable. This was a situation where the Marines were not interested in holding the bandits in the fight and inflicting heavy casualties, but in driving them off, casualties or no casualties.

Efficiency of Weapons—One Browning automatic rifle jammed and had to be field stripped to get it back into action. All hand and rifle grenades exploded, as did all the bandit dynamite bombs.

Bandit Personnel and Armament—It appears that Sandino had additional troops around his two main camps or out on other missions. It is difficult to explain the absence of bandit machine guns in this contact. One Thompson seems to be the only automatic weapon they employed and that proved to be very dangerous.

The effectiveness of the bandit Thompson sub-machine gun is interesting. Some Marines that have been shot at by bandit Thompsons belittle the range and smashing power of the .45 caliber bullet that comes out of the Thompson. These Marines make the mistake of judging all Thompsons by those in the hands of the bandits. Thompsons, like other weapons

that are fired both semi-automatically and automatically, must have their worn barrels replaced by new ones. The bandits evidently make no provision to get extra barrels for their Thompsons.

After the Liberals and Conservatives laid down their arms in 1927 I tested several Thompsons turned in by the Liberals and discovered that their barrels were so worn that the bullets had very little range, accuracy or smashing power.

The Marines and Guardia carry extra barrels with Cutt's compensator attached and replace worn barrels with them.

The Cutt's compensator on the Marine and Guardia Thompsons make them better weapons than those handled by the bandits because the compensator takes up much of the recoil and upward climb of the muzzle when firing and enables the firer to get on his target and stay on it easier than when firing a Thompson without a Cutt's compensator.

Entrenching Tools:—Very few were carried as the men could not carry everything that belongs to an army. A couple of big shovels and picks on the ammunition mules will be a big help if a small unit is surrounded and has to dig in and fight it out.

Medical Supplies:—A patrol of this nature should have ample medical supplies, especially bandages. This patrol did not have sufficient. All the first aid packages of the men were used up and then the Hospital Corpsman resorted to mosquito nets.

Action of the Guardia:—The Guardia, as a whole, are excellent fighting men in bush warfare. When well led, they are very courageous and aggressive in the attack. During the Bandit War in Nicaragua their individual acts of heroism have compared very favorably with those of the Marines. To understand the action of the Guardia in the Hunter Contact we must consider the certain characteristics of the Nicaraguan native that apply in this case.

They have little confidence in their leader, their chief, unless they know him personally. Blackburn's Guardia did not know him and he was not able to talk to them in their language. Had they known that Blackburn was a fearless and a very efficient fighter they would probably have been willing to trust their safety to him.

They must be made to feel that they are getting justice and a square deal at all times. These men seem to have gained the impression from some source (probably not an authorized one) that they had done their bit in the bandit area and were due for relief. Therefore they were dissatisfied and willing to lay down on the job and quit.

In the flight of the Guardia we have an interesting example of Nicaraguan tactics. These Guardia were outnumbered and considered themselves unable to fight with the advantage in their favor, therefore, they scattered and fled. When the battle was over they showed up with their weapons and evidently prepared to participate in any further fighting. We have here one of the most discouraging features of the Bandit War in Nicaragua. A Marine-Guardia unit engages a bandit unit. The bandits fight as long as they think they have the advantage, then they disperse and flee from the scene to some assembly area, where they gather together again and are all enthusiastic about their late encounter, which resulted in only one or two deaths to themselves and the fifteen or twenty they are sure they inflicted on the Marine-Guardia unit.

The fact that they hit only a few of their enemies does not occur to them. They like to cajole themselves by believing they have inflicted heavy losses on the Marine-Guardia unit. This sort of cajolery is not confined to the bandits—it occurred during the Civil War and the World War.

The point to remember is that when bandits disperse and flee that it is their method of disengaging themselves from an unfavorable engagement and they are farther from defeat than if they had stuck and fought it out. Each bandit breaks off contact and flees in good order, and with all his equipment, to the assembly area, where the band will gather to prepare for further operations.

We Marines are too prone to consider bandit and Marine units in flight in the same sense, but a bandit unit in flight is a unit employing good bandit tactics, whereas, if ever a Marine unit take to flight, that day will be a sorry one for the "Yanqui."

Ranges and Use of Cover:—We do not know what the bandit casualties were, but it appears that those "seen to fall" were shot at close ranges and when they were exposed. One thing is certain; the casualties suffered by the bandits the first day did not discourage them from fighting the second day.

We know that four members of the patrol were hit and under the following conditions:

Captain Hunter, by a Thompson at 50 yards, while standing up, fully exposed;

Corporal Williamson, by a Thompson at 75 yards, while running in an upright position and fully exposed to observation;

Private Rosenberg, by a rifle at an unknown range, probably less than 75 yards, after he had exposed himself by getting up from behind excellent cover;

Private Du Bois, by a rifle, while prone but exposed to observation.

The more one studies the casualties suffered by the Marines, Guardia, and bandits in Nicaragua, the more one realizes that men generally hit in an infantry fire fight are hit when they expose themselves to observation at ranges under two hundred yards, generally under one hundred yards. (Motto: Do not expose yourself unnecessarily.) Of course, there are many situations where men and officers, particularly officers, must expose themselves. If necessary, it must be done fearlessly and with the knowledge that even exposed men are difficult to hit.

In some situations a unit will move forward so slowly when taking advantage of all cover that if it is being subjected to much fire it will suffer more casualties than it would have suffered had it ignored some of the cover, exposed itself and finished the job fast and furiously. Deciding when to abandon cover so as to enable his unit to get at the enemy with bullet and bayonet is one of the difficulties that confronts all leaders of platoons or smaller units. We have seen in this battle where Captain Hunter and Corporal Williamson were shot when they exposed themselves and rushed forward in the open to close with the bandits. It is difficult to estimate what would have happened had the group that rushed forward to the military crest crawled forward instead, using available cover. As the bandit volume of fire was heavy, it is easily possible that the patrol would have suffered heavier casualties by a slow movement over ground that was being combed with bullets.